

**Testimony of Pam Eddinger, President
Bunker Hill Community College
to the House Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment**

**The Cost of Non-Completion:
Improving Student Outcomes in Higher Education
May 9, 2019
Washington D.C.**

1 Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Smucker, and Members of the Subcommittee on
2 Higher Education and Workforce Investment, thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the
3 pressing issue of degree completion, its implications for our future workforce, and solutions we
4 are implementing at Bunker Hill Community College.

5 Bunker Hill is the largest of the 15 community colleges in Massachusetts, and one of
6 over 1,100 community colleges across the country. Bunker Hill is a mid-size urban institution in
7 Boston, serving 18,000 students annually from the metro area and many Gateway Cities.
8 Community colleges educate over 13 million students with one out of every two undergrads
9 around our nation. Middle- and lower income students are more likely to attend community
10 colleges than any other type of higher education institution.

11 Increasingly, we are the source for the future workforce, for what we call “new-collar
12 jobs.” Jobs that are middle-skills that pay well; jobs that would shore up wages and social
13 stability; and jobs in IT, STEM, big data, health care, manufacturing, and the creative economy,
14 driven by the expansion of gaming and artificial intelligence, will all require education post high
15 school. In Massachusetts alone, 65,000 middle-skills workers will be in demand by the
16 beginning of the next decade. In fact, 80% of the jobs created now will require some college.

17 But our enrollments are not trending to meet this need. Local high schools have lower
18 enrollments now than in previous years, which means that our traditional-aged college student
19 population will drop steeply in five years, and fewer traditional-age college grads will reach the
20 workplace. Our hope of filling these new-collar jobs lies in educating and training our adult
21 learners, who are becoming the majority at community colleges nationwide.

22 Degree completion in a two-year or even three-year timeframe has always been a
23 challenge for community college students, and now more so with adult learners.

24 At Bunker Hill, the first challenge is financial and social. College is not at the center of
25 their adult lives: three out of four work with more than one job; three out of five are parents;
26 and 77% earn at the lowest two quintiles of income, often one small financial disaster away
27 from dropping out. They are financially fragile, yet they know college leads to a better job and
28 economic mobility.

29 It is important to note that the majority of students do not drop out because of
30 motivation or even academics. Among those who dropped out, 60% had a cumulative GPA of
31 2.5 or greater and 40% had over a year's worth of completed classes. The pressures of housing,
32 food, transportation and childcare are what derailed these students. Over 50% of students
33 experienced food insecurity on our campuses; 14% were homeless.

34 Thus, Bunker Hill's immediate answer to basic needs was to open a food pantry, to
35 fundraise for passes for public transportation, and to advocate for alignment of social services
36 like SNAP benefits. In 2016, Bunker Hill rolled out the Open Educational Resource (OER)
37 initiative with free online resources taking the place of textbooks. We have seen a savings of
38 approximately \$1.5 million to our students since the start of the OER program. Last year, we

39 experienced an influx in summer registration with the availability of year-round Pell Grant
40 funding. We need to increase the maximum Pell Grant award, index it to inflation, and keep it
41 year-round.

42 The second challenge is academic preparation. 90% of entering students need
43 developmental math and 45% are below college level in English. We used to call Developmental
44 Education (Dev. Ed.) the revolving front door. The longer you stayed in Dev. Ed., the more likely
45 you were to drop out. So we compressed and accelerated Dev. Ed. Now, students take their
46 remedial math course at the same time as their college-level math course (we call it a co-
47 requisite), and they do the same with their college English and remedial courses. We offer lots
48 of tutoring on demand. It seems counterintuitive, but students do better, and can complete
49 their Dev. Ed. work in one year if they are able to also complete their college-level courses at
50 the same time. We are working on our English as a Second Language sequences now, using this
51 same co-requisite format.

52 The third challenge is to map the shortest and most effective pathway to employment.
53 This requires aligned curriculum, apprenticeships, and internships with our business and
54 industry partners. Because our students work to support a family, they need fully paid
55 experiential learning opportunities with transportation stipends. We cannot adopt a “build it
56 and they will come” model when the economic future of whole families is at stake. Instead, we
57 map out career pathways, so that when students successfully complete their program of study,
58 they are ready with the skills as well as the contacts to land a job in their field. Some programs,
59 like our Electric Power Utility program, come with job placement with partner companies. The
60 best retention strategy of all is a promised job at the end of the program.

61 The final challenge is an institutional shift from the traditional college paradigm to one
62 that is designed for today's community college student. To retain and graduate every adult
63 learner, we must craft policies, procedures, schedules, services, and mindsets that respect the
64 complex lives of the adult student and cater to it. Bunker Hill used to offer midnight classes to
65 accommodate workers on the second shift. Now we offer hybrid and online classes for the
66 same reason.

67 Students drop out of the career and higher education pathway for many reasons.
68 Meeting these four challenges will help retain and graduate a larger and more prosperous
69 future workforce.

70 Thank you for the opportunity to share with you information about steps Bunker Hill has
71 taken to better serve our students.