

Testimony of Kathleen Offenholley
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Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York

Concerning the Pathways Initiative

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Hello, I'm Dr. Kathleen Offenholley. I teach mathematics at the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Pathways has been billed by its supporters as a way to provide uniformly high standards at CUNY. I am here to testify that in the mathematics department at BMCC, it will have quite the opposite effect. There will be many unanticipated and unintended consequence.

I would like to tell you about ours. At BMCC, all of our math courses are 4 credits. This is because our students need that additional seat time to understand the math. Because of Pathways, we've changed two of classes to meet for 3 hours instead of four. We did this by taking out some topics. But after much consideration in the math department, our Statistics course remains four credits, because we don't believe our students can learn statistics in only 3 hours per week.

So students will probably take our 3-credit liberal arts math and our 3 credit quantitative reasoning, since those are in the core and are only 3 credits, rather than four. The unintended consequence? Less math for our students. Fewer topics in the two core courses, and fewer students taking Statistics than ever before. Statistics is the most important, most practical course, most useful for students going on to business, health care fields, journalism, and anything else that deals with data.

At its root, I believe this has occurred because the essential nature of the community college is being disrespected. Our students are different from four-year students. They come from different academic backgrounds and are often less prepared for college. They can end up just as well educated, but that is because we take the extra care and give the extra hand-holding and help that a student can get at a community college.

To conclude, far from being a rigorous new curriculum, Pathways ends up requiring that we provide less math for the students who need it the most.