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**Testimony presented by Anthony Ng  
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**Before the Education Committee of the New York City Council  
Robert Jackson, Chair**

**Oversight Hearing – “Addressing the Dropout Crisis”**

**April 26, 2007**

Good morning. My name is Anthony Ng and I am the Senior Legislative Advocate of United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH). Founded in 1919, UNH is the nonprofit membership organization for 35 settlement houses and community centers in New York City. Our member agencies comprise one of the largest human service systems in New York City and the largest group of such agencies in the nation. Eight thousand employees operate programs and activities in over 300 locations, reaching 500,000 New Yorkers each year. Services provided by UNH members include: early childhood education, after-school programs, teen centers, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, immigration legal services, GED classes, job training, recreation, meals and supportive services for the elderly, mental health counseling, drug prevention, and art, music and drama programs.

I am pleased to appear before you today to offer the perspective of how community based organizations (CBOs) can address the dropout crisis. New York City has a strong network of CBOs that offer programs to enrich a young person’s life and their social, cultural, physical and academic development. I am proud to say that UNH members are part of this extensive network, since 33 of our 35 members operate youth development programs after-school, on the weekends, and during holidays. These programs offer activities such as leadership development, recreation, youth employment, service learning, community service, teen councils, college preparation and awareness, and music, dance, and arts programs. Crucial to the success of youth programs is the attention and encouragement given to young people through the caring and supportive relationships that develop between youth workers and the young people. It is common to hear children and teens from successful programs describe them as “it’s just like family here.” CBOs strive hard to create such a supportive environment, and know that it is a key ingredient to making a difference in the lives of NYC’s young people. Research has indicated that youth development programs are a positive factor in helping children and teens stay in school and achieve (e.g. improve their grades, graduate from high school, attend college).<sup>1</sup> When research is combined with our

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<sup>1</sup> National Collaboration for Youth. National Youth Development Information Center. <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/toolkits/index.htm>

experience working with youth, it is obvious that youth programs are an important strategy for preventing dropouts. Indeed, we are thankful for the support and interest that Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council have offered for youth programs such as the Cultural After-School Adventures, Beacons, the summer youth employment program, OST, etc.

Using the backdrop I just described about the breadth and importance of youth programs operated by CBOs, I would like to speak further about two specific programs that address the dropout crisis in NYC – Community Achievement Project in the Schools (CAPS) and DOE’s Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG). Both programs rely on school-CBO partnerships, yet CAPS is a preventive strategy, and OMPG is an intervention strategy to help dropouts return to the worlds of education and work.

### **Community Achievement Project in the Schools (CAPS)**

For nearly 2 decades, CAPS has existed in NYC, and is largely funded through State attendance improvement and dropout prevention (AIDP) funding. Currently, the Department of Education partners with two intermediaries – United Way of NYC, and The After-School Corporation (TASC) to administer these programs. United Way and TASC in turn partner with 88 CBOs to operate CAPS within high schools across NYC.<sup>2</sup> Youth workers from the partner CBO are based at a school during the school day and work with school administration and teachers to identify students who are most at-risk of dropping out based on certain criteria -- examples include poor attendance, poor academic performance, limited English skills, current or recent resident of temporary housing, pregnant or parenting teen, and victim of child abuse.

Once youth are identified, the CBO youth workers offer counseling, supportive services, and youth development activities in an engaging manner. When appropriate, outreach and services are provided to the student’s family in order to better serve the young person, or to address family issues that could be affecting the young person’s performance in school, and their ability to remain in school. The impact of these services is to not let one fall through the cracks, and offer the motivation and support needed to remain and achieve in school. For example, since 1990, United Way’s CAPS program has reached over 300,000 students in 150 schools, and helped students to improve their attendance levels; those students with the greatest risk of dropping out have also made the greatest gains. CBOs recognize the value of partnering with schools on CAPS since it allows them to offer youth development services during the school day and on-site, and connect students with resources within their community for themselves and their families. In addition, many of the CBOs reflect the diversity and culture of the neighborhood where the schools are located in.

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<sup>2</sup> United Way partners with 60 CBOs. TASC partners with 28 CBOs. <http://www.unitedwaynyc.org/?id=17&pg=caps>

## **Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG)**

The programs through the DOE's OMPG are offering overage and under-credited students<sup>3</sup> who have dropped out of high school, a real chance to return to school, advance their education, and obtain the support they need to prepare for the world of work and transition successfully to adulthood. The power of OMPG programs is that they combine the educational, youth development supports, and work experience that high school dropouts and or those thinking of dropping out need. Through OMPG, students can advance their education in 3 ways:

- Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC) – Afternoon and evening classes for older students who have been in high school for at least 4 years, and are 17 ½ and have at least 17 credits. The flexible schedule allows teens to tend to adult responsibilities, (e.g. work; take care of family) complete their education, and still obtain a high school diploma from their original high school.
- Transfer Schools – These are small academically rigorous diploma granting high schools for students who have been in high school for at least one year, but are overage for their grade and behind in credits needed to graduate within 4 years. Transfer schools are an ideal option for younger students (14-16) who are not performing well.
- GED – The DOE has a new GED model called Access GED that is full time and offers opportunities to gain work experience and explore careers through internships, while preparing for the GED exam.

Within each of these 3 models, CBOs are partnering with schools to offer the youth development supports, and operate the Learning-to-Work (LTW) programs that can be overlaid on top of each of these instructional models. Through LTW, the CBOs develop internships; provide job readiness, job skills, and career exploration workshops. Some CBOs go one step further and offer services to raise college awareness and help students apply to college as well. By partnering with schools, CBOs are helping overage and under-credited youth get exactly what they need to turn their lives around:

- Motivation and supportive services to address any human service needs they face.
- Obtaining a high school diploma or GED.
- Work experience and jobs skills training and coaching.
- Encouragement and confidence to navigate one's future postsecondary and employment opportunities in a positive manner.

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<sup>3</sup> These students are also the ones that form the pipeline for out-of-school youth and disconnected youth. The DOE defines overage and under-credited (OA-UC) youth by age and number of credits obtained. At age 16, one is OA-UC if they have less than 11 credits; age 17, it's less than 22 credits; age 18, it's less than 33 credits; age 19-21, less than 44 credits.

In their short existence to date, OMPG programs have had some important successes. We encourage the City to continue supporting these programs, to nourish the school-CBO partnerships that make these programs succeed, and continue to scale up these programs as we collect more data about their positive impact. Indeed, we are thankful that Mayor Bloomberg increased the investment into OMPG programs in his Preliminary FY2008 Executive budget based on the successes to date.

While OMPG programs are promising for overage under-credited youth, there is still a gap in service to one segment of this population – those students who are older (18-24), have dropped out of school, and who have extremely low literacy levels. For these students, the current OMPG programs are not an option since they are so far behind in credits or are at literacy levels below what is needed to pass the GED (below 9<sup>th</sup> grade) – they are at pre-GED levels. This is where the City has a gap in services, and CBOs have been attempting to offer programs to these young adults to raise their literacy levels and offer the youth development and work experience services they need. The challenge has been the limited funding available to provide these services in an intensive and rigorous manner. However, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) of the Fund for the City of New York is currently working with six CBOs in the City (4 of which are UNH members) on its Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS) program. CEPS seeks to reach the pre-GED population, and offer them intensive academics, counseling, youth development supports, and the chance to learn job readiness and job skills through community service projects. The CEPS initiative is showing promise, and is worth examining further to see how it can be scaled up as well.

As you can see, CBOs have and continue to play a significant and important role in preventing high school students from dropping out, and offering them options to re-connect to education and work if they have dropped out. We look forward to continuing to work with the Mayor and City Council on supporting the role of community based organizations in addressing the dropout crisis. Together, we can reduce the number of dropouts and offer teens and young adults a brighter future.

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**United Neighborhood Houses** (UNH) is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Founded in 1919, UNH's membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 35 agencies working at more than 300 sites to provide high quality services and activities to more than half million New Yorkers each year. For over 85 years, UNH has worked with its members to strengthen families and improve neighborhoods throughout the City. UNH supports the work of its members through advocacy and public policy research and analysis, technical assistance and funding and by promoting program replication and collaboration among its members.

**UNH Members:** *Boys & Girls Harbor-CAMBA-Center for Family Life in Sunset Park - Chinese American Planning Council - Citizens Advice Bureau - Claremont Neighborhood Centers - Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation - East Side House Settlement - Educational Alliance – Queens Community House (formerly the Forest Hills Community House) - Goddard Riverside Community Center - Grand Street Settlement - Greenwich House - Hamilton-Madison House - Hartley House - Henry Street Settlement - Hudson Guild - Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House - Kingsbridge Heights Community Center - Lenox Hill Neighborhood House - Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center - Mosholu Montefiore Community - Riverdale Neighborhood House - SCAN New York - School Settlement Association - Shorefront YM-WHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc - Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers - St. Matthew's and St. Timothy's Neighborhood Center - St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation - Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center - Sunnyside Community Services - Third Street Music School Settlement - Union Settlement Association - United Community Centers - University Settlement Society*

