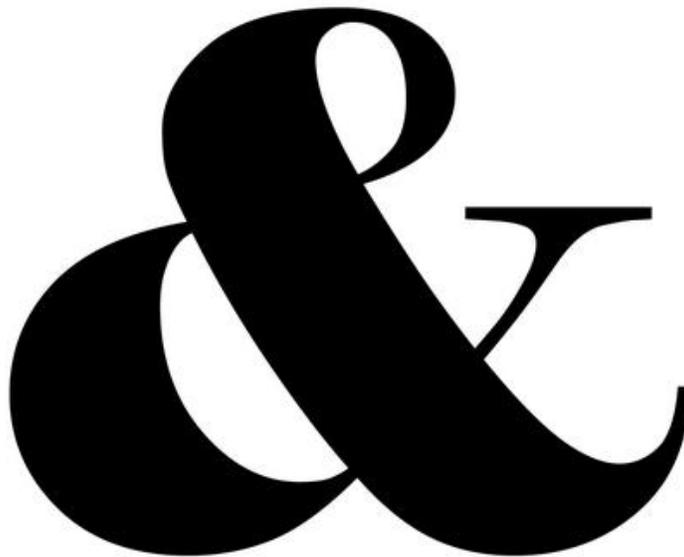


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**TESTIMONY OF BRYANT & STRATTON COLLEGE**

**APRIL 10, 2019**

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**Bryant & Stratton College**

**FOR EVERY & IN LIFE**

**TESTIMONY PROVIDED BY BRYANT & STRATTON COLLEGE**

Thank you Senator Stavisky and other esteemed Senators of the New York State Senate Higher Education Committee. On behalf of Bryant & Stratton College's community of students, graduates, employers, faculty, board members, and professional staff, I thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony.

My name is Dr. Francis Felser. I am the President and CEO of Bryant & Stratton College, where I have served for almost 30 years in a number of institutional capacities. I am also proud to be a Commissioner at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

My testimony will focus on how Bryant & Stratton College offers a unique approach to educating and serving our students, graduates, and employers in Upstate New York, primarily in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany.

### **Who is Bryant & Stratton College and Why do Students Choose to Attend?**

Bryant & Stratton College was founded in Buffalo, New York in 1854. Since its inception, the College has been preparing students for the modern workplace – and while that workplace has continuously evolved over the last 165 years, the College's dedication to its students has remained unwavering.

Within New York, we have eight campuses and one extension center in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany. The College has also been accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 267-284-5000) since 2002. Our mission is to offer a personalized career education and experience leading to a high-demand profession so graduates are prepared for career and life pursuits.

Our typical student is an African American (41%) or Caucasian (41%) woman (81%) who is in her late twenties (47%) or early thirties (15%) and who is a non-traditional (86%) student pursuing her associate's degree (72%) in either medical assisting, medical reimbursement and coding, business, general management, or medical administrative assisting. Our research tells us that our students, after being away from high school for as many as 10 years, are now aspiring to a particular life pursuit; a college credential and career is the gateway to achieving that pursuit. Over 70% of students who have attended Bryant & Stratton College have attempted higher education elsewhere, and interestingly, of that 70%, almost 80% have previously attended a community college.

So why do our students attend Bryant & Stratton College instead of a taxpayer subsidized community college?

First, academic programs at Bryant & Stratton College lead to careers in New York's fastest-growing occupations requiring an associate degree or less. Programs where graduates' salaries are commensurate with the amount of time and moneys invested by the student. Bryant & Stratton College's dual approach to academic and career pursuits, including a theory-based but workplace-application approach to liberal arts, ensures students learn not only content and technique, but also the soft skills required to succeed in the workforce. In addition, we arrange internships for all

academic programs and coordinate proactive employment outreach to ensure students have significant employment opportunities upon graduation.

Secondly, Bryant & Stratton College develops faculty members to be educators in addition to content experts. Higher education regulation and academic convention generally favors content experts over educators. Typically, good teachers learn educational competence, skills, and techniques in teaching programs that usually lead to careers in elementary and secondary education, not higher education. Unfortunately, many first-time college students are not sufficiently prepared for postsecondary learning without the benefit of content experts who are also developed as educators. Bryant & Stratton College faculty, especially those who teach first- and second-semester courses, are exposed to education theory and the guiding tenants of good instruction through a 10-module faculty development program, which is supported by once-a-semester faculty in-services. The result is a more engaging faculty leading a more active-learning instructional environment.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Bryant & Stratton College, through our educator-trained faculty, teaches our students in the first semester of study to learn how to be postsecondary learners. Grounded in education research as best practice, this scaffold approach to learning fosters in first-semester students the capability to acquire never-learned-before study skills and cognitive abilities necessary for learning more advanced content in later semesters. In this first semester, faculty guide students to dissect and break down information into small pieces with a focus on consistent and frequent review and repetition of material to master the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to assure academic success. Supplementing the faculty are professional staff who provide one-on-one student outreach services, which maximize student persistence leading to graduation.

These focused efforts and one-on-one supports are necessary given the challenges faced by our students in Upstate New York. Public school districts in each of our communities are unfortunately the poorest in the state. According to the latest U.S. Census data, more than half of the children living in the Rochester City School District live below the poverty line – ranking second in the nation. In Buffalo, which ranks fourth in the nation on this inauspicious list, the youth poverty rate is over 47%. High school graduation rates in 2017 average less than 64% among what are considered the state’s “high-need large city districts” of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers – only one of those districts outside of markets we serve.

Bryant & Stratton is not only committed to students of our college, but we are also working daily to positively impact high school students across these challenging New York State markets. Through partnerships with secondary and high schools, we are working to change students’ lives for the better:

- Bryant & Stratton offers Jump Start classes, in which high school students have the opportunity to take college courses at all eight of our locations across the state;
- Pathways is a 13-year partnership of ours with the Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Division that has been providing students with opportunities to improve their math, English, and reading skills;
- In Albany, Bryant & Stratton partners with BOCES to provide GED preparation classes;

- Since 2011, we partnered with the Lancaster Central School System to provide college preparation assistance to nearly 400 graduating seniors annually at Lancaster High School. The program offers Bryant & Stratton's ENGL 101: Research and Writing 1 in a weekly workshop format. Two Bryant & Stratton liberal arts faculty members meet with these high school students in 40-minute sessions, during which they experience a typical college composition classroom.
- At South Park High School in Buffalo, Bryant & Stratton is an integral part of the school's Community Engagement Team; we offer classroom support to enhance the college readiness of the school's students, provide opportunities for assistance with college applications and financial aid forms; provide health and wellness support to the school's staff; and participate actively in school events.

### **Students in Associate Degree Programs Deserve a Choice Too**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, a majority of the fastest-growing occupations, such as a medical assistant, physical therapist assistant, and occupational therapy assistant, require an associate degree or less. There are over 57 colleges and universities in Upstate New York, all focused on professions requiring baccalaureate-level degrees or advanced credentials. While students in these communities have ample choices for academic programs that will prepare them to become teachers, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, physical therapists, and doctors, there are very limited choices for those who wish to enter occupations requiring an associate degree or less: they can pursue a degree with either a community college or Bryant & Stratton College. In some regions of New York State, Bryant & Stratton College is the only institution offering academic programs in these career areas.

Bryant & Stratton is proud of our record of helping students achieve success – and New York State and its lawmakers should be, too. In 1973, New York State adopted a regulatory framework that holds all degree-granting institutions of higher education, including Bryant & Stratton, to the same rigorous standards of accountability.

Regardless of whether an institution is public, non-profit or for-profit, or whether it caters to students from a particular end of the socioeconomic spectrum, the New York State Education Department undertakes a meticulous review of every academic program offered by each and every institution of higher education.

Before granting approval to enroll students, the State Education Department evaluates each academic program's curriculum, teaching faculty, the demand for and saturation of such academic programs by employers and in the community, and the overall success of the institution.

New York State's uniform standards and focus on program quality has made the State a leader in higher education, and it has served New York's institutions and their students, including Bryant & Stratton and our students, incredibly well for nearly half a century.

## **Confluence of Student Access and Choice to Support Workforce Development**

The result is that students who had not previously succeeded at another college have now graduated and are productive taxpaying New York State workers. The majority of Bryant & Stratton College graduates remain and work in the communities where their respective campus is located.

The College is proud of our 1,000 students who graduate every year in New York State. We have dozens of employer testimonials supporting our contributions to workforce development across Upstate New York (see Attachment A). For example, Darcy Pautz, Medical Office Manager at Rochester Regional Health, stated:

“Bryant & Stratton College is our primary recruitment partner for entry-level medical assistants. We bring our managers to the Rochester campuses throughout the year to meet and interview qualified graduating students to fill our openings. We’ve enjoyed a strong internship partnership with the College as well; we look forward to continuing our work together into the future.”

Quantitatively, Bryant & Stratton College’s outcomes exceed or are on par with the community colleges near our New York campus communities, even though Bryant & Stratton serves students with more challenging socioeconomic circumstances. For example, the combined student Pell usage at the New York State community colleges near Bryant & Stratton campuses is 36%, while Bryant & Stratton College’s student usage at these campuses is more than double that, at 76%. Research shows that students who are Pell recipients default on their student loans at a higher rate compared to those who do not receive Pell. Yet the College’s graduation rates at these campuses are 25.5% (two-years and less degree graduation rate for first-time, full-time students) versus the combined community college’s 24.9% (IPEDS 2013 cohort; most recent final data) and Bryant & Stratton College’s student default rate is 18.8% versus 16.4% (2015, most recent final data). An interesting statistic is that longitudinal studies of our graduates show that their average salaries have increased on a five-year annual compounded basis of 6.3% after graduation compared to CPI of 2.4%.

Bryant & Stratton College also partners with numerous employers across Upstate New York to provide workforce development opportunities and ensure our students have a positive experience in the workplace. These partnerships include:

- **GEICO**
  - Bryant & Stratton has partnered with GEICO to develop a customized program designed to provide and enhance educational opportunities for employees. Workshops are provided onsite to GEICO supervisors, and a variety of classes are held both onsite and at Bryant & Stratton campus locations for GEICO employees.
- **Community Action Organization (CAO)**
  - Bryant & Stratton has partnered with CAO to offer two courses onsite at CAO. The course offerings were based on CAO’s desire to upgrade skills and knowledge of key employees. Courses were specially selected in consultation with CAO leadership and Bryant & Stratton College program directors, faculty and deans. CAO called it the “CAO certificate”.

- Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) – Community Schools Initiative
  - BPS’s Community Schools Initiative seeks to utilize school buildings during the evenings and weekends for the broader community. Bryant & Stratton has partnered with BPS’s Community Schools (including South Park High School and others) to offer workshops and programs on weeknights and Saturdays for the greater community’s well-being. For example:
    - Bryant & Stratton provides health and wellness programs where the College’s Medical Assistant and Physical Therapist Assistant faculty and students offer health education, conduct blood pressure and glucose screenings, and share information on proper body mechanics;
    - The College has hosted multiple BPS health and wellness trainings at Bryant & Stratton campuses for hundreds of BPS faculty and staff;
    - Bryant & Stratton also offers career readiness workshops, including resume writing, interviewing skills and more;
    - The College has also planned and coordination a panel program featuring local dignitaries on the future of Buffalo;
    - Moving forward, Bryant & Stratton will be offering a 3-credit college course on Saturdays.
- Spectrum, Blue Cross of Western New York (HealthNow) and others
  - Bryant & Stratton partners with these employers in two ways:
    - We are invited regularly to speak to their employees about continuing education and the process associated with it. We are featured on their websites and are considered an education partner.
    - We also invite them to our campuses to talk to our students about job opportunities. They also work with our students, conducting mock job interviews, providing interviewing skills, and more.

### **Federal Title IV Student Loans are an Entitlement**

Those who are critical of proprietary higher education claim that institutions encourage students to incur debt when, because of their age, they cannot be expected to make informed decisions about their education and financial aid. Disappointingly, critics have not provided a complete picture of federal financial assistance programs and may not understand Bryant & Stratton’s mission, values, and student demographics:

- Under federal law, students aged approximately 23 or younger are generally considered dependent students who require the involvement of their parent or guardian in admissions and financial aid decisions. While we serve a number of dependent students, the average age of our students is 27 years old, and over 70% have previously attended another institution of higher education. In other words, we enroll students who are older, more mature, and have prior college and personal experience with admissions and financial aid decisions.
- In addition, and most importantly, Bryant & Stratton College carefully and clearly educates its students – and their parent or guardian, if applicable – about paying for college and potential financial aid grants and loans, including federal financial aid programs. Each student acknowledges receipt of this information when submitting their Free Application

for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), accepting individual award letters, and signing federal student loan master promissory notes.

What is often overlooked is the possibility that federal regulations, perhaps unintentionally, contribute to the increased usage of student loans. This unintended consequence occurs as a result of the student loan entitlement that allows students to borrow for costs beyond tuition, books and fees. Many students with limited income are not able to borrow under traditional consumer lending opportunities. The federal student loan program does not include a credit score component in the approval process; therefore, it provides access to funds not otherwise available to these students.

To demonstrate the impact on student debt related to a student's ability to borrow in excess of costs for tuition and fees, consider the following illustrations of a full-time student enrolled in one of our associate degree programs:

- A student borrows to direct costs of attendance (e.g., tuition, fees and books) and successfully completes the program on time, graduates with debt of \$14,500 and a monthly loan payment of \$165.
- The same student borrows the maximum amount permitted by federal regulations, which provides the capacity to borrow for expenses that are not paid to the College (e.g., living expenses, transportation and similar costs) and successfully completes the program on time, graduates with debt of \$24,750 and a monthly loan payment of \$283.

The regulations, as currently written, do not allow colleges and universities to limit federal borrowings that students may not necessarily need but choose to borrow because under the law they can.

### **Conclusion**

Bryant & Stratton College has been deeply committed to our students and their success for over 165 years, and we remain as committed as ever.

Since before the Civil War, the mission of Bryant & Stratton College has been to provide our students, who are often otherwise discouraged from post-secondary education, with a practical education and skill set that will allow them to thrive in the modern workplace. We are proud of the students we serve and the success they achieve.

Lawmakers who meet our students and dedicated staff recognize that critics' claims are simply not warranted. We invite you to visit our campuses, meet our educators, and witness our students' success in action.

These days, not all college students come from the same background, and many students need individualized attention and support services in order to thrive. We provide access and choice to underserved students by offering programs leading to high-demand careers supporting workforce development in the communities we serve.

We welcome the use of metrics as one measure of quality if applied to all sectors and if the metrics take into consideration such factors as program length and student socioeconomic factors. I appreciate your consideration on this matter, and respectfully request your continued support for New York's next generation of students and working professionals.

**Contact Information :**

**Francis J. Felser, D.M.**  
**President and CEO**  
**Bryant & Stratton College**  
**Phone: 716-250-7500**

## **Attachment A**

### **The Importance of Bryant & Stratton College to Employers Across New York State**

“Bryant & Stratton College is our primary recruitment partner for entry-level medical assistants. We bring our managers to the Rochester campuses throughout the year to meet and interview qualified graduating students to fill our openings. We’ve enjoyed a strong internship partnership with the College as well; we look forward to continuing our work together into the future.”

*Darcy Pautz, CPC, Medical Office Manager, Rochester Regional Health*

“Allied Universal and Bryant & Stratton College have enjoyed a valuable partnership, training BSC students and alumni to become part of our security workforce across New York State. We host 8-hour NYS Security Guard training courses for these students at no cost and frequently hire the successful completers as Allied Universal employees. This partnership has contributed to the success of our company in Rochester and throughout New York State.”

*Kristina Luxon, Human Resources, Allied Universal*

“Our internship and hiring partnership with Bryant & Stratton College in Rochester has spanned many years. We can rely on the College for qualified and certified medical assistant candidates and interns who are ready to learn and contribute to the organization. We appreciate opportunities to engage with their students on campus and look forward to continuing our partnership in the future.”

*Andre Dixon, Human Resources – Student & Employment Enhancement Manager, Trillium Health*

“Frontier Abstract and Research Services has had a great partnership with Bryant & Stratton College for many years. We have hired multiple graduates from the Paralegal Studies program and they have done very well here. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Bryant & Stratton College in the future.”

*Anna Mancini, Human Resources Director, Frontier Abstract & Research Services, Inc.*

“We are constantly seeking IT technicians and engineers with strong qualifications, practical experience, strong soft skills and a passion for problem solving and technology. Some of our key employees have come from Bryant & Stratton’s IT program. Starting as interns, we have offered them positions upon completion of their studies. We continue to look to Bryant & Stratton to be our hiring-partner and to provide the same high-quality graduates that support ours and other Central New York companies.”

*John Spiridigliozzi, Chief Operating Officer, Infinit Technology Solutions*

“We appreciate and value the opportunity to work with Bryant & Stratton College on their internship and partnership program. We often reach out to the College for qualified and certified medical assistant candidates and past graduates when employment opportunities become available at our practice.”

*Anne E. Zaccheo, MBA, FACMPE, Practice Director, Nephrology Associates of Syracuse, PC*

“Bryant & Stratton College and InterFaith Works CNY have built a robust relationship with our Internship Program. We have welcomed 2-8 interns per semester to learn soft skills, leadership, brainstorm program ideas, work with clients, and so much more. We learn as much from the interns as they do with us. Looking forward to a continued collaboration as we walk shoulder to shoulder with Bryant & Stratton College interns in their life’s journey.”

*Daryl Suzanne Files, Volunteer and Donor Relations Coordinator, InterFaith Works of CNY*

“The medical assistant interns from Bryant & Stratton have been very impressive! We have hosted several who learned quickly and helped our patients feel at ease. This partnership has been beneficial for us and we love seeing students grow into professional roles.”

*Ingrid Hansen, RN, CASAC-T, Nurse Manager, Helio Health*

“As an organization that has grown exponentially over the years, Bryant & Stratton College has been instrumental in helping Optanix fill many of our entry-level IT positions with qualified, hard-working and well-rounded graduates. We rely regularly on the valuable students and staff at Bryant & Stratton to support our continued growth and look forward to continuing our partnership for years to come.”

*Olesh Iwachiw, HR Business Partner, Optanix, Inc.*

“Our student internship partnership with Bryant & Stratton College has been in existence for many years and has been growing especially in the HR Department. We can count on the College to send students who are focused and ready to jump in and learn new things. We appreciate the opportunity to engage with the students and be a part of their learning journey. The Rescue Mission looks forward to continually growing this partnership.”

*Belinda Teller, Chief Human Resources Officer, Rescue Mission*

“Our organization has partnered with Bryant & Stratton College in CNY for several years. Bryant & Stratton College of CNY produces extremely qualified and certified medical assistants and medical administrative assistants. Having a partnership with the internship program has not only been beneficial to the students, it has also been personally rewarding to be a part of helping students succeed in their careers. Our organization has proudly employed several students upon graduation.”

*Karen McCargar, Practice Manager, AMP Urology*

“Over the years we have greatly appreciated our partnership with Bryant & Stratton College and the quality students they have provided for our internship program and fulfilling our employment needs. The educational process at Bryant & Stratton is such that the students not only obtain the clinical knowledge that we desire but they also prepare their students with the soft skills necessary to be successful in life after graduation.”

*Jason Isbrandt, Director of Provider Relations, Greater Buffalo United Accountable Healthcare Network*

“Gross Polowy and Bryant & Stratton College have a long-standing and successful relationship. Our law firm has consistently received high-quality candidate referrals from the Paralegal Studies program and employs multiple BSC graduates today.”

*Amy LuVollo, Human Resources Director, Law Firm of Gross Polowy*

“The internship and hiring partnership we have with Bryant & Stratton College in WNY has spanned many years. Bryant & Stratton College has been a great partner in providing our organization with qualified medical assistant and medical administrative assistant candidates and interns. Our relationship has been very successful with assisting us in filling employment opportunities for new graduates. The internship program has given students an opportunity to get “real world” experience and we welcome them with the goal of preparing them to excel in their chosen field. These programs are very important and fulfill a need within the healthcare community.”

*Rebecca Mecca, Practice Administrator, OB-GYN Associates of Western New York*

“We have enjoyed a strong partnership with Bryant & Stratton College’s Albany Campus over the past several years and have relied on their graduates to fill vacancies within our practice. Our experience has been very positive and they are an exceptional resource when searching for new candidates. Their graduates come prepared to work with knowledge in their area of study. We look forward to continuing our work together into the future.

*Chavonne Brown, Office Manager, Pan Dermatology*

“Bryant & Stratton College has been a strong recruitment and educational resource for CEO as an organization. During the past eighteen months, we have had very qualified interns and job candidates. In fact, one of our interns has just come on board as a full-time accountant. We hope to continue this valuable relationship which has already proven to be beneficial to us as an organization, to the college and most importantly to the students”

*Mary O’Grady, Chief Financial Officer, Commission on Economic Opportunity*

“The Albany Campus of Bryant & Stratton College has been an exceptional source for recruitment and an education resource for Computer Answers. We can rely on the College to provide quality candidates from their Networking Technology program. We look forward to opportunities to engage with their students both on and off campus and continuing our partnership into the future.”

*Dahl Todd, Manager, Computer Answers*

"Hiring a Bryant and Stratton graduate has proven to be extremely beneficial for our busy practice. Their graduates are well prepared to handle any task given to them, with the knowledge and confidence to complete it."

*Jennifer Rosebrook, BSN RN-BC, Clinical Coordinator, Saratoga Hospital – Endocrinology*