



CONNECT

STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION
2022-2023

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**A dream you dream
alone is only a dream.**

**A dream you dream
together is reality.**



— John Lennon

CONNECT



ROSE BENAVIDEZ
Chair



JEE HANG LEE
President and CEO

DEAR ACCT MEMBERS AND PARTNERS,

ACCT was established in 1972 to unite board members nationwide, fostering growth through shared values, goals, lessons, and insights from experts in education leadership and policymaking, spanning government, business, news, and more.

In the beginning, members' only ways of expanding their knowledge about governance included in-person gatherings and mailed materials. The advent of the Internet empowered the association with the ability to reach people immediately through websites, newsletters, and alerts delivered to their inboxes, fueling deeper connections and more engaged board members throughout the country.

Because our priority is connecting our members, the association has embraced changes as opportunities to empower members with vital information. Our latest evolution is ACCT Connect, an online social-learning platform designed to bring people together when they can't be together in person. Initially conceived as an information hub, it evolved into an interactive learning management system (LMS), akin to online college courses, combined with a "Facebook for community college leaders" interface. This new dynamic space is a place for members to learn, to share lessons, and to engage in all ways possible through social media.

As you read about ACCT Connect in this year's State of Association, you'll also read about new ways we're connecting with members face to face on members' own campuses, and bringing boards from across entire states together to learn and plan collaboratively.

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

“It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tired into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one destiny, affects all indirectly.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

In addition to connecting members across the globe through the online ACCT Connect platform, we've taken every effort to build and strengthen face-to-face connections right where our members are.

This year alone, President and CEO Jee Hang Lee personally represented ACCT at more than 50 member colleges and over 30 statewide or national events, such as state community college association meetings and national conferences dedicated to community college leadership.

Other staff and consultants worked hand in hand with member colleges to guide 33 searches for new community college presidents, chancellors, and vice presidents, to conduct 57 board retreats and workshops, 39 board or presidential evaluations, and 17 technical-assistance trainings. Staff also visited campuses to lead educational events, to brief members on advocacy accomplishments, and to engage members in urgent advocacy efforts that will be our future accomplishments.

One of the most notable efforts to “go local” this year was to tailor ACCT's acclaimed Governance Leadership Institutes to the needs of states. Beginning in 2022, the association piloted state-specific Governance Leadership Institutes in Illinois, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Wyoming. Already slated for the coming year are institutes to be held in Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, and Wisconsin. Beyond this, our Governance Leadership Institute for New Trustees, traditionally convened in Washington, D.C., will take place on the campus of a different ACCT-member college each year going forward.

We're working hard to forge and reinforce regional connections among our membership. Our State, Province, and Territories Coordinators Network is positioned to help answer trustees' questions and to direct them to the association's resources. Members can find their State Coordinators' contact information through ACCT Connect, at www.acct.org/membership/coordinators-network, or by emailing coordinators@acct.org.

Membership Visits



● State Association Visits ● Member College Visits
Created with Datawrapper

ACCT MEMBER COLLEGES VISITED

- Aims Community College, CO
- Arapahoe Community College, CO
- Ashville-Bumcombe Community College, NC
- Baton Rouge Community College, LA
- Bunker Hill Community College, MA
- Casper College, WY
- Central Arizona College, AZ
- Central Piedmont Community College, NC
- Chippewa Valley Technical College, WI
- Coconino Community College, AZ
- College of DuPage, IL
- College of Southern Nevada, NV
- College of the Desert, CA
- Community College of Aurora, CO
- Community College of Denver, CO
- Community College of Philadelphia, PA
- Cuyahoga Community College, OH
- Delgado Community College, LA
- Eastern Wyoming College, WY
- Elgin Community College, IL
- Gateway Community College, AZ

- Gavilan College, CA
- Hagerstown Community College
- Hartnell College, CA
- Heartland Community College, IL
- Iowa Western Community College, IA
- Kankakee Community College, IL
- Laramie County Community College, WY
- Louisiana Community & Technical College System
- Mission College, CA
- Metropolitan Community College, NE
- Middlesex Community College, NJ
- Midlands Technical College, SC
- Moberly Area Community College, MO
- Northeast Community College, NE
- Northeastern Technical College, SC
- Northern Virginia Community College, VA
- Northwood Technical College, WI
- Parkland College, IL
- Pima Community College, AZ
- Rio Salado College, AZ
- Roxbury Community College, MA
- San Antonio College, TX
- San Jose City College, CA

- Scottsdale Community College, AZ
- South Texas College, TX
- Union College of Union County, NJ
- Triton College, IL
- Walla Walla Community College, WA
- Western Iowa Tech Community College, IA
- Western Piedmont Community College, NC
- Yavapai College, AZ
- York Technical College, SC

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP VISITS

- American Association of Community Colleges
- Association of College Trustees of Washington
- Association of Colleges, Birmingham, England
- Arizona Association of Community College Trustees
- Bellwether Community College Futures Assembly
- California Community Colleges Chancellors Office
- Community College Association of Texas Trustees
- Community College Baccalaureate Association

- Community College League of California
- Community Colleges for Iowa
- Illinois Community College Trustees Association
- League of Innovation-Executive Leadership Institute
- Maryland Association of Community Colleges
- Mississippi Community College Trustees
- National Association of Community College Entrepreneurship
- Nebraska Community College Association
- New Jersey Council of County Colleges
- New York Community College Trustees Association
- North Carolina Community College Trustees
- Phi Theta Kappa
- Rural Community College Alliance
- South Carolina Association of Technical College Commissioners
- Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association
- Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees

ACCT CONNECT

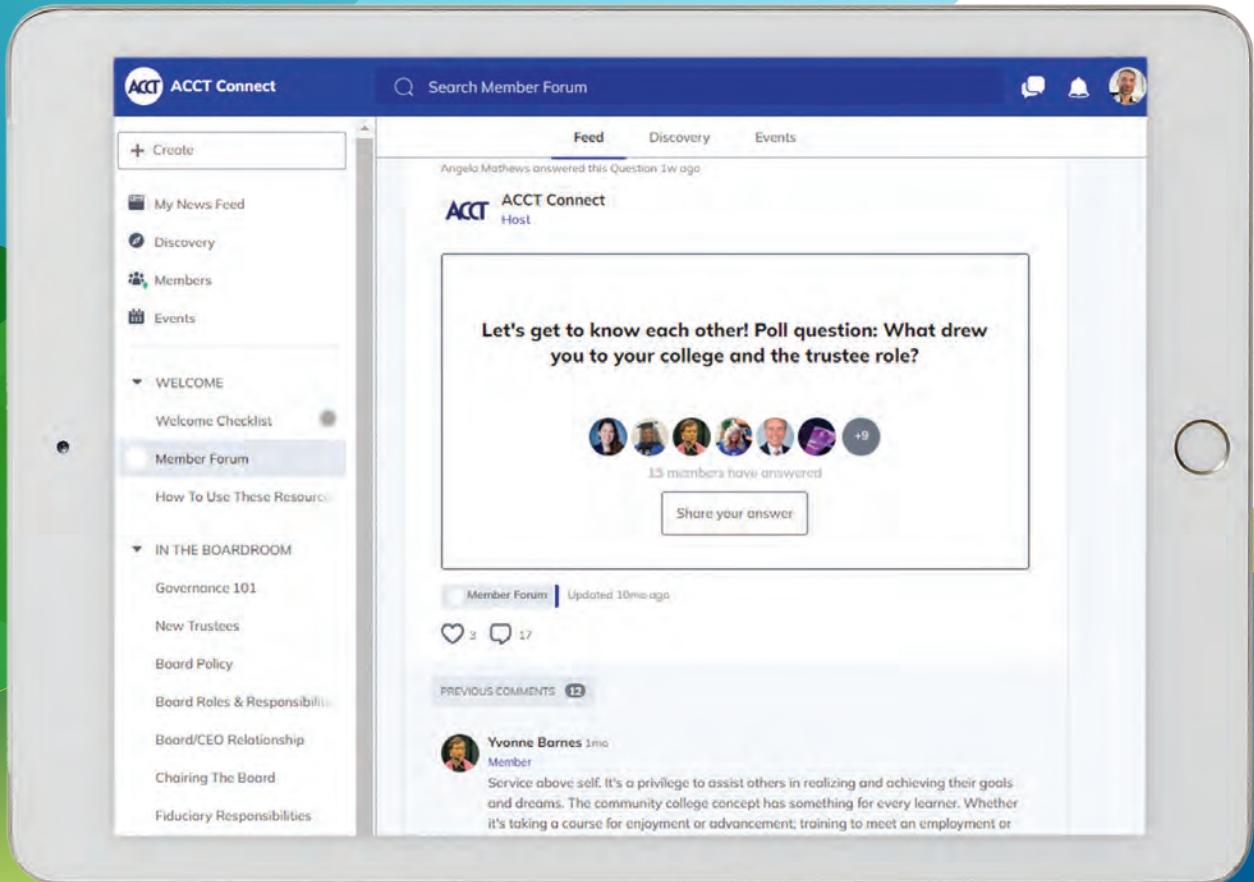
 Communication is merely an exchange of information, but connection is an exchange of our humanity. 

– Sean Stephenson

ACCT Connect is an online forum for community college board members to quickly access the governance education they need, as well as a way through which members can directly tap into the experience and expertise of their peers, ACCT staff and consultants, and others.

Through ACCT Connect, members can:

- Share information publicly and privately in a Facebook-like forum created specifically for them.
- Access a directory of members and follow their posts or chat directly with them.
- Find members near them.
- Join and create groups for discussion and resource sharing.
- Participate in exclusive online events.
- Learn or refresh their “governance 101” knowledge through our exclusive online course, complete with discussion questions, available exclusively through ACCT Connect.
- Access boardroom resources about topics including governance 101, new trustees, board policy, board roles & responsibilities, board/CEO relationship, chairing the board, fiduciary responsibilities, finance and oversight, and much more.
- Access resources on other topics, including accreditation; affordability; community partnerships; diversity, equity and inclusion; rural institutions; student success; technology and innovation; workforce development; and more.
- Access advocacy resources, including community college federal legislative priorities, webinars and more.



**Members can engage today at
Connect.ACCT.org.**

ACCT CENTER FOR POLICY & PRACTICE



ACCT officially launched the Center for Policy and Practice last year to connect the ACCT membership and policymakers. Its goals are to practically address challenges facing community colleges, to inform policy recommendations, and to provide technical assistance and aid in implementing new legislation. It represents a significant evolution for the association, one that is designed to deepen our relevance and value to member institutions, and which will serve as an infrastructure through which services can expand intentionally so as to enhance the association’s mission rather than to divert from it. For updates and more information, visit www.acct.org/center-for-policy-practice.

Over the last year, the Center has engaged with the following primary projects:

SNAP E&T Community College Partnership



As an initiative to support best-practice development through new pilot projects, ACCT’s Center for Policy and Practice has been awarded a multi-year grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Services to develop resources and tools to expand the number of community colleges serving as SNAP E&T third party providers. Using a cohort model, ACCT provides technical assistance and is developing a series of planning guides for community colleges to design and implement their SNAP E&T third party provider program.

“SNAP” is an acronym for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budgets of families in need. This federal program provides technical assistance, guidance, and funding for states to administer their own state-specific SNAP programs, typically

through their health or human services departments. The SNAP program is housed within the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Services program.

“SNAP E&T” is an acronym for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Employment and Training. The SNAP E&T program helps SNAP participants gain skills and find work that moves them forward to self-sufficiency. Through SNAP E&T, participants have access to training and support services to help them enter or move up in the workforce. These programs also help to reduce barriers to work by providing additional support services. As open-access educational institutions, community colleges predominantly serve low-income individuals. In many states and U.S. territories, community colleges serve as SNAP E&T third party providers. In this role, community colleges provide job and skills training for individuals enrolled in their respective states’ SNAP E&T programs. A community college may also provide expanded case management and other SNAP E&T services such as job-search training and assistance.

Learn more: acct.org/snap-employment-and-training

Skills-Based Hiring



This year, the ACCT Center for Policy and Practice launched a partnership pilot program that focuses on increasing the effectiveness of skills-based hiring. The partnership, supported by Lumina Foundation, includes ACCT, Opportunity@Work, the State of Maryland, select employers in identified sectors, and four Maryland Community Colleges. This pilot will demonstrate the effectiveness of skills-based hiring by designing and/or enhancing existing training programs at four community colleges around the essential skills most needed for specific occupations, creating a pipeline of skilled and career-ready job candidates for open roles.

The State of Maryland employs more than 38,000 individuals. The Department of Budget and Management estimates that more than half of those jobs can substitute relevant experience, training, and community college education for a bachelor's degree. In addition, thousands of vacant state government jobs no longer require a bachelor's degree. Recently, in partnership with Opportunity@Work, Governor Hogan launched a multi-pronged, first-in-the-nation effort to formally eliminate the four-year college degree requirement from thousands of state jobs, opening equitable access for a commonly underestimated talent category known as "STARs."

Community colleges — a high-quality option for sourcing skilled and career-ready candidates — already play an important role in workforce development across the country. They enroll nearly half of all college learners and are already a gateway to higher education and skill building for learners who would not otherwise have access. Community colleges are also tied to their local communities and contribute to their regions' growth and success through various avenues, including workforce development, growth of the labor force, community service, local and regional economic development, and technical and vocational training. Baked into the mission and structure of community colleges is their capacity to prepare learners for the workforce, which makes them an ideal partner for expanding skills-based hiring. Finally, we know that community college learners may face multiple barriers that can impact their ability to be successful in the classroom. Community colleges have an infrastructure to support learners directly and/or have established partnerships with local organizations that provide additional support services (e.g., tutoring services, career development, essential skills training, and connections to social services programs for support around childcare and transportation needs).

To learn more, visit: acct.org/skills-based-hiring.

““ We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects. ””

— Herman Melville

Non-Credit and Credit Alignment Lab



ACCT and Education Strategy Group (ESG) partnered in 2021 to create the Non-Credit and Credit Alignment Lab (NCAL), a two-year initiative to support 10 community college governance units' efforts to develop new or improved pathways between non-credit and credit programs. The project is supported by a \$1.2 million grant from ECMC Foundation.

Non-credit programming can be a steppingstone to further education and training that leads to higher earnings and greater career sustainability. Unfortunately, our systems are designed to discourage rather than facilitate pathways across non-credit and credit programs, according to ESG research. The result is that many students in non-credit programs are left without pathways to additional learning, and colleges fail to take advantage of a significant population of engaged learners ready to enroll in credit-bearing programs. To achieve greater equity and develop more resilient and responsive systems following a global pandemic, community colleges must bridge the divide between non-credit and credit programs.

Outcomes from this partnership will be released in early 2024. To learn more, visit: acct.org/noncredit-and-credit-alignment-lab.

ACCT CENTER FOR POLICY & PRACTICE (continued)

Kids on Campus



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

ACCT and the National Head Start Association (NHSA) launch an initiative to explore co-locating Head Start programs on community college campuses. The goal of this six-month planning grant from ECMC Foundation and Seldin / Haring-Smith Foundation is to gauge interest and feasibility in this partnership model and to develop resources for use in a future technical-assistance grant to the partnerships.

The project gained immediate national attention with a *Washington Post* editorial board article that asserted why pairing the two well-known community pillars together just makes sense. Community colleges are able to offer Head Start programs with no- or low-cost facilities in direct access to the families they aim to serve. Head Start programs can offer free, high quality child care to student parents so they can attend class, study, or go to work.

Together, ACCT and NHSA will develop resources for the next phase of this project to build a road map for formal partnership and the opening of new child care classrooms. These resources will include a process for identifying, vetting, and matching interested members. In addition, the two organizations will build materials to simplify partnership explorations and contracting between campuses and Head Start providers.

These materials and processes will be informed by focus groups and surveys of ACCT and NHSA members, direct engagement with the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Head Start at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and interviews with partnership experts.

Improving Educational Outcomes for Men of Color

Over the last decade, two-year institutions have seen a steep decline in student enrollment rates, which has been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline in enrollment is especially significant among men of color. Between fall 2019 and fall 2021 Indigenous men in community colleges experienced a 25.6% decline in enrollment, followed by Black men at a rate of 23.5%.

The Improving Educational Outcomes for Men of Color Symposium explored underlying factors driving these trends, as well as successful strategies to best support men of color that are already working in the field. Panelists shared how to scale those strategies on other campuses to increase enrollment and retention rates for men of color nationally.

During the symposium, an original report, *Increasing the Enrollment, Retention & Success of Men of Color in Community Colleges: A Framework for Policy and Institutional Responsibility*, was released. To read the report and for more information on the symposium, visit: acct.org/center-for-policy-practice/men-of-color.

The cover of a report features a photograph of a young man with curly hair in a green shirt and an older man with a beard in a blue sweater, both smiling and engaged in conversation. The background is a mix of green and blue geometric shapes.

**INCREASING THE
ENROLLMENT, RETENTION,
AND SUCCESS OF MEN OF COLOR
IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
A FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY AND
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

ACCT
ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES

CCEAL
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

Frank Harris III & J. Luke Wood
San Diego State University
Community College Equity Assessment Lab

October 2022

Panelists and report issued at the Improving Educational Outcomes for Men of Color Symposium.

#CCMONTH'S GRASS ROOTS

ACCT's Community College Month grassroots advocacy campaign this year saw millions of online engagements and media outreach throughout the country. We invited community college graphic design students to enter a competition to redesign the #CCMonth logo, offering cash prizes to the top three finalists. We received 225 entries, and Quantanik Norton, a Phi Theta Kappa honors student enrolled at Oakland Community College in Michigan, was selected the winner. The cash prizes were supported by ACCT Corporate Council members Anthology, CLARUS Corporation, Edamerica, Ellucian, Ferrilli, and matched by ACCT. The winning designer was promoted nationally, and ACCT incorporated the winning logo into its monthlong promotions and into its #CCMonth toolkit.

“Realize that everything connects to everything else.”

— Leonardo DaVinci

Partners and Advocates Expand Reach of Community College Month



Community College Month has expanded to include a broad partnership of allied advocates from within the community college and higher education sectors and far beyond.

At the top of the month, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker visited community colleges throughout the state and then issued a proclamation declaring April to be Illinois Community College Month. Later in the month, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, and Maryland Governor Wes Moore issued formal Community College Month proclamations on behalf of their states.

The U.S. Department of Education and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona have lent their voices to #CCMonth on Twitter in past years. This year, former First Lady Michelle Obama added to their voices with a video supporting Community College Month, garnering hundreds of thousands of “likes” on Instagram within 24 hours. And the U.S. Department of State kicked off the campaign on April 1 in spectacular fashion, posting to LinkedIn and Instagram:

The Department of State is committed to recruiting qualified, dedicated candidates from all backgrounds. When you think about Foreign Service professionals, have you ever thought that many started their successful careers with a community college education? #Equity is achieved by lowering systemic barriers, and community colleges provide equitable access to higher education to many talented, driven Americans with the skills, cultural competencies, and experience that make a successful #diplomat. Throughout April, we will highlight some of our #foreignaffairs professionals who started at #communitycollege and now have a rewarding and exciting #globalcareer representing the very #community their community college supports to the world.

The State Department linked to its job listings, encouraging community college students to apply. On April 26, it hosted a careers-focused webinar called Global Careers, Community College Beginnings. “Community colleges are one of the backbones of the U.S. higher education system, bringing access to affordable, quality



Left to right: Quantanik Norton; Michelle Obama; Community College Month 2023 Illinois Proclamation

“Most importantly, nearly all of our member colleges as well as state-based community college associations leveraged the occasion to bring attention to the work being done locally – and that’s what the #CCMonth Campaign is all about.”

post-secondary education to millions of Americans each year. Whether you’re a current community college student, alumnus/a, or a transfer student, your community college education has opened the doors to an exciting career with the U.S. Department of State.”

The unprecedented and extensive participation of the State Department is just one of this year’s vital engagements. On April 19, ACCT hosted a live Twitter #CCMonthChat to draw attention to the good work done by community colleges, in partnership with New America, a nonpartisan national think tank. The following week, New America released a report for community colleges offering institutional policy and practice recommendations to boost enrollments.

Among the many other leading organizations that participated in #CCMonth are Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, Cengage Education, Century Foundation, Community College Baccalaureate Association, the Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teachers College, Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, ECMC Foundation, EnGen, Equity Avengers, Generation Hope, Higher Learning Advocates, the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, InsideTrack, Institute for Higher Education Policy, League for Innovation in the Community College, Lumina Foundation for Education, National Head Start, Office of Community College Research & Leadership, Phi Theta Kappa, Seldin/Haring-Smith Foundation, SkillPointe, Strada Education Foundation, Vera Institute, Third Way Education, and others.

Most importantly, nearly all of our member colleges as well as state-based community college associations leveraged the occasion to bring attention to the work being done locally – and that’s what the #CCMonth Campaign is all about.

FEDERAL CONNECTIONS



ACCT Chair Rose Benavidez and student trustees at the 2023 Community College National Legislative Summit

As a near-record of community college leaders and advocates came to Washington, D.C., for the 2023 Community College National Legislative Summit in February, the growing importance of the sector was hard to miss.

It was on television during the State of the Union Address, where at least two community college leaders sat in the gallery as the guests of lawmakers who spoke at the Congressional Forum on Capitol Hill. And it was evident in the ever-expanding range of federal leaders who spoke at the NLS, a testimony to how expansive the community college mission has become.

“The pipeline from high school to affordable community colleges to great jobs is the future of our workforce and our economy,” First Lady Dr. Jill Biden told attendees. President Biden, she added, “is bringing together his entire administration — not just the Department of Education, but Commerce, Energy, and Transportation as well — to build more programs across the country.”

With this in mind, nearly 1,100 community college trustees, presidents, and advocates came to Washington to help their institutions do just that.

“It is crucial we continue to advocate to ensure that community colleges continue to receive the support we need and deserve,” said ACCT Chair Rose Benavidez, chair of South Texas College.

A Growing Mission

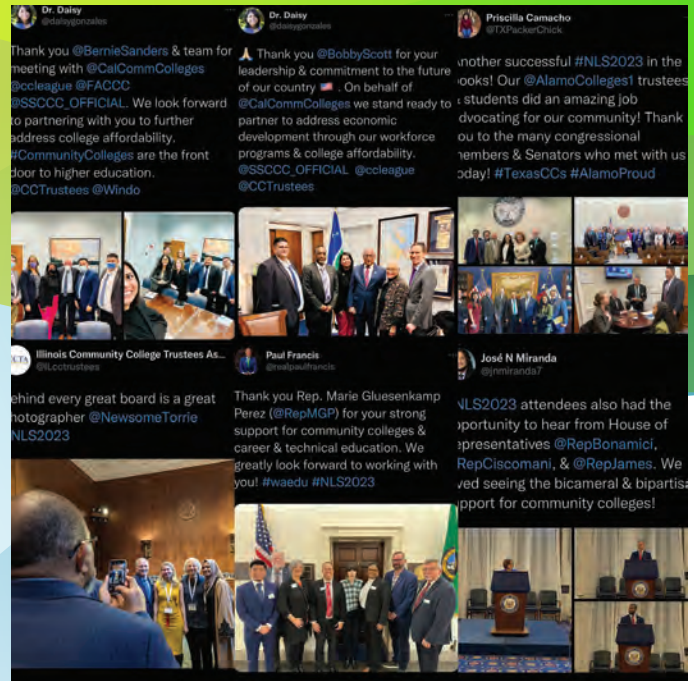
Another litmus test for the expanding awareness of the importance and value of community colleges was the lineup of speakers for the 2023 NLS. For the first time, secretaries of both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Transportation took center stage to describe their visions for how community colleges can serve the nation’s vital agricultural and infrastructure needs.

Biden and other Administration leaders — including Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, and representatives from the Department of Commerce and the White House — highlighted the importance of community colleges to a growing array of federal initiatives.

Pointing to the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act as the beginning of an “infrastructure decade,” Buttigieg stressed the vital role community colleges are playing in “an extraordinary time for transformation in America.”

“The nature of the infrastructure law and the upgrades we’re doing are testing the productive capacity of the United States — the human capacity you are producing,” Buttigieg told attendees.

Community colleges, he added, can play a key role in improving transportation infrastructure by improving transit access to campuses and supporting careers in emerging fields. “You are leading one of the most important sectors in our



Clockwise from top left: Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack; Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg; community college advocacy visits with elected officials; ACCT and AACC public policy staff detail the 2023 legislative priorities.

country,” Buttigieg added. “In short, you are helping to pave the way toward the America we need.”

In similar fashion, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack stressed multiple roles community colleges can play as part of partnerships to transform rural America and the 90 million people who live there. Along with improving student access to nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC, Vilsack pointed to the more than \$3 billion allocated to the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities and the need for workforce development in food processing, agricultural inputs, and decarbonizing energy supplies.

“The opportunities are unlimited to transform, change, and revitalize the rural economy,” Vilsack said. “I think community colleges play a critical role in... supporting folks who work not just with their heads but their hands.”

Zoe Baird, senior counselor for technology and economic growth to Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, pointed to another landmark bill passed into law — the CHIPS and Science Act — as an example of opportunities for community colleges to serve as partners in wide-ranging projects to reshape the American economy.

“We are really at a moment of transformation in our economy,” Baird said. “The rapid change we saw during COVID is not going to slow down...that means you have an entirely new business model.”

Even so, that new model has precedent, she added. “One hundred

years ago, we invented the high school when we moved from an agricultural to industrialized economy. Now we’re at a very similar inflection point,” Baird said. “We need to invent the system that’s going to train workers and enable the growth of the economy. I’d encourage you to think of community colleges as the foundations for this kind of system.”

‘Career-Connected Learning’

Pointing to the need for “career-connected learning,” the First Lady urged community college leaders to “think about more ways you can partner with high schools, local businesses, and unions” — approaches including apprenticeships, new relationships with business, and dual enrollment that “bridge the gap between what students learn and the careers they will eventually find.”

“[These are] the kinds of hands-on learning that community colleges have been leaders on for so many years,” Biden said. New partnerships, she added, will “help us expand those tried and true approaches to more communities. It’s one of the best ways to make community college programs and workforce training free or affordable to everyone.”

Workforce partnerships enjoy bipartisan support, NLS speakers said. Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-Pa.) stressed the importance of community colleges addressing both present-day workforce needs and long-term concerns about the direction of the country. “We need to do a better job of connecting our educational system

FEDERAL CONNECTIONS (continued)

LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A few highlights of ACCT's public policy and advocacy efforts over the past year include:

- Near-record attendance at the 2023 Community College National Legislative Summit
- ACCT President and CEO meets quarterly with Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona to discuss community college priorities
- Strong ongoing relationships with the White House, including presenters from various White House initiatives at the 2023 NLS; White House initiatives leadership guest speakers at ACCT member constituency meetings during the NLS
- Regular meetings with congressional offices to advocate for community college priorities, including short-term Pell, improving SNAP access for college students, and over 50 meetings with appropriators
- ACCT signed onto over 20 public higher-education coalition letters to U.S. Congress, Departments of Agriculture, Education, Labor, and Veterans Affairs to support community college priorities
- Secured significant increases through the annual appropriation process, including the largest addition to the Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG) program and a \$500 bump to the Pell Grant award maximum.

ACCT endorsed the following bills:

- JOBS Act of 2023
- College Transparency Act
- Dream Act of 2023
- Community College Agriculture Advancement Act of 2023
- Pathways to College Act
- Affordable College Textbook Act
- VA Work Study Improvement Act
- Head Start for Our Future Act

Visit www.acct.org/advocacy or contact publicpolicy@acct.org for more information about ACCT's advocacy work.

to the jobs that are available," he told NLS attendees. "That's the heart of what community colleges are able to do."

"The heavy role of community colleges [in local workforce systems] is really changing what we think about what sectoral partnerships really mean," Baird said. "We will apply what we're learning to investments in other areas."

White House officials also stressed the role community colleges can play in advancing historically disadvantaged Americans. "There are staff all across all of our agencies are trying to think about how they might be able to work with you [to] open the doors to their agencies to their programs to make sure they're truly reaching and serving the community," said Melody Gonzales, executive director for the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics.

Challenges and Opportunities

This vision of a more expansive role was balanced by ever-present political realities. A divided Congress "will cause a shift in the conversation" over the next two years, Carrie Warick-Smith, ACCT's vice president of public policy, said during a briefing on legislative priorities.

Following the 2022 elections and the change in control of the House, "there are a lot of retirements and a lot of new faces at the subcommittee level and generally in Congress," José Miranda, ACCT director of government relationships, told attendees. "We have our work cut out in building new relationships. Your conversations will be critical."

Lynn Tincher-Ladner, president and CEO of Phi Theta Kappa, urged student trustees to think of advocacy beyond legislative matters. Pointing to PTK's CCsmart campaign, she stressed the importance of social media in helping elevate perceptions of community colleges. "Students are a lot more visible now," Tincher-Ladner told student trustees. "It's up to all of us to let people know that community colleges aren't just about accessibility and affordability. They're all about quality."

The importance of advocacy was repeated throughout the NLS. "The best advocates at their core are teachers. Lead with a human face...the human face of the workers who would otherwise be left behind,"

And speakers reminded NLS attendees that the work continues long after the conference ended. "The work we do in our community college sector is about our students, changing lives, and making lasting change for our communities," said ACCT President & CEO Jee Hang Lee. "It's about making the stories and building the advocacy we do every day."

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