



State of the College Address

Christopher M. Reber, President

College Service Day

August 28, 2019

Good morning! It's a great pleasure and honor to join you this morning to begin another wonderful year of challenge, adventure, discovery and success! Today marks a milestone in the history of Hudson County Community College as we begin a new academic year and a time of new focus and commitment to student success; to diversity, equity and inclusion; and to other priorities and values.

The theme for today is "Removing Barriers to Student Success." This theme couldn't be more relevant and timely as we begin our engagement with *Achieving the Dream*, and we welcome to HCCC our ATD Leadership Coach, Dr. Mary Fifield, and our Data Coach, Dr. Rene Garcia.

Dr. Fifield is President Emerita of Bunker Hill Community College – a large, urban community college in Boston – where she served in a very successful presidency for 17 years. Earlier in her career she was President of Harrisburg Area Community College, and she held other leadership roles at various colleges and universities before that.

During Dr. Fifield's presidential tenure, each institution she led was selected as the national recipient for achievement of equity and opportunity for persons of color, and women, by the Association of Community College Trustees. She is a former member of the Board and Executive Committee of the American Association of Community Colleges. Her record of public service, publications and presentations is extensive.

Dr. Garcia retired in 2015 as Director of Enrollment Management at Miami Dade College, one of the largest and most respected community colleges in the nation, where he worked for 38 years. He had responsibility for Miami Dade's recruitment and retention efforts.

Dr. Garcia was an integral contributor to the development of structured pathways at Miami Dade College, and was the recipient of the College's Endowed Teaching Chair. He served as resident faculty for several Community College Survey of Student Engagement Institutes, including Men of Color, Engaging Latino Students, and Entering Student Success Institutes.

Mary and Rene have coached many community colleges across the nation, and they are highly respected nationally. Welcome, Mary and Rene! We are delighted to have the honor of working with and learning from you!

Mary and Rene spent the entire day with us yesterday and met many of you. They will speak with us later this morning.

I look forward to working with all of you in the coming year to serve our students and our community, and to realize our collective vision and aspirations for HCCC. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank the officers and leaders of our All College Council and our Professional Associations, with whom my colleagues on the President's Executive Council and I look forward to working this year. We thank them for their leadership for our College and their contributions to our participatory governance processes.

From the All College Council, we thank Chair Lauren Drew, Vice Chair Angela Tuzzo, and Secretary Kathleen Smith-Wenning.

From the HCCC Professional Association, we thank President Michael Ferlise, Vice President Dorothy Anderson, Treasurer Claudia Delgado, Corresponding Secretary Tony Acevedo, and Recording Secretary Alison Wakefield.

From the Academic Administrators Association, we thank President Jose Lowe, Vice President Christine Peterson, and Secretary Angela Tuzzo.

From the Support Staff Federation, we thank President Dorothea Graham-King, Vice President Patrick DelPiano, Treasurer Daisy Baiza, and Recording Secretary Hope Guirantes.

And from the HCCC Adjunct Faculty Federation, we thank President Nancy Lasek, Vice President Qamar Raza, Secretary Raffi Manjikian, and Membership Assistant Rose Grimaldi. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your leadership!

I'd also like to recognize several of our student leaders: Student Government Association President Warren Rigby; Student Government Volunteers and Senators Princess Kelly and Jeron Fields; Phi Theta Kappa Association President Christine Tirado; HCCC Peer Leaders Koral Booth, Katricia Colon, Suri Hidago, Hillary Kouevi, Crystal Newton, Brian Ribas, Tyler Sarmiento, Kailyn Segovia Vazquez, and Abou Traore; EOF Peer Leaders Avery Tan and Natasha Rozon; and all of our many other student leaders, who so capably support our students and our college. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen! You make us all proud!

I also thank members of the Cabinet, with whom I work so closely, and who live and breathe responsibility for ensuring the welfare of this great College: Executive Vice President and Provost, Dr. Eric Friedman; Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment, Lisa Dougherty; Vice President for Business and Finance and CFO, Veronica Zeichner; Vice President for External Relations and Senior Counsel to the President, Dr. Nicholas Chiaravalloti; Vice President for Human Resources, Anna Krupitskiy; Assistant Vice President for Employee Relations, Vivyen Ray; and Executive Administrative Assistant to the President, Jennifer Oakley.

And I thank all members of the President's Executive Council, and Marcella Williams and Alexa Riano in my office, who make all things work. Thank you, colleagues!

Our work this year will include several interrelated priorities:

- Being laser focused on continuous improvement in our efforts to promote student success;
- Bringing increased clarity to *Guided Pathways* as a framework for our student success agenda;
- Continuously improving how we address student needs, including holistic supports;
- Expanding the use of data to inform decision making;
- Increasing transparency and accessibility with our policies and procedures;
- Further aligning the programs, services and activities of our Journal Square and North Hudson campuses;

- And, as we are discussing today, bringing increased sensitivity and continuous improvement to the removal of a multitude of barriers to student success, from facilities accessibility to consistency in advisor assignments, from financial concerns to equity impediments, from opportunity gaps to the comprehensive and meaningful engagement of all students, and others.

Pakistani activist for female education, and the youngest Nobel Prize Laureate, Malala Yousafzai, wrote, “Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.”

As I begin my second year at HCCC, what continues to inspire me most is the commitment that everyone here has to our students. We have the privilege of working in an institution that changes and transforms lives, and it’s clear that our core common value – what everyone here champions – is our students and their welfare.

The 2018-19 academic year was a monumental one for HCCC thanks to the efforts of everyone in this room, and so many others. I’d like to take a few moments to review some major accomplishments that have set the stage for a tremendous upcoming year of opportunity for our students, our community, and all of us. All of these outcomes are the result of the entire College community’s dedicated efforts to supporting our students.

- Together, we achieved our goal of a full, eight-year reaccreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education – with commendations and without follow-up reports, I might add.
- We celebrated nationally distinctive student, faculty, staff and trustee accomplishments and recognitions, including:
 - Sara Hayoune’s receipt of a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarship and naming to the Phi Theta Kappa Coca-Cola Academic Team;
 - Abderahim Salhi’s naming to the All-USA Academic Team, New Century Transfer Pathway Scholar for New Jersey, and receipt of the Phi Theta Kappa Hites Transfer Scholarship, the most prestigious scholarship awarded by PTK;
 - Lindy Pagan’s receipt of the 2018 Coca-Cola Military Leaders of Promise Scholarship;

- Professor Catherine Sweeting's receipt of the American Association of Community Colleges' Dale P. Parnell Faculty Distinction Award;
 - Vice President Lisa Dougherty's selection as a 2019-20 Aspen Presidential Fellow;
 - President Emeritus Glen Gabert's receipt of Phi Theta Kappa's Michael Bennett Lifetime Achievement Award;
 - Board Chair William Netchert's receipt of the Association of Community College Trustees' M. Dale Ensign Northeast Region Trustee Leadership Award;
 - Bill and Barbara Netchert's receipt of the 2018 HCCC Foundation Distinguished Community Service Award; and so many others.
- We celebrated the hiring and promotion of talented, accomplished and dedicated colleagues from diverse backgrounds throughout the College;
 - We achieved the completion of multiple-year contracts with all four of our professional associations.
 - We made significant progress in addressing employee salary and equity concerns, which remains a work in progress and a continuing central priority. This year we will engage a consultant and begin our work to update job descriptions, create an employee classification system, and further address issues related to equity in salaries.
 - We made a college-wide commitment to the focused use of data and best practices to promote the success of students, and joined *Achieving the Dream*, a national reform movement dedicated to community college excellence in the continuous improvement of student retention, completion, transfer and gainful employment.
 - We created plans, goals, and strategies for enrollment growth through continuous improvement in recruitment and retention based upon data and best practices.
 - We commenced construction of HCCC's first ever, state-of-the-art Student Center, which is an important component of our vision for enhanced student

engagement. The project is well underway and slated for completion by next spring.

- We created and opened food pantries on the Journal Square and North Hudson campuses and developed “Hudson Helps” services to address students’, faculty’s, and staff’s basic-needs issues including food insecurity, homelessness, mental health, and concerns related to immigration status, among others.
- We developed new and expanded collaborations and articulation agreements with educational partners, including Year Up New York New Jersey; America Needs You; New Jersey City University; New Jersey Institute of Technology; Ramapo College of New Jersey; Saint Peter’s University; Rutgers University Newark and New Brunswick; Fairleigh Dickinson University; Montclair State University; Kean University; Clarion University of PA; University of Phoenix; and others.
- We also developed new, renewed and expanded agreements with K-12 partners in support of HCCC’s “Guided Pathways” model. These include agreements with Hudson County Schools of Technology, Jersey City Board of Education, M.E.T.S. Charter School, Hoboken High School, Hoboken Charter School; and the first phase of planning for a STEAM agreement with West New York Schools, and partnerships with Secaucus and Bayonne High Schools.
- We developed entrepreneurial, and, in several cases, nationally distinctive programs and partnerships in Continuing Education and Workforce Development. These include new advanced manufacturing apprenticeship partnerships, which have been described as models for future entrepreneurial apprenticeship programs in New Jersey and were featured in a June 2019 “Wall Street Journal” article; and an Aspen Institute sponsored Workforce Leadership Academy, which is the latest in a series of Aspen Institute Leadership Academies hosted in cities throughout the United States and Canada, and the first to be held in partnership with a community college. Our Office of Workforce and Continuing Education has become the workforce development hub for Hudson County and the larger region, and a leader for college-wide entrepreneurial initiatives.
- We established a Middle States approved site at the new \$160 million High Tech High School in Secaucus, where we are serving high-achieving high school students interested in STEM education with the opportunity to complete an

HCCC associate degree upon high school graduation; and residents of Secaucus and the surrounding region with full credit programs offered in the evening.

- Through transparency, communication, and the engagement of all community members, we built trust, enhanced morale, and generated enthusiasm for our future throughout our entire community.
- We continued to develop and build upon our historic partnership with the County of Hudson, resulting in a 7.5%, \$1.1 million increase in operating support from the County for the coming year.
- And we achieved additional strong financial outcomes, including increases in the College's net position.

And there are many more outcomes we realized together, which time will not allow me to mention. All of these outcomes and accomplishments reflect the dedicated commitment of our entire community to excellence and student achievement, which are central to our mission.

Very importantly, these accomplishments are focused on our HCCC values, beginning with my own Presidential goals that flow from our Board approved Mission, Vision, and Values statements, and cascading throughout the College through the initiatives and day-to-day contributions of every member of our HCCC community.

Indeed, every person matters! We celebrate every community member's contributions that, collectively, lead to our mutual success. Ladies and gentlemen, let's recognize and thank one another for a phenomenal year of accomplishment in support of our student-centered mission!

During the coming year, our focused efforts around continuous improvement in student success, including retention, completion, transfer and gainful employment – supported by our new work with *Achieving the Dream* – will bring us to new levels of accomplishment in this mission central area of priority. These efforts are fundamental to our goal of reaching the pinnacle of excellence as a high-achieving, comprehensive, urban community college that offers a personal and caring environment for student engagement, which are cornerstones for student learning and student success.

Pervading and underpinning the work of ATD is equity, which will integrate seamlessly with our collective efforts to promote continuous improvement in our community's advancement and support for diversity, equity and inclusion.

The late American business leader and writer, Max De Pree, wrote, “We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.”

Through much of the last year we have been discussing our College’s commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Over the summer we reviewed best practices nationally and continued to engage the College community. I have valued many discussions in recent months that have led to the development of a draft statement pertaining to the College’s commitment to DEI, and the composition and charges for our new President’s Advisory Council on DEI.

The draft was refined through review and discussion with our Board of Trustees, Cabinet, President’s Executive Council, officers and representatives of our All College Council, Educational Opportunity Fund, by the All College Council subcommittee that will administer a campus climate survey in early fall, by discussion at Town Hall Meetings, and through feedback from many others. Copies of the draft document have been distributed college-wide. If you haven’t already, please give it a read. We continue to welcome suggestions and feedback. Allow me to share the opening statement about our shared values and commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

“Hudson County Community College is proud of its diversity, including one of the most diverse student bodies in the United States. The College is committed to the value and principle that all members of the HCCC community should be treated with respect, dignity, and kindness. Our community celebrates diversity and unity, and welcomes all people onto our campus and into our community. We believe that celebrating diversity benefits everyone. The HCCC community encourages culturally aware curricula; recruitment of – and opportunities for – diverse populations, including administration, faculty, staff and students; diversity training and education that is available to everyone; mediation of differences that may arise among our community to derive the best possible solutions and compromises available; encouragement of diverse conversations and philosophical discussions without censure or hostility; treating all community members with respect, and encouraging their voices to be heard.”

The document continues with important definitions and charges for the new President’s Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The Council will be comprised of about 30 members, broadly representative of our community, including students, faculty, staff, Trustees, Foundation Board members, and community members. In

collaboration with the Trustees, All College Council, Student Government Association and others, I anticipate convening the new Council in the next several weeks.

In a few weeks, our Board of Trustees and I will be holding an all-day retreat to review our progress, our strategic initiatives and priorities, to discuss best practices, and to consider our future vision. The retreat will be facilitated by Dr. DeRionne Pollard, President of Montgomery College in Maryland, who chaired our Middle States Visitation Team. This new retreat, which we plan to hold at least annually going forward, will provide a foundation for the beginning of a college-wide review of our Mission, Vision, and Values, and the development of our next strategic plan. This will be a college- and community-wide process that will begin later this year. We want everyone to be engaged in this work because everyone's ideas and perspectives matter and are valued.

Central to this work will be telling our stories – the stories of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and our institution's story in this community and beyond. As we are all aware, and as became so clear in our reaccreditation process last year, these stories are exceedingly powerful and inspirational.

American poet Kay Ryan wrote, "I . . . celebrate the fact that right near your home, year in and year out, a community college is quietly – and with very little financial encouragement – saving lives and minds. I can't think of a more efficient, hopeful or egalitarian machine, with the possible exception of the bicycle."

And Northern Virginia Community College Professor, Dr. Jill Biden, wrote, "One of the things that makes community colleges so special is they do not pick and choose their students – they work with all students."

As I've shared in many meetings and conversations on and off of our campuses, I continue to believe that at this moment in our nation's development and in postsecondary education, community colleges are uniquely positioned to address many of the nation's highest priorities, challenges, and aspirations. We are a gateway to the American Dream for the millions of students who join our communities and traverse our pathways.

The mission and principles of community colleges – to meet students where they are, offer access, support and inspiration that can change lives, and focus on the specific workforce, economic development and quality of life needs of the community – make this the most exciting and fulfilling part of our nation's higher education system, which is clearly the best in the world.

It's particularly inspiring and fitting that Hudson County Community College thrives in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty! May she forever bring light, inspiration, and caring to all of our people!

Colleagues and friends, I pledge to do everything I can as your president to support our collective efforts to continue to grow and excel as an institution that is committed to serving our students, our community, Hudson County, the surrounding region and beyond. Clearly there is much for which to be thankful, much to celebrate, and much more to do!

During the coming year I encourage the entire HCCC community to share with one another and me your thoughts, your ideas, your concerns, and never hesitate to let me know how I can be helpful. Please feel free to stop in and see me at the office, drop me a note, give me a call, or schedule time to talk. And I welcome invitations to meet with faculty, staff, and student organizations, to attend events and celebrations, and to visit classes.

I am honored to have the opportunity to work side by side with all of you; to celebrate our successes and work through our challenges together; and to be Hudson County Community College's tireless advocate! Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for all that you do for our students, our academic community, and our region. And thank you for entrusting me with the honor and privilege of serving you as President of this inspirational College that transforms lives. I look forward to another year filled with experiences that are rewarding, inspiring, and, most of all, caring. Happy New Year!