



## **BUILDING AMERICAN SKILLS BY STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

*“Now is the time to build a firmer, stronger foundation for growth that will not only withstand future economic storms, but one that helps us thrive and compete in a global economy. It’s time to reform our community colleges so that they provide Americans of all ages a chance to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to compete for the jobs of the future.”*

- President Barack Obama

In an increasingly competitive world economy, America’s economic strength depends upon the education and skills of its workers. In the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience. And over the next decade, nearly 8 in 10 new jobs will require higher education and workforce training. To meet this need, President Obama set two national goals: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world, and community colleges will produce an additional 5 million graduates.

As the largest part of the nation’s higher education system, community colleges enroll more than 8 million students and are growing rapidly. They feature affordable tuition, open admission policies, flexible course schedules, and convenient locations, and they are particularly important for students who are older, working, or need remedial classes. Community colleges also work with businesses, industry, labor, and government to create tailored training programs to meet economic needs like nursing, health information technology, advanced manufacturing, and green jobs.

The White House Summit on Community Colleges brings together community college leaders, faculty and students; business leaders; philanthropic organizations; and other workforce development experts to discuss the role that community colleges play in our efforts to increase the number of college graduates and to prepare these graduates to lead the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

### **INVESTING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: REACHING OUR ECONOMIC POTENTIAL**

At the forefront of training workers for some of our most highly-skilled and high demand occupations, community colleges work with businesses, industry and government to create tailored training programs on and off the worksite, programs resulting in degrees, industry-recognized credentials and certificates, and opportunities for retraining and skills enhancement. Given these relationships, community colleges are uniquely positioned to raise the skill and knowledge base of our workforce.

The President recognizes the critical role community colleges play in developing our nation's human capital and has a plan to usher in new innovations and reforms for community colleges. The President's plan will also improve college access and completion by supporting programs and activities designed to boost college persistence and increase graduation rates. This commitment has already been demonstrated in a number of significant ways.

### **The Community College and Career Training Initiative**

On March 30, 2010, President Barack Obama signed the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, which provided \$2 billion over four years to fund the Community College and Career Training initiative. The Department of Labor, in close cooperation with the Department of Education, will soon open the competition and award approximately \$500 million to community colleges over the coming year to help increase completion of degrees, certificates, and other industry-recognized credentials.

This program is designed to meet industry needs while also accelerating learning, and improving retention and achievement rates. With these resources, eligible institutions of higher education will be able to improve their capacity to provide quality education and training services to individuals to improve their knowledge and skills, enabling them to obtain high-quality employment to support their families. This investment will incentivize evidence-based projects that that will build career pathways with businesses, advance the teaching of basic skills, and support the creation of a new online, open-source clearinghouse of courses.

### **The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Obama Administration has invested billions of dollars specifically in community colleges:

- More than \$3.5 billion in student financial assistance, in the form of Pell Grants, to low-income students at hundreds of community colleges across the country.
- Over \$1 billion in workforce training programs at community colleges - preparing students to work in cutting-edge clean energy industries, training future medical professionals in new health information technology, and providing education and training to dislocated workers.
- \$40 million in Work Study funds to help community college students pay for their education through employment.

### **Increasing Affordability**

Affordability is critically important to community college students, who generally have lower incomes than four-year students and more likely to cite financial concerns as impediments to persistence and completion. The Obama Administration has taken historic steps to increase affordability for college students by ending wasteful subsidies to banks that administer federal

loans and increasing Pell grants to make college more affordable for low-income students. The Obama Administration has also made student debt more manageable by strengthening income-based repayment and public service loan-forgiveness, and tripling the investments in tax credits for college expenses. And the financial aid process has been made easier and faster to navigate by simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

### **VetSuccess**

As part of the Administration's ongoing efforts to strengthen and support community colleges, several agencies and Cabinet Secretaries will participate in the Summit and its working sessions. The Department of Veterans Affairs will announce that VetSuccess on Campus will be expanded to include two new sites, Salt Lake City Community College, and Community College of Rhode Island. The program, which was started in 2009, is designed to provide on-campus benefits assistance and adjustment counseling to help veterans obtain education and training to enter the civilian workforce. At VetSuccess centers, VA liaisons help ensure veterans receive VA benefits and also provide vocational testing, and career and academic counseling. Due to the success of the program and positive feedback from veterans who use VetSuccess services, the program will be expanded this fall to additional campuses. Salt Lake City Community College, which serves approximately 800 veterans, and the Community College of Rhode Island, which serves 550 veterans, are the first community colleges to host VetSuccess on Campus.

### **PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

In response to the President's leadership and in recognition of the central role community colleges will play in preparing the American workforce to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, foundations and educational organizations are increasingly investing in research and programs to strengthen these critical institutions. The Obama Administration is pleased to highlight three new such commitments at the White House Summit on Community Colleges.

#### **Gates Foundation: Completion by Design**

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will announce *Completion by Design*, which aims to dramatically improve community college graduation rates by building on proven, existing practices to implement model pathways making the college experience more responsive to today's student's needs and education goals. The competitive grant program is a \$35 million investment over five years to 3-5 multi-campus groups of community colleges in nine states serving the largest populations of low-income students (Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington). *Completion by Design* supports tough-minded campus- or college-based analysis to learn where along the education journey students are being lost and to design an intentional educational pathway that employs proven and promising practices at every critical moment from enrollment to credential completion.

#### **Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence**

The Aspen Institute, the Joyce and Lumina Foundations, and the charitable foundations of Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase have partnered to announce a new, \$1 million annual prize to recognize, reward, and inspire outstanding outcomes in community colleges nationwide. The Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence will shine a spotlight on outstanding performers

and rising stars that deliver exceptional results in student completion rates and workforce success; distill and share successful practices; and contribute to the development of high-quality, consistent measures and benchmarks for assessing community college outcomes. By focusing the field on a clear and bold definition of success, honoring excellence with prizes and prestige, and accelerating the spread of successful practices, the prize aims to galvanize the work of reform-minded educators, governors, employers, and community college presidents across the nation. The Aspen Prize will launch in the spring of 2011 and celebrate the first winners that fall.

## **Skills for America's Future**

On October 4, President Obama announced the launch of *Skills for America's Future*, a new initiative to expand innovative strategies and improve the skills of America's workers. *Skills for America's Future* will build high-impact partnerships with industry, labor unions, community colleges and other training providers in all 50 states, all in support of the President's goal of 5 million more community college graduates and certificates by 2020.

*Skills for America's Future* is in response to a key recommendation by the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board, which spent the last year surveying employers about their workforce needs and development strategies.

*Skills for America's Future* will be spearheaded by Penny Pritzker, Chairman and Founder, Pritzker Realty Group, and Walter Isaacson, CEO, Aspen Institute. Together, they will advance this effort by recruiting additional private sector leaders; providing a national voice for effective public/private partnerships in workforce development; developing a "certification" for best-in-class partnerships; and leveraging new opportunities for online learning, measuring program impact and sharing lessons learned. Several Fortune 500 companies, including PG&E, Gap Inc., McDonald's, United Technologies, and Accenture, have already committed to support the *Skills for America's Future* initiative and will work over the next year to expand their training partnerships to provide American workers the skills for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

In addition, the President announced the establishment of a *Skills for America's Future* Task Force, co-chaired by top-level administration policymakers and including the Secretaries of Education, Labor and Commerce, to ensure federal efforts are coordinated and to facilitate private sector access to federal training and education programs.