

Chancellor Martha Kanter's Remarks

“Equity Equals Excellence” California Community Colleges at the Vanguard of Change: Santa Clara Hyatt Hotel May 1, 2008

When Dr. Marion Winters asked me to be part of this conference many months ago, I was humbled at the thought. I knew she had invited James Banks, Ron Takaki and Betita Martinez and I thought to myself: what could I add to such an incredibly distinguished group of speakers? When I looked at the sessions on cultural competence, intentional pedagogy and institutional equity, diversifying the faculty, and immigration, to name just a few of the significant topics you are discussing today and tomorrow, I thought to myself: what can I say to you that would make a difference to you, especially after dinner and before an evening of music and dance?

Some who may be much smarter than I might say: You cannot add to this conversation. But I'll do my best to make a couple of points from my perspective that hopefully can inform your thinking about the critical role you play in our community colleges.

First, the title of the conference “Equity Equals Excellence” is brilliant and strategic. I figured Marion talked with her colleagues and came up with this title to make an important point to us all: that if our goal is to achieve excellence in educating our students, we must, at the same time, achieve equity because you can't have one without the other. In telling you what you already know, my first point is that there are many in our community colleges and in the communities we serve that don't understand this point. By reframing the relationship between equity and excellence, and certainly by being part of this conference, we are now the collective voice for this issue. We have educated ourselves and we must speak about “Equity equals Excellence” at every opportunity, whether in our classrooms, our counseling offices, our governance meetings or to our boards and communities.

To deepen my own thoughts about excellence and equity, I turned to a couple of sources that affirm this work. One of the references that I read each year is the annual report of the World Bank. They recently issued a new report on Agriculture to make the point that three-quarters of the world's poor live on less than \$1 a day. This amounts to 900 million people who live in the most rural, underdeveloped regions of the world, living on less than \$1 a day.

The report calls for structural transformation, noting that differences in performance reflect different underlying conditions and seeks to find the most efficient pathways out of poverty for the world's poor. One of the chapters is called: Moving beyond the Farm. In it, the authors share that education and training are the pathways out of poverty and into the labor market, but they also note that communities must provide safety nets to reduce vulnerability. They call out for public investment for long-term development; they say that governance must be strengthened to make progress from the local communities to our global world; and they note that institutional innovations are still a work in progress.

I thought about the fact that so many of our students have little economic means when they enter our doors. I thought about the innovations that we all look to in our quest to make a significant difference in the lives of these students. I recalled many of our hopes and disappointments when we look at the research on basic skills and how much more we must do, and I was struck by how pertinent the World Bank's recommendations are to the changes we need to make in our community colleges.

We are all searching to make the structural transformations that are required to increase the success of our most vulnerable students, students historically underrepresented in higher education. I believe that everyone in the audience this evening is already committed to achieve equity with excellence on behalf of these students. I believe that we are the safety net for our students that the World Bank talks about. We know that governance must be strengthened to make progress with our students, so how can we strengthen governance?

Answering that question becomes a second important point. Each of us in our own ways, and together, we are strengthening governance at our institutions by hiring extraordinary faculty and staff who reflect the very backgrounds and cultures of our students, people who speak a variety of languages and can understand and address the needs of our students far better than in the past.

One of the greatest privileges I hold as chancellor is to recommend to the board the hiring of our diverse faculty and staff. I study how we do every year and I look back at the prior years to see if we are making progress. Like you, I am constantly looking for new ways to recruit and retain our diverse faculty and staff.

But, as you well know, we have to go far beyond bringing a diverse teaching and learning workforce to our colleges. We must now provide leadership development opportunities so that the faculty and staff we are hiring today will become tomorrow's boards of trustees, chancellors, presidents, vice presidents and deans. Only then will we realize the true promise of "equity with excellence."

We have both a professional and personal obligation to know the world of the community college like we know the back of our hand. Do we really know how bad the achievement gap really is? Do we really know what educational programs increase the success of our students? Are we willing to take some risks and figure out new ways to attract and retain every one of our students?

I hope that you are not afraid to take risks, to speak up when things aren't right, to challenge any one of us to make more of a difference in educating our students, to be an activist on campus, rather than sitting back and letting others take the lead.

You are the future of our institutions. Even if a few of you are a long way past your fiftieth year like me, it's incumbent that you find one or two or more of us to become our academic senate and administrative leaders now and in the future.

I like to think I've learned a lot over the last 31 years as a community college faculty member and administrator, but I haven't learned nearly enough and everything seems much more urgent to me now than in years' past. Every time a student fails, I internalize it as my failure as a leader. Every time a student succeeds (and all of us get those visits and letters when we near graduation), that student's success says to me: one for the road but there are so many more that we need to educate.

For my part, I'm working in Sacramento on ways to increase revenues and amend Proposition 13 to increase funding for education, healthcare and social services. If we don't do that as soon as possible, we won't be able to educate our students with the programs that make the difference between their success and failure. I'm also working on leadership development, closing the achievement gap and open educational resources because knowledge should be free and I don't want students to drop classes because they can't afford the textbooks. Each of us has goals like these and I thank you for that.

Let me close with a last set of points from another report I look at every year. It's called "If the world were a village of 100 people" and the information is found in the archives of Donella Meadows who teaches environmental studies at Dartmouth College and founded the Sustainability Institute in Hartland, Vermont.

She tells us that if we could reduce the world's population to a village of precisely 100

people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, the demographics would look something like this:

The village would have 60 Asians, 14 Africans, 12 Europeans, 8 Latin Americans, 5 from the USA and Canada, and 1 from the South Pacific.

51 would be male, 49 would be female.

82 would be non-white; 18 white.

67 would be non-Christian; 33 would be Christian.

80 would live in substandard housing.

67 would be unable to read.

50 would be malnourished and 1 dying of starvation.

33 would be without access to a safe water supply.

39 would lack access to improved sanitation.

24 would not have any electricity (And of the 76 that do _have electricity, most would only use it for light at night.).

7 people would have access to the Internet.

1 would have HIV __2 would be near birth; 1 near death.

5 would control 32% of the entire world's wealth; all 5 would be US citizens.

33 would be receiving --and attempting to live on-- only 3% of the income of "the village."

And, finally, 1 would have a college education.

Excellence does equal equity and we have to do our part to change these conditions. We cannot wait! Thank you for inviting me to share these thoughts with you.