

A letter to community colleges

TOPICS: Commentary



U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona earlier this year visited Mesa Community College (Arizona) with First Lady Dr. Jill Biden. (Photo: MCC)

BY MIGUEL CARDONA MAY 3, 2023

In today's economy, a high school diploma alone is no longer a guaranteed ticket to a well-paying job and a middle-class life. Within the next four years, it's estimated 70% of jobs will require some form of postsecondary credential, whether it's an industry certification or two-year or four-degree. That's why increasing support for our community colleges is central to President Biden's effort to Invest in America and meet the needs of the moment – for our country and for students.

Viewpoint

Thanks to President Biden's leadership, we have the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act, and historic investments to fight climate change. From

manufacturing semiconductors to building electric vehicle infrastructure to upgrading broadband, there's a tsunami of great, well-paying jobs in America coming – and we need to make sure this generation of students is prepared to ride the wave.

Community colleges will be instrumental in this work. They are situated in virtually every community across the country, rural to urban, and provide high-quality pathways to great jobs and higher wages. They do this work while serving students from diverse backgrounds and all walks of life, from high school students in dual-enrollment programs to working adults seeking to upskill.

I know that I'm preaching to the choir about this, but I've seen the life-changing impact our community colleges have on students' lives while visiting campuses across the country. Whether students are planning to pursue a four-year degree or completing a credential that leads directly to the workforce, community colleges are inclusive, accessible institutions that meet students where they are and get them where they need to go.

Earlier this year, I visited [Mesa Community College](#) in Arizona, where I met a student named Lily. Lily is pursuing an associate degree in construction management – a field close to her heart because her family works in the trade. In fact, her father Agustin was so inspired by his daughter's determination that he chose to enroll in the very same program. Father and daughter are now both on a pathway to higher earning potential thanks to their community college.

I've also met students who've benefited from the more than \$10 billion provided to community colleges by the American Rescue Plan. In 2021, 94% of community college leaders reported using these investments to keep students enrolled who were at risk of dropping out, through emergency financial relief, improving access to food, housing, and other basic needs, covering textbook costs, and more. At [Reading Area Community College](#) in Pennsylvania, I met a working mom named Melissa who never imagined returning to school but is now pursuing her dream of becoming an arts teacher thanks to financial assistance and wraparound supports.



Cardona chats with Susan Looney, president of Reading Area Community College in Pennsylvania, during a visit to the college last fall. (Photo: RACC)

President Biden’s new budget asks Congress for dramatic new investments to make free community college a reality across America, by building on state-level efforts like College Promise. We’re also requesting another \$820 increase to the Pell Grant – on top of the \$900 increases we’ve won already – to bring the maximum Pell award to \$8,215 for the 2024-2025 academic year.

As we close out Community College Month, I want to recognize the incredible work you’re doing to support students and serve your communities. The Biden-Harris Administration believes in you and will continue to champion you. Let’s continue working together to raise the bar for educational attainment and create pathways for students of all backgrounds to build rewarding careers and prosperous communities.

With gratitude,

Miguel Cardona

U.S. Secretary of Education

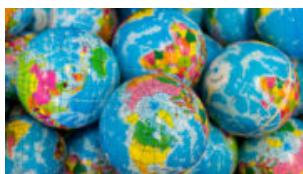
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Miguel Cardona is secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

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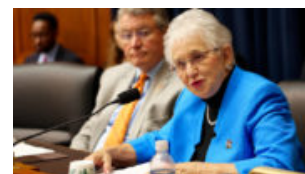
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