

**REMARKS BY CHERYL L. HYMAN
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Good afternoon. Thank you Mayor.

I am humbled by the Mayor's words. We are bound by the same passion for the city and tenacity when it comes to empowering City Colleges students. He has been a great champion for our students and for me and, for that, I will always be grateful.

Thank you Jay and Paul, and thank you to all who have supported City Colleges and me these last six years.

As a corporate executive turned education leader, I want to extend special thanks to the civic and business communities that are so committed to making our city stronger. That of course includes my corporate mentors, Frank Clark, John Hooker and John Rowe. I have been fortunate to have them and you as partners.

I am humbled by the knowledge that, while much remains to be accomplished, we have been able to dramatically boost student success at City Colleges, which was the mission I gave myself when I arrived six years ago.

I said then, and I quote: "There are thousands of young people who could be inspired by my story. Their success hinges on my ability to do this job well." The challenge, I said, was to "build a world-class institution at a time of national recession that still puts students in a better position in life than when they came through the doors."

Six years later, the record shows thousands of students are in a better position in life thanks to Reinvention, but in a year where City Colleges has been cut \$45 million because of the State budget crisis, it feels very quaint that I was worried about the recession back in 2010!

Having been appointed Chancellor by two Democratic Mayors and appointed to the Illinois Community College Board by a Republican Governor, I hope I have shown that education reform can be an area of common ground. Heck, I seem to be the only thing the Governor and the Mayor can agree on!

Now, it was very flattering to be asked to lead the institution that gave me my start in life. But the real reason I accepted the mission was because this was an opportunity to help give students the same chance to succeed that I had, and in the process of changing careers I

found my calling.

Many students see me as a beacon of hope, because I was once them. My own journey is unique to me and yet it is so commonplace when it comes to so many of our students.

My journey consisted of just 24 blocks. A 24-block distance that was short and yet made the destination often feel so out of reach. The 24 blocks from Henry Horner at Lake and Damen to City Colleges' District Office at Jackson and Franklin. I walked those 24 blocks in our students' shoes and that has informed my vision and daily purpose as Chancellor.

What I learned along those 24 blocks was that you can't let your circumstances dictate your destiny, and that you can't let anything or anyone stand between you and your goals... not even yourself.

I struggled as a teenager in a family that had its fair share of challenges. We prevailed but not before it took a toll on our financial and emotional footing as a family.

And I certainly struggled at school. I was not willing to put in the work and make the sacrifices that are demanded of all students, but even more so of students who come from where I come from.

I was starting to allow myself to become a victim of my own circumstances.

It wasn't until dropping out of high school and even being homeless and aimless for a time that I realized I alone held the key to a better future for myself. I realized that education was that key. And so on my 24-block journey I earned an associate's, a bachelor's and a master's degree and eventually an MBA on my way to a good position with a Fortune 500 corporation.

All the while, at every one of those 24 crossroads, there were people who looked to stare me down, tried to steer me wrong and, as my grandmother would say, just simply steal my joy. Thankfully, at most of these corners, there also were people who inspired me to forge ahead.

My story and the stories of the thousands of additional graduates under Reinvention have helped pave the way for other students as they come to these same crossroads. But telling stories, however inspiring, is not enough.

What truly gives people hope is a relevant academic credential that holds currency with four-year institutions and employers.

And so six years ago, City Colleges also found itself at a critical crossroad. The institution had a long history of access, but it did not have a strong focus or track record on student success.

There had been little strategy and no clearly articulated goals, and so it was impossible to target investments and to hold ourselves accountable, either operationally or academically. We knew we had to couple access with success, and the only way to get there was to set explicit targets to drive improved outcomes, and this was a true cultural shift.

First, we had to educate everyone where City Colleges stood. The institution had a 7 percent graduation rate, which few people either inside or outside of the institution knew.

It became evident very quickly that a leading reason for our low graduation rate was that we did not have clear and relevant paths to graduation for students, and that we had too few support systems to get them there. It was also clear we were not living up to our obligation to taxpayers to manage their dollars responsibly.

And so, if we were going to put in place the kind of academic systems that would drive student success, we had to free up money tied up in operational inefficiencies.

Because there was a dire need for operational improvements and because City Colleges clearly was in need of fresh ideas and new approaches, it was critical to establish true diversity in our administration. Diversity is usually defined in terms of race, ethnicity or gender but rarely are diversity of thought and experience included.

As Nicholas Kristof wrote in the New York Times about higher education a few weeks ago, “We’re fine with people who don’t look like us, as long as they think like us.... When perspectives are unrepresented in discussions, when some kinds of thinkers aren’t at the table, classrooms become echo chambers rather than sounding boards — and we all lose.”

Reform-minded institutions need leadership teams with backgrounds in change management who are willing and able to make unpopular decisions when necessary.

These administrators need to include both those with education experience as well as those with business or other professional backgrounds in results-driven organizations.

We have to stop being afraid of the so-called “corporate takeover of education” and embrace business insights that can both help us bring relevance to our programs and help us run our institutions more efficiently.

So we put in place a leadership team that was a partnership of academic experts and others who like me came from industry.

This was met with pushback, which is ironic to me, because higher education trains people to run things but often doesn’t want their help running higher education.

Our team developed a five-year plan with measurable annual goals in key academic and operational areas, and we release annual scorecards to track our progress. That is the kind of transparency that is common practice outside of government, but it has created controversy within higher education because it requires such a shift in mindset and culture.

I was committed to Reinvention being a collaborative effort. We set up taskforces of faculty, staff, students and community and business stakeholders to document what they thought were the biggest issues and make recommendations for solutions.

In all, 20 percent of full-time faculty members served, and taskforces have accounted for 210,000 people hours since the beginning of Reinvention.

We had to be careful, however, that the process did not become the product. As with any reform, there is a time to reflect and listen, and there is a time to act.

We put in place centers for tutoring, career placement, transfer, veterans and even wellness.

We created relevant semester-by-semester academic pathways that are tied to a career goal, whether that goal requires a few months or many years of education. Today, 100 percent of City College credit students are on such a pathway.

We brought our student-adviser ratio down from more than 900-to-1, which was twice the national average, to less than 300-to-1, well below the national average.

As a result, in the last three years, we have awarded more than 14,000 degrees, compared to 6,000 degrees in the three years preceding Reinvention.

The number of degrees awarded annually to both full-time and part-time students, from about 2,000 before Reinvention to nearly 5,000 today. Certificates are up by more than a fifth, to almost 7,000. Both numbers are the highest on record at City Colleges.

In addition, our federally defined graduation rate for first-time, full-time students who graduate within three years also has more than doubled from 7 percent to 17 percent, again the highest on record.

When we had a 7 percent graduation rate, urgency was a must. But even now that the rate is at 17 percent, urgency is still required. Some people point out that we are still short of the 20 percent national average graduation rate for community college. I would argue that neither number is a reason to celebrate or rest, because both are unacceptable.

Also, the number of GED and English-as-a-Second-Language students who advance to college-credit certificate or degree work has increased 171 percent.

When I became Chancellor, colleagues in higher education and partners in industry told me what we taught was out of step with what their admission officers and their HR teams looked for.

Today, we have 200 education and employer partnerships that have helped us ensure the relevance of our credentials, and as a result the transfer rate to four-year institutions is up 9 percent, and we have placed more than 3,000 students in paid internships and jobs directly through College to Careers.

And thanks to the Mayor's vision, qualified Chicago Public School students can attend City Colleges of Chicago for free, under the Chicago Star Scholarship. We expect to have more than 2,000 Star scholars enrolled this fall.

We have successfully negotiated twelve collective bargaining agreements, ushering new group incentives for instructor and faculty unions that include student success pay for faculty members based on performance against student outcomes in our five-year plan. Now, you may have heard of the 12 labors of Hercules. I should note he had it easy because none of them actually included labor negotiations.

We achieved all this while the State cut us \$75 million overall since Fiscal Year 2011. We have been able to manage through this crisis, albeit with many sacrifices, because we saved \$70 million through increased efficiency, securing AA and AA- credit ratings along the way. In all, we have cut administrative overhead 30 percent under

Reinvention.

Also, last year, anticipating the State budget crisis, we increased our tuition for the first time in more than five years, a period over which every other community college in the state had raised tuition or fees each year. Our new tuition structure keeps City Colleges by far the most affordable higher education option for Chicagoans.

And so while most other Illinois community colleges are laying off faculty and staff in the face of the paralysis in Springfield, City Colleges will finish Fiscal Year 2016 with no layoffs, and is about to adopt a Fiscal Year 2017 budget without layoffs. Without our reforms, we likely would be in a very different place.

Because we have made significant inroads in our outcomes, Chicago has been looked upon as a reform model by other cities and states.

This has led to conversations with education and government and business stakeholders across the country, which have convinced me that the challenges and needs we have worked so hard to address at City Colleges do not have their roots in Chicago and are not unique to our city.

When college and civic leaders pull me aside at national gatherings, they don't ask me about our academic model, our fiscal reforms or how we partner with industry as much as they ask me this: How do you make the cultural changes that make all the other changes possible?

The biggest challenge is shifting higher education to a culture of success and accountability guided by data and outcomes, regardless of pushback, regardless of the cost to us as leaders.

When I announced my decision to only renew my contract for a year, the headline said my tenure had been stormy. Some people who love me dearly asked, why would they insert such a negative thing in the headline given all your accomplishments?

I said: "My tenure HAS been stormy." If it hadn't been, we wouldn't be talking about how City Colleges has made such dramatic improvements. You don't change the status quo without some storms. And the more performance and the more accountability you demand, the bigger the storms.

You see, after more than six years of being an education leader but retaining the fresh perspective of an outsider, what I have learned above all else is that, if higher education is going to more fully live up to its mission – and its obligation to taxpayers – it needs to be more in tune with the real world. This idea is at the heart of

Reinvention, but higher education is still debating this issue.

Here, the data is clear and there should be no debate.

In 2015, in UCLA's American Freshman survey, the top reason freshmen listed for going to college was "to be able to get a better job."

Students see college as a ticket to a job because they know that you can't pursue life's loftier goals if you can't feed yourself and take care of your family.

That was a lesson I learned along my 24-block journey, and it's too often overlooked by those who have not experienced the sheer desperation of not having good job options, and of not having good life options. So rather than having false debates wrapped in buzz-words and jargon, we should simply measure our success by whether students are entering good careers, and how well we prepare them to do that.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently asked graduates and employers whether graduates were ready for the workplace in various skills areas.

Here is one result that illustrates the whole survey: 59% percent of students felt they were good at applying their knowledge and skills in the real world, but only 23% of employers agreed.

The lesson also is that, even as we support our students, we also have to challenge them to know the facts and pay attention to what the real world wants from them.

We hear a lot about the skills gap in America, and it is very real. But there also is an information gap, which must be bridged if we are going to close the skills gap.

According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2025, two thirds of all jobs in the U.S. will require education beyond high school, and the Center forecasts a shortfall of 11 million workers with the relevant credentials to fill those roles over the next 10 years. City Colleges of Chicago's College to Careers initiative, which the Mayor and I launched in 2011, has been cited as a model of how we can avoid that shortfall.

Before College to Careers, City Colleges did not know which careers or skills where in demand. Even if it had known, our institution was not set up to provide students with those skills.

We must, as a country, recalibrate programs and curriculum so

graduates can leverage their credentials for employment, and we can't do it without input from the people doing the hiring. In 2015, the Economic Policy Institute estimated that the unemployment rate among young U.S. college graduates was two points higher than for the U.S. population as a whole. In addition, nearly 15 percent of young college graduates were underemployed.

I think the disconnect between the job-market demand and our education product is the reason. Even when people graduate, many do not graduate with skills that correspond to employers' needs.

Our Reinvention effort and our College to Careers initiative have begun to help close the skills gap and preparing Chicagoans for the 600,000 jobs coming to our region in high-growth careers.

Under College to Careers, each of our seven colleges has become the Center of Excellence for a high-growth industry, which has allowed us to pool our talent and resources, but also facilitated the involvement of partners in a much more targeted, impactful way.

And, wouldn't you know it... increasing outcomes while saving money has caused one of our many storms.

In a perfect world, our city would have a Fortune 500 company offering good jobs in every neighborhood. And in a perfect world, our city would have a world-class college or university that offers every possible program in every neighborhood. In a perfect world, City Colleges would build seven new \$251 million Schools of Health Sciences, like we did at Malcolm X.

And seven, \$75 million Advanced Manufacturing centers like we are building at Daley. And seven, \$45 million Transportation, Distribution and Logistics centers like we are building at Olive-Harvey. And seven, \$1 million Child Development academic centers like we are building at Truman.

But we don't live in a perfect world. We live in an imperfect world made up of imperfect people with imperfect funding who are trying to make the world just a little less imperfect.

Just like the right job isn't always conveniently located right around the corner, the right academic program to reach one's goals isn't always either. Sometimes it requires a 24-block journey.

On the health care front, for instance, we went from six largely underachieving, mostly unaccredited nursing programs to one City Colleges School of Nursing at the new Malcolm X College, where the nursing licensure pass rate has gone from 42 percent in 2010 to more

than 85 percent today, and, where, for the very first time, every nursing student is now attending a nationally accredited program.

Our mission isn't just to provide stellar programs, we have to educate students about their options before we educate them with the skills they need.

Far too few people know which jobs are available, know what they can truly expect to earn, know which skills are needed to succeed in those jobs, or know where to get those skills without accumulating a massive amount of debt.

As our students make their own 24-block journeys, they look to us for guidance. We owe it to them to give them accurate advice guided by the correct data, and not by our own biases.

The College to Careers model has been criticized by some because, according to them – and these are quotes – we are putting the high-end, pen-and-paper programs on the North side and the low-end, manual jobs on the South Side.

And yet, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, here are the expected work-life earnings for Americans in some of these very same programs, including the so-called low-end jobs:

“Natural resources, construction and maintenance,” \$2 million;
“Production, transportation and material moving,” \$1.9 million;
“education,” \$1.8 million; “office support,” \$1.8 million.

So, here again, it's important to be guided not by our biases but by facts, and not demean the people who study, teach and work in fields that are shown to be sources of true economic empowerment. We can't let cynicism get the best of us.

Since I was here at the City Club last year, we faced controversy that symbolizes this.

Under Reinvention, we joined a national reform movement in higher education called “award credit when credit is due” to ensure students who earn degrees actually receive them.

I know, I know... awarding degrees to students who actually earned them should not prove controversial, but wouldn't you know it... that led us right into another storm.

We have awarded what are called retroactive degrees to students who have left City Colleges without getting a degree they had earned but

not claimed because they did not know they had met the requirements. What's even more tragic is that for some time City Colleges had not known these students had earned these degrees, because before Reinvention City Colleges did not regularly perform degree audits.

We also have started granting reverse-transfer degrees to students who transfer from City Colleges just a few credit hours short of graduation. With the student's consent, we apply credits from their four-year institution and award them an associate's degree, which they can leverage for more earnings if they work while pursuing their bachelors.

Now, unrelated to this, we also started, at the request of families, faculty and college administrators, the practice of awarding honorary posthumous degrees to graduating students who passed away.

A local publication wrote that we were artificially inflating our outcomes by using such questionable methods as reverse and retroactive degrees, and went as far as stating we were combing the list of dead students to give them degrees that would further boost our numbers.

As we explained to the outlet, in vain, we had awarded just three such honorary posthumous awards that did not count toward our graduation rate. These are gestures of respect and compassion toward students and their families.

The fabricated controversy, however, did not stop us from doing what's right. This year at graduation, I personally awarded four more honorary posthumous degrees to grieving but grateful families.

And, for the record, retroactive and reverse-transfer degrees at City Colleges accounted for just 0.3 percent of our graduation rate. But the fact is, we should award more, not less, of these degrees. While some here still debate the issue, we run the risk of being left behind if we give in to the cynicism.

The rest of the country has embraced reverse and retroactive degrees as forward-thinking strategies.

Best-in-class community colleges like Miami-Dade in Florida – which has a graduation rate in the 40s – employ these strategies.

All 64 State University of New York institutions (including 30 community colleges) do reverse transfer. All of the Michigan community colleges do reverse transfer with University of Michigan. Colorado public universities and community colleges do reverse transfer

statewide.

Cynicism may be provocative, but it's dangerous and it can lead you astray.

Reinvention has been about facing reality: facing what employers demand, facing what universities expect, facing our fears of change, facing the challenges of pushing outside our comfort zone, and facing the reality of our resources.

It is because I learned to face my own reality that I was able to make it the full 24 blocks from Henry Horner then to where I am today.

The easy choices, the easy path, often lead to dead ends. In City Colleges, in the city of Chicago and our country, the path of most resistance is the one that holds the greatest rewards.

I will end with this: The most frequent question I have gotten since announcing I decided to only renew my contract for a year is: Chancellor, what are you going to do next? Because City Club is so important to me, I wanted to wait until today to make the big announcement: After my tenure is over, here is what I am going to do: I am going to sleep for eight hours straight at least once, I am going to disconnect my phone and I am going to finally take a vacation. After that, I am going to resume my journey.

As I now realize, even after making it through my own treacherous 24 block-journey, you never arrive. It's dangerous to think you have.

I will embark on a new 24-block journey with the same passion and fire in my belly as during the first 24 blocks, to continue advancing the cause of academic and economic empowerment.

What shape it takes is for another day, but for now my passion and my fire will remain concentrated on student success at City Colleges.

I can not think of better words than those of Senator Ted Kennedy, whose sentiment resonates with me in this moment:

For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die.

Thank you.