

DREAM 2022

ACHIEVING THE DREAM ANNUAL CONVENING



“BE THE HOPE”

Opening Remarks at DREAM 2022



Dr. Karen A. Stout, President and CEO of Achieving the Dream

Welcome to DREAM 2022. I wish I could really see you. But we simply could not ask all of you — as front-line educators, partners, parents, caretakers, community leaders and colleagues — to leave your campuses and the students who need you now more than ever — even as special as we believe DREAM to be. And it is special. Ever since attending my first DREAM conference in 2006, this is an event I have always anticipated as a necessary time for renewal, recharging, reconnecting.

When we gathered a year ago, we were tired and vulnerable, but hopeful. We were beginning to see what we thought was a light, albeit dim, at the end of the pandemic tunnel. We saw energy in a movement of diverse coalitions of Americans calling for action to address systemic racism and other types of marginalization and oppression. Yet the challenges persist.

One million. The number strikes me.

Nearly one million Americans — some are your students, faculty, campus leaders, trustees — have died in this pandemic. And, greater than one million fewer students are enrolled in colleges now than before the pandemic, the largest two-year decline in enrollment in 50 years.

We are still tired and vulnerable. As one president told me recently, “we are working hard to stay in one place.” COVID feels what I aptly heard called “maddeningly indefinite”. The economy continues to recover in fits and starts, but unevenly, hurting

racially minoritized and poverty impacted citizens the most. This mounting series of challenges can feel insurmountable.

But I don’t think they are insurmountable because we are different. We are changed. Amanda Gorman captures some of this difference in her recent essay about why she almost didn’t read her now famous poem, “The Hill We Climb” at President Biden’s inauguration. She writes:

“Even as we’ve grieved, we’ve grown; even fatigued we’ve found that this hill we climb is one we must mount together. We are battered, but bolder; worn, but wiser. I’m not telling you to not be tired or afraid. If anything, the very fact that we’re weary means we are, by definition, changed; we are brave enough to listen to, and learn from, our fear. This time will be different because this time we’ll be different. We already are.”

Over and over, we hear and see that change—how we are already different. We hear it from our coaches and ATD leaders who are by your side advancing

the work. We hear it in your annual reflections. You are thinking differently about your missions. We hear the difference when students tell us how you have supported and lifted them up. Students like Malia Capers-Cristobal who knew only two things. One, she was interested in going back to school to be a nurse and two, as a single mother with a four-year old daughter she was going to need help.

Fortunately, she found her way to Austin Community College. ACC provides a holistic set of services to help low-income parents like Malia including one-on-one guidance and advising from student advocates like Amber Huffman, Malia's current advocate. Now, about to complete her RN program, Malia reflects on the importance of those advocacy center supports.

"I would have never been able to finish this program, let alone start the program without having an advocate guide me because, when you get in, especially if you're going back to school, after not having been in school for so many years you don't even know where to start."

We see the difference in the stories of our eight DREAM Scholars who I had the privilege to meet with earlier today. We see that we are already different in the resiliency of faculty members. You did everything in your power to adapt and support students through the last two years. As one college leader said: "Our faculty have come together in the most monumental way to make sure our students do not stop learning."

We hear the difference in how our college leaders talk about what is needed to support students and serve our communities. As Amarillo College president Dr. Russel Lowery Hart explains, "we are committed to loving our students, and each other, to success." And we see the difference in the results from this year's Leah Meyer Austin winner as well as our new Leader Colleges and Leader Colleges of Distinction.

We too at ATD are different. You see it in the work we have engaged this last year, work that reaches more than 300 network colleges and another 300 through our partnerships with colleague organizations that are part of this great movement. You see it in our equity work, our focus on different types of institutions and learners, our effort to strengthen partnerships with K-12, our focus on student centered resources and more.

OUR WORK

Equity

- ATD and USC Race and Equity Center Racial Equity Leadership Academy
- Continued work through Project Success with 33 Tribal Colleges and Universities

Student-centered Resources

- Knowing Our Students Guidebook
- Shortening Academic Terms Guide and Workbook

Diversity of Institutions and Students

- Building Resiliency in Rural Communities for the Future of Work Initiative
- Prioritizing Adult Community College Enrollment Initiative
- Community College Women Succeed Advisory Group

K-12 Partnerships

- ATD's Gateway to College program 10,000th graduate

That work and our 18 years of support for community colleges and advancing the equitable outcomes of students was affirmed and recognized in June by philanthropist MacKenzie Scott with a \$20 million unsolicited and unrestricted gift. We're already putting these dollars to work strengthening our organizational capacity, but most importantly you will soon hear about grants we will make to catalyze innovation and broaden and deepen the reach of our work with you. In short, we have collectively worked to put our network colleges in position to meet this important moment, a moment that requires us to put forward a new vision of what community colleges could and should be and, as a result, what our work at ATD should be.

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Our New Vision

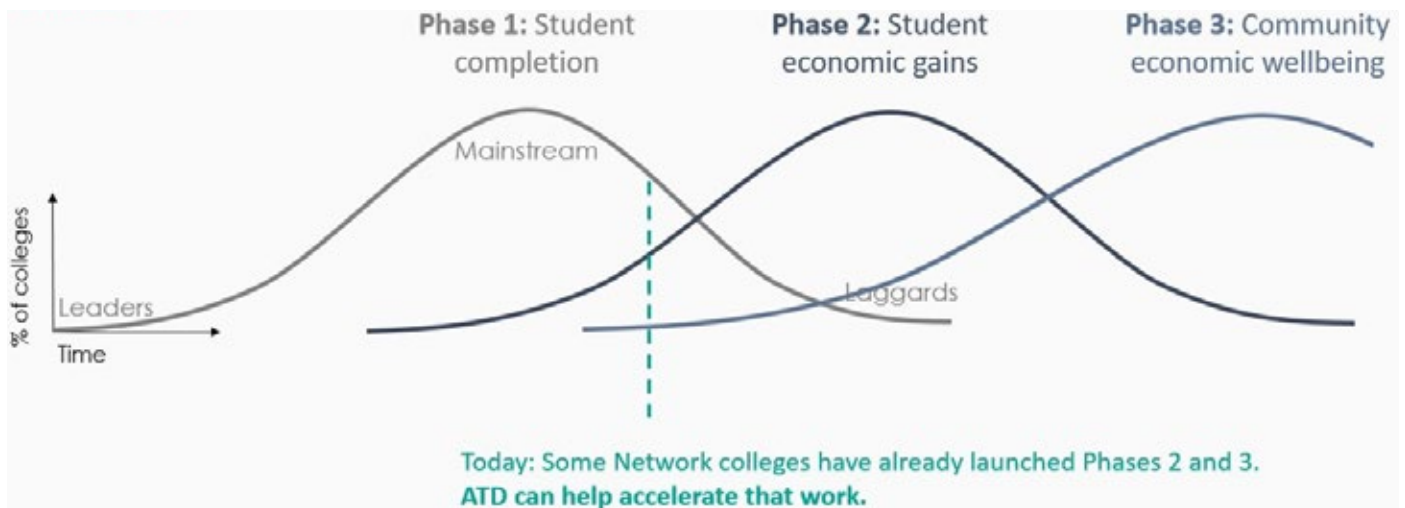
In 2017, when ATD moved to design our supports to meet you where you are on your transformational journey, I spoke to the three arcs of our movement, arcs that focused on completion, student return on investment, and community return on investment. Those arcs are still important.

But those arcs are no longer enough. We need a new “phase 0” in our work, a bold new access agenda. We need a deeper commitment to community in phase “3” that recognizes the

transformational power of whole college change in activating a community toward action. We need a recentering of the equity imperative of our missions, coursing through all the phases.

This recognition is central to our new vision, a vision that captures the potential of our colleges beyond completion; a vision that captures our potential in our communities and that capitalizes on our strategic asset as a sector, our localness.

Arc of the Student Success Movement



NEW ATD VISION STATEMENT

ATD will help our network colleges catalyze antiracist, **equitable**, and economically vibrant **communities** through institutional transformation that advances community colleges as profoundly **accessible** hubs of learning, credentialing, and economic mobility that eliminate inequities in educational and workforce outcomes.

Recentering Equity

This vision starts with and is centered on equity which has been ATD's core value since our inception. This vision includes acknowledging the ugly truths our country bears as a legacy of its founding that began with the displacement and decimation of Native Americans as well as other forms of racially fueled hatred that continues to plague our nation today.

Amid Black History Month, when we should be celebrating and lifting the amazing achievements of Black Americans, we are witnessing the continued violence and oppression toward Black individuals. The recent string of threats at our nation's HBCU's reminds us that our violent history is still very much with us. As one student said: "I'm just tired of being terrorized like my grandparents were."

Sadly, as we all know, our history is replete with examples of systemic oppression and violence. We recognize Black History month as part of what must be our systemic response to that oppression and violence and to ensure that our history — both good and bad — is a critical part of our consciousness raising and commitment to centering equity in all that we do.

I know many of you have made this commitment to equity, looking more closely at your data, narrowing equity gaps, and centering student voice in redesigning access and success for the diverse

communities you serve. But we know that we must and can do more.

It is tempting to point out that many of the factors that create these inequities are outside of our institutions and our control, but as Anthony Carnevale points out: "higher education has ... become a new gearwheel, arguably the biggest gearwheel, in the American race and class inequality machine."

Our challenge as a sector is to disassemble that gear wheel of race and class inequality. Our updated equity statement which we are releasing today, is at the heart of our vision for the future. It calls on us to:

"interrogate the disconnect between institutionalized practices that impact student success and the systemic structures and processes that continue to oppress and exclude students based on the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender identity, language, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, economic status, and/or religion."

Those inequitable structures and systems must be named and explicitly addressed for our Black, Brown and Indigenous students and communities, but also, as Heather McGhee will talk about today, for the "sum of us." This is not a zero-sum game. Addressing racism and creating policies and practices that benefit Black, Indigenous and Latinx students and communities benefits us all.

The updated statement also advances our expectations for our colleges. We expect you “to honor [your] institutional responsibilities to create and invest in thriving local communities by leveraging [your] leadership positions to actualize social, economic, and racial justice.”

While equity is foundational to our work and the moral imperative of this work is urgent, we understand that ATD colleges are on individual and highly localized equity journeys. What connects us is our deep commitment to help all students reach their goals. We must design, also, for our

employees and our communities, because if we don’t intentionally center equity in all we do — in the classroom, in the design of student support services, in our own hiring, evaluation and promotion processes, in procurement practices, in institutional policies that influence employee success and sense of belonging, in our partnership designs, we will never reach these goals.

I promise you that ATD will walk with you on this journey both on the ground with our coaching and with a new set of tools and resources we will be releasing shortly after DREAM.

Profoundly Accessible Institutions

As important as it is from an equity standpoint to look at our policies and practices that impact students once they walk through our doors, we cannot start there. As Broward College president, Greg Haile points out, our relationship with our students — their proximity to our institutions — needs to “start long before students get to our institutions.” He says “[w]e tend to focus on socializing students once they arrive on our campuses..., [but] we must create this sense of belonging long before the individuals arrive, for then it is too late for an untold many.”

As such, our new vision calls on us to “advance our colleges as profoundly accessible hubs of learning, credentialing and economic mobility” and to elevate this access agenda to expand the populations of citizens that we support.”

Access may be in our institutional DNA — but being affordable, open-admission institutions located in our communities doesn’t automatically ensure that students have access and will find us. Focusing on access also does not mean abandoning the important progress we have made on student outcomes. That work must continue and be strengthened.

This is a call to take those student success lessons and imagine what it would mean to apply them to our thinking about and our approach to access. Just as we are investing in culturally responsive pedagogy, we need to develop culturally responsive outreach strategies to help more disconnected learners see college as an option that is connected to their lived experiences.

Access must be more than an entrance into a discrete academic or training endeavor. It must include access to a broad set of supports — academic and holistic — that we know students need. This access agenda must place a premium on extended and ongoing engagement with learners, designed around a portfolio of programs and supports that match the life cycle of education and training needs of our students, workers, and employers.

We need an access agenda that is equity-centered and aimed squarely on dismantling structures and practices including entry into selective programs that have maintained the gearwheel. Fundamentally, we need an access agenda that is positioned squarely to respond to the lived experiences of our students and the needs of our communities.

Vibrant Communities

Finally, our vision requires us to recognize the transformational influence of whole college change and our role in activating more equitable and vibrant communities. I don't suggest this will be an easy shift. Our students' lives, the relationship between school and work, and our communities in general, are becoming more complex. As Dr. George Baker who was a leading voice for community colleges and who we unfortunately lost recently, said: "The more complex the community, the more complex the community college."

Our most relevant community colleges take the form of their communities while also shaping the future form of the communities they serve.

We need to develop stronger relationships with our K-12 partners to ensure that our early college and dual enrollment programs as well as our general school to college pathways are not narrowed by privilege and that we are helping our students have a sense of belonging with our institutions early and consistently. We need strong partnerships with our four-year partners including owning bachelor's degree completion as one of our sector metrics, as we know the power of bachelor's degree attainment and that this pathway continues to reflect one of the largest and most persistent equity gaps.

We need deep connections with community partners who provide much needed support and guidance to our students and their families. We need to be lifelong career matching institutions that

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build strong partnerships with our local employers as we know that so many of our students will remain in our communities.

Important to this shift will be how we measure our success which will require next generation metrics that focus on community vibrancy. These metrics may include the more obvious measures such as employment of community college graduates, unemployment and labor participation rates, and measures of college mobility. We must also explore metrics that demonstrate community vibrancy such as adult literacy, intergenerational mobility, the percent of opportunity youth who complete high school, and other possible success indicators that require institutions to be more deeply embedded in their local communities.

In many ways these metrics will help us assess how well we are supporting economic mobility and the elimination of the inequities in education and workforce outcomes in our communities.

Be the Hope

Those of you who know me, know that I am a planner. But equally important to planning, is what motivates us — what moves us to action. Recently, in addition to Dr. Baker, we lost Dr. Michael Elam, president of Halifax Community College, a colleague and an amazing leader.

Writing just a year ago in his local newspaper, Dr. Elam observed:

“There is so much happening in today’s society that seems to indicate that love is absent. Prejudice, hatred and killing are the obvious culprits. But there are more subtle indicators as well, such as the inequitable distribution of resources, uncaring treatment toward others, and all forms of discrimination. It does not have to be that way. Our community could be so much better if more love was exhibited.”

He knew the importance of well-designed programs, and partnerships and planning. But what Dr. Elam also knew was that his motivation for action was to bring love to his community and that

with that connection comes a sense of hope and possibility for our students. He said:

“Hope begins with someone conveying even a glimmer of a different, better, safer, less painful, more joyful possibility tomorrow, and each day after, to another person who cannot see it himself/herself at the time.”

We all, in this virtual room, have a role to play in helping our students begin to hope. We are coming through one of the worst times for our institutions, our communities, our students, and even our nation. The ripple effect of these two years will last at least a decade. Together, our movement is climbing a steep hill. But that is when we shine, because “this time is different.”

As the progressive political activist Marcus Raskin once said, “When there is no hope, you be the hope.” Working together, we can be the glimmer or possibility for millions of students and their communities. We can be the hope. It is up to us.





Achieving the Dream™

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