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Building a Strong, Independent DC Community College

By JBL Associates

Commissioned by Greater Washington Research at Brookings

and

DC Appleseed

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Letter to the Readers:

In 2008, our organizations each published papers calling for the District to increase its community college capacity. At that time, Washington, DC was the only major American city without a full-service community college. We concluded that DC needed a community college to prepare residents for good jobs and further college education, build its middle class, and grow its tax base.

Accordingly, we held a working session in June of that year for higher education leaders, government officials, employers, and other community stakeholders to discuss practical ways for the city to enhance and grow its community college capabilities. At that meeting, DC Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray called for a study to assess the feasibility of the options for starting a community college, as outlined in the Brookings Institution report, *Envisioning Opportunity: Three Options for a Community College in Washington, D.C.* Following strong endorsement of this suggestion by other government and community leaders, DC Appleseed and Greater Washington Research at Brookings undertook a competitive bidding process and chose JBL Associates to conduct the study.

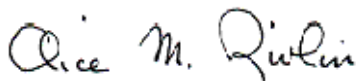
Since then, the University of the District of Columbia has moved forward vigorously to establish a community college—the Community College of the District of Columbia (CCDC), which opened its doors in fall 2009. CCDC is currently in a transition year as its new CEO, Dr. Jonathan Gueverra, develops a vision and strategic plan for the college. The changes at UDC/CCDC are taking place so quickly that we have no doubt that some of the details contained in this report will be out of date by the time it is released. Nonetheless, we believe that the report offers information, general guidance, and recommendations that can help District leaders and residents partner in determining the path that CCDC should take to become a strong, independent, and full-service community college.

Building a new community college presents an exceptional opportunity to take advantage of the best thinking on student success at a time when the President and the Nation are turning to community colleges to strengthen the foundation for economic growth. Through thoughtful planning and innovative partnerships, DC's community college can play a vital role in the region's economy—connecting DC residents to good jobs and supplying employers with a knowledgeable and competitive workforce.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Government of the District of Columbia, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Federal City Council, Consumer Health Foundation, and the Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative. We also thank the many individuals and organizations who shared their insights with the JBL study team.

We look forward to continuing to support the District in developing a first-rate community college for residents, employers, and members of the community.

Sincerely,



Alice M. Rivlin
Director and Senior Fellow,
Greater Washington Research at Brookings



Walter Smith
Executive Director
DC Appleseed

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DC Appleseed
Walter Smith, Executive Director
Judy Berman, Deputy Director
Brooke DeRenzis, Project Director

Greater Washington Research at Brookings
Alice Rivlin, Senior Fellow
Martha Ross, Deputy Director

JBL Associates, Inc.
John B. Lee, President
Lindsay Albert, Research Associate
Ellen Frishberg, Research Associate
Barry Christopher, Editor

MDC, Inc.
David Dodson, President
Carol Lincoln, Project Director

Steering Committee
Terese Lowery, Legislative Analyst
Office of the Chairman, District of Columbia Council

Sarah Oldmixon, Program Director
Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative

Margaret Singleton, VP and Executive Director
DC Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Andrea Wilson, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
District of Columbia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington, DC needs a strong, independent community college to increase economic opportunity for District residents and connect them to the Washington region's well-paying jobs. Such a community college would significantly increase the city's education and skill-building capacity by accomplishing multiple goals:

- Providing a clear, affordable entry point to post-secondary education, including:
 - Developmental education to prepare residents for college-level work
 - The first two years of course work leading to a bachelor's degree
- Providing career and technical education to help District residents obtain skills to get a job or advance on the job, either through short-term training or through longer-term certificate and degree programs
- Boosting the city's economic development efforts by creating a more competitive labor force for the city and the region:
 - Assisting area employers with their education and training needs, enabling them to grow their local businesses and supporting a positive business climate
 - Helping District residents access good jobs, improving their personal economic fortunes as well as increasing the city's tax base
- Offering non-credit community education courses for personal enrichment
- Aspiring to be a model of effective community college education by raising its completion and graduation rates above those typical of community colleges and offering challenging, well-taught courses to a wide range of community residents.

This study, undertaken by JBL Associates, Inc. under contract with Greater Washington Research at Brookings and DC Appleseed, and with guidance from the DC Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative, the Office of DC City Council Chair Vincent Gray, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, assesses various options for strengthening the District's community college capacity to achieve the above goals. The study is intended to build on the foundation of the new community college—the Community College of the District of Columbia (CCDC)—established by the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) in fall 2009. In doing so, the study examines three paths that CCDC could take given its current status as a division of the University:

1. CCDC remains a permanent branch or division of UDC, and permanently shares the University's governance, administration, and accreditation
2. CCDC temporarily shares UDC's governance and accreditation as it explicitly works on its own toward the goal of becoming an autonomous, independently-accredited institution
3. CCDC develops and leads partnerships with one or more of the area's suburban community colleges to augment its programs as it builds capacity to become an autonomous, independently-accredited institution

While Options 2 and 3 both result in independence for CCDC, they differ primarily in the strategy by which they reach scale. The project team considered political realities, financial limitations, legal requirements, employer needs, community wishes, effects on UDC, and organizational interests to determine the best way forward to achieve the stated goals. The project team is also aware that, due to the rapid pace of change at UDC/CCDC, some of the details in the report may be out of date by the time the report is released but that the overall recommendations will remain valid.

This report concludes that the District should support CCDC's intention to separate from the flagship university, and encourage it to take the fast track to becoming an independently-accredited, autonomous community college with its own Board of Trustees and budget. The report also concludes that CCDC's move toward independence would be significantly advanced by developing appropriate partnerships with one or more of the DC area's three suburban community colleges (Northern Virginia Community College, Montgomery College, and Prince George's Community College) to take advantage of these institutions' resources and reputations and quickly expand CCDC's capacity. Such partnerships could be the start of a regional consortium of community colleges in the DC area. Accordingly, the report recommends that CCDC pursue Option 3, which we call the "Independence Plus Partnership Option."

CCDC's move to independent status is critical to the success and sustainability of the institution. Right now, CCDC's status as a division of UDC takes advantage of the University's academic accreditation so that students are eligible for federal financial aid, are able to transfer credits to other accredited schools, and are able to have their credentials recognized throughout the United States. However, a community college and a state university have different missions, programs, faculty, and services, and they should not be housed within the same institutional structure where they will compete for resources and attention. In such a situation, the community college is likely to suffer, since the academic community typically considers universities more prestigious than community colleges. Moreover, CCDC must disengage from the high cost structure of UDC if it is to become economically viable. The District is fortunate to have the leadership of UDC President Dr. Allen Sessoms and of CCDC CEO Dr. Jonathan Gueverra—both of whom support the goal of achieving an independently-accredited community college separate from UDC.

Brokering strategic partnerships with one or more of the suburban community colleges can help CCDC develop a robust set of programs more quickly. By contracting with other institutions to provide specific programs in high-demand occupations, CCDC can increase its capacity more rapidly than if it built its own programs from scratch. Such contracts with other schools would continue while CCDC gained sufficient capacity to run these programs on its own. At that point, the cooperating colleges could step back according to a process defined in the contracts. In the interim, the participation of the other community colleges would bring supplementary expertise into the CCDC and contribute additional credibility among area stakeholders and employers. CCDC should draw on the best aspects of the other community colleges and improve on their achievements where appropriate, including in the important area of graduation and transfer rates.

Managing the suggested contracts would require close coordination and cooperation among CCDC and the participating college(s), which adds a layer of administrative complexity; however, we believe the benefits outweigh the costs. Moreover, Dr. Gueverra's experience as a community college administrator will provide the leadership necessary to develop and lead such partnerships.

Partnerships with one or more of the suburban community colleges could also be the first step in creating a regional consortium in which each jurisdiction is home to strong programs which students throughout the area can access. Training for some occupations (for example, in the construction and allied health fields) requires expensive facilities and equipment and specialized instruction skills. Since the labor market is regional and not limited by jurisdictional boundaries – and, in fact, many employers have sites in multiple jurisdictions in the DC metropolitan area – it may be beneficial for education institutions to specialize in certain programs, assuming reciprocal arrangements are developed with institutions in the other jurisdictions. Such a consortium will provide an easy point of entry for employers who would access a coordinated regional network designed to help meet their workforce needs. It will also produce cost-savings to the extent that not all the colleges reproduce the same expensive equipment and training capacity.

To ensure that CCDC is on the fast track to independence, the strategic plan being developed by Dr. Gueverra should guide the college's development and serve as a performance measurement tool. The strategic plan should include the following:

- Programs that CCDC aspires to offer, and an implementation plan for providing those programs
- Annual estimates of enrollment, costs per student, and completion rates that will guide the growth process for both the community college and the flagship university
- Student success strategies and the metrics by which student success will be measured, such as second-term and second-year retention, successful completion of developmental education and use of student support services
- A timeline for acquiring a new site for the community college and the cost of developing new facilities
- A strategy and timeline for achieving independent accreditation

The strategic plan should be developed in consultation with an advisory panel that will be the forerunner of a separate Board of Trustees for the community college. The advisory panel should include UDC board members, employers, and representatives from local government, the public education sector, community organizations, and other stakeholder groups.

Building on the work that he has already begun in his role as CEO of CCDC, Dr. Gueverra will need to take the following steps to build appropriate and timely partnerships with one or more of the suburban community colleges:

- Inventory and assess existing programs compared to resident and labor market demand and employer expectations, and determine which ones to continue, enhance, or possibly drop
- Discuss with one or more suburban community colleges their interest and capacity in providing specific programs, such as community education, on-line education, short-term workforce training, and longer-term certificate and degree programs
- Identify the administrative, financial and contractual arrangements necessary to implement the partnerships, and develop the terms under which the CCDC will eventually take over the programs as it moves toward independence

These determinations should be incorporated into the strategic plan, and should be made by Dr. Gueverra in a way that gives him maximum flexibility and authority to develop partnerships that will assist CCDC's growth and independence.

The strategic plan and partnerships with other colleges should provide the basis for a multi-year budget that is developed and maintained through a transparent budget management system. If CCDC aimed to operate at scale with an enrollment level and cost structure similar to other high-achieving community colleges, it would have a target enrollment of 5,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) students and an operating budget of about \$60 million (\$12,000 per FTE on average). If its revenues are structured similarly to other community colleges, half of this budget—\$30 million—would be covered by public funds, while the remainder would come from tuition, federal support, and grants. To maximize the District's return on its investment, CCDC must help students achieve a degree or certificate that is relevant to the regional marketplace, or complete enough courses to upgrade specific skills, get a job, or transfer to a four-year college. An associate degree graduate, for example, would pay roughly \$23,000 more in local taxes over a 30-year working life than would a high school graduate.

We do not provide estimates of how much CCDC will cost during its start-up years because those costs depend on decisions that CCDC makes about how to grow. Costs should be driven by the strategic plan: target enrollment numbers for each year, the types of programs and services that CCDC chooses to offer, and how they choose to provide those programs (on their own, borrowing from UDC, or through partnerships with suburban colleges), CCDC should aim to have an efficient cost structure from the outset.

The level of local government funding required by CCDC as it moves toward its target capacity will depend on these same variables. While CCDC will require increased resources, total operating revenue need not entirely be raised from new sources. Rather, some of the community college's costs can be funded using existing revenue that CCDC receives from UDC. Determining how to carve out CCDC's budget from UDC will require clear goals for enrollment, per-pupil expenditures, and programming at the flagship university and the community college, as well as a commitment to cost containment at both schools.

The District should work to ensure that CCDC does not inherit UDC's high cost structure. UDC's costs per full-time equivalent (FTE) student are about \$31,000, compared to an average of about \$9,500 per FTE among other community colleges and \$17,000 among peer universities. These high costs reflect several historical events, such as the creation of UDC through the merger of three separate institutions in the 1970s, declining enrollment, and a faculty that is older and at the higher end of the salary scale compared with other colleges. Since CCDC is starting out as an embedded unit within UDC, these high costs will be built into the community college unless CCDC has the authority to take steps to reduce costs, and does so. Contracting with outside institutions for selected programs may help to introduce new, lower cost structures. While the suburban community colleges have relatively efficient cost structures that could benefit CCDC, the development and maintenance of regional partnerships will carry additional costs associated with administration and implementation. The District government will have to underwrite these additional costs, as CCDC's current revenue streams are likely to fall short of covering them.

The executive and legislative branches of the District of Columbia government should take active roles in developing, supporting, and overseeing UDC, CCDC, and the emerging public post-secondary education system created by the separation of the university and the community college. The Deputy Mayor for Education and the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) should actively support CCDC's strategic planning process. In a related activity, the OSSE should ensure that state financial aid policies and post-secondary funding policies align with the needs of community college students. The Council of the District of Columbia should provide rigorous oversight, especially in regard to splitting CCDC's budget from the flagship university and developing an independent community college.

This feasibility analysis points to the importance of building on the work that UDC has already done to lay the foundation for a community college, while drawing on resources from the well-established, highly-regarded community colleges in the neighboring suburbs. This option should give the District and its residents an opportunity to build what is needed—an independent, credible community college that provides a wide range of education and workforce development options. In addition to assessing the feasibility of the options available to CCDC and making the recommendations discussed, the study examines the current capacity of community college programs in DC, projects student, employer, and community demand for a full-service community college, defines the attributes of an effective DC community college, provides cost estimates, and suggests the benefits a community college would provide to the District.

This report, along with the work currently underway at CCDC, are steps in a process that will take several years to complete. Decisions that are made in these early years will shape and limit the choices that are available to CCDC in the future. A well-planned and well-executed strategy that takes advantage of the best current thinking on community colleges and the experience of local experts will pay tremendous dividends: increasing numbers of District residents will be prepared to take their place in a vital regional economy, and employers will have a stronger, more competitive workforce in the District from which to draw.