

“A Strong Independent Community College for the District of Columbia”

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Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
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Chairman Gray and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this roundtable highlighting the importance of a strong, independent community college in the District of Columbia and for your leadership on this issue. I will talk briefly about how DC Appleseed and my organization, Greater Washington Research at Brookings, came to sponsor the community college feasibility study we are releasing today, and then turn to John Lee for a summary of the findings and recommendations.

In 2008, both Brookings and DC Appleseed published papers highlighting the importance of providing opportunities for DC residents to improve their skills, obtain and advance in higher paying jobs, move from poverty into the middle class, and contribute to the tax base that supports public services. Our two organizations both pointed out that a strong full-service community college could make a major contribution to these goals and that Washington, DC, alone among major American cities, did not have one.

Accordingly, we worked together to highlight the issue and last year pulled together a working group that met several times to discuss options for creating a strong DC community college. Attendees included representatives from higher education, government, employers, foundations

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and other stakeholders. During one of these working meetings, Chairman Gray suggested a feasibility study to more concretely assess how the District of Columbia could increase its community college capacity. Deputy Mayor Victor Reinoso affirmed the executive branch's support for the feasibility study (and ultimately helped to fund it). Business leaders, including Barbara Lang, President and CEO of the DC Chamber of Commerce, strongly endorsed the need for a community college. The acting president and board chair of UDC expressed strong support for the development of a separate community college structure within UDC, bringing increased visibility to the effort. Moreover, leaders of suburban community colleges pledged their support, indicating their belief that a strong community college presence in DC was not something they would oppose as competition but rather would embrace as a contributor to regional prosperity and opportunity.

Encouraged by the working group to develop a feasibility study, DC Appleseed and Greater Washington Research at Brookings raised funds from public, private and foundation sources, managed a competitive bidding process, and chose a team of experts led by JBL Associates to conduct the study. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who supported the project financially, including The District of Columbia, Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Federal City Council, and the Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region. We are also grateful to the organizations that provided guidance to JBL on the project, including the DC Chamber of Commerce, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Office of the Chair of the Council of the District of Columbia, and the Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative.

When the feasibility study was first contemplated, one of the open questions was whether the best path toward a strong community college in the District involved incubating such a college at UDC; creating a new stand-alone community college incubated by another institution, or forming a consortium of institutions to offer a menu of community college course offerings in the District. UDC itself was in transition. It was under the leadership of Acting President Stan Jackson, who supported a community college agenda during his brief tenure. In September of 2008, the UDC Board of Trustees recruited Dr. Allen Sessoms to lead UDC. President Sessoms moved quickly to create a distinct community college at UDC. In January 2009, the UDC Board approved Dr. Sessoms' proposal to create two separate schools at UDC: 1) an open-admissions

community college, offering students both two-year degree programs non-credit workforce programs and; and 2) a flagship university with admissions standards, four-year and graduate academic programs, and somewhat higher tuition. The Community College of the District of Columbia (CCDC) officially opened its doors in fall 2009 under the leadership of a new Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Jonathan Gueverra. He brings with him many years of postsecondary experience, including a recent stint as head of Northern Virginia Community College's Alexandria campus.

In view of these developments the study team kept in touch with UDC and the Community College of the District of Columbia as it worked on the report. It recognized that the steps taken by Drs. Sessoms and Gueverra and the commitment of the UDC Board had increased the chance that UDC could incubate a strong, independent community college. Hence, the study team shifted its attention from other models and focused on how District leaders could build on these steps to help CCDC become an effective, efficient, and sustainable full-service community college for DC residents. At present, CCDC is, in Dr. Gueverra's words, a "start up" with a long way to go. Merely replicating existing UDC programs under a different administrative arrangement would accomplish little. In addition to offering courses and putting teachers in front of students in a classroom, a high-quality institution needs to focus on curriculum development, teacher quality, advising, tutoring and other student services, and data systems to track student progress. While the school should aspire to serve a wide cross-section of District residents, much of its student body is likely to be academically under-prepared for college-level work or face scheduling challenges between school, work and family responsibilities. Thus, the school needs to develop an explicit strategy to help students succeed – and it must do a better job than UDC has done thus far.

The goals of a community college are clear:

1. Provide a clear, affordable entry point to post-secondary education, career and technical education to help residents get a job or get a better job, and developmental education to prepare students for college-level work

2. Boost the city's economic and social vitality by creating a more competitive labor force and helping District residents access good jobs, improving their personal economic fortunes and increasing the city's tax base

3. Aspire 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. From the very beginning, the school should be focused on student success – helping students reach their goals to obtain a degree, a certificate and upgraded skills.

I will now turn to John Lee of JBL, who will talk about the findings of the study and its recommendations for meeting those goals.