



DC APPLESEED
C E N T E R

1111 Fourteenth Street, NW
Suite 510
Washington, DC 20005

Phone 202.289.8007
Fax 202.289.8009
www.dcappleseed.org

**Testimony of Walter Smith,
Executive Director
DC Appleseed**

**DC City Council Committee of the Whole
Community College Roundtable
November 20, 2009**

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Gray and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on DC's community college. We very much appreciate your leadership on this important issue. DC Appleseed is strongly committed to the effort to build an effective, full-service community college for the District. And, we endorse the recommendations made by Dr. John Lee and his team in their study, "Building a Strong, Independent DC Community College." We believe that the study outlines the right next steps in building an effective community college here in the District.

As Dr. Lee has described, the study identifies the "Independence Plus Partnership" option as the best way to achieve a strong, independent DC community college. That option calls for the Community College of DC (CCDC), under CEO Dr. Jonathan Gueverra's leadership, to develop and lead partnerships with suburban community colleges to augment its programs as it builds capacity to become an autonomous institution. Dr. Lee has already described this option, and why he believes that it is optimal. I would like to review the kinds of activities that the DC government, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), CCDC, and other community leaders can engage in to move JBL's recommendations forward. I would also like to discuss the types of benefits that will accrue to the District if it succeeds in establishing a strong, independent community college.

Steps Toward Implementation of JBL's Recommendation

1. Inclusive Strategic Planning that is Broadly and Publicly Shared

DC Appleseed strongly supports JBL's recommendation that CCDC establish independence and autonomy quickly, a goal that we understand UDC President Sessoms and Dr. Gueverra share. CCDC needs a public strategic plan that clearly explains how it plans to achieve this goal of independence. Plan elements might include:

- The programs that the separate college aspires to offer and how it plans to provide them
- Annual enrollment, completion, and budget estimates that demonstrate its planned growth process and deliberate separation from UDC
- A timeline and strategy for achieving independent accreditation
- A timeline and capital budget for acquiring and developing facilities.

It is our understanding that Dr. Gueverra is currently developing this type of strategic plan. To ensure that his plan meets the city's broad array of educational needs, we think Dr. Gueverra should consider developing it in consultation with an advisory panel. The panel could include UDC Board members, employers, CCDC students, and representatives from local government, public education, and community organizations. This type of inclusive strategic planning could help galvanize support early on from CCDC's diverse constituency of students, employers, and community stakeholders. It could also broadly and publicly demonstrate how CCDC purposefully plans to set out on its own—concretely distinguishing the community college from UDC. The Executive and City Council could then use the strategic plan as a performance measurement tool.

2. Partnerships with Suburban Community Colleges:

In addition to independence, JBL also recommends that CCDC lead partnerships with the suburban community colleges to augment its own programs. We support this recommendation; we believe that such partnerships will help CCDC offer programs more quickly as it builds capacity; we also believe they will bring resources, credibility, and supplementary expertise to CCDC while at the same time providing CCDC an opportunity to play a regional leadership role; we furthermore believe that such partnerships will mutually benefit both the participating colleges and the region.

Crafting such partnerships will require CCDC to decide what programs and services it would like the suburban community colleges to provide, and enter into discussions with those colleges to gauge their interest, capacity, and needs accordingly. The Presidents of Montgomery College, Prince George's Community College, and Northern Virginia Community College have all enthusiastically indicated support for this model, but have clearly stated that their participation would depend on appropriate administrative, financial, and contractual arrangements, as well as a visible demonstration of support and commitment to the partnerships from DC's elected leadership. If CCDC indicates willingness to engage in partnership planning, DC government should provide the college with appropriate funds in the FY2011 budget to support the administrative costs of the process. These funds would cover the staff costs of CCDC and the suburban community colleges—ensuring that adequate time and attention is given to the planning process.

3. Budget Development

DC government—and especially the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) and the Council's Committee of the Whole—can play a large role in moving the community college toward independence through CCDC's budget development. As the study explains, CCDC should have a transparent, multi-year budget process that clearly explains how its budget will split from the flagship university, and how it will grow in a cost-effective manner. The budget should not be based on existing inefficiencies but rather on elements described in the strategic plan. Starting now—with planning for Fiscal Year 2011—DME can work with CCDC and UDC officials to craft separate budgets for the two schools, and City Council can provide rigorous oversight of the budget process.

4. State Policy

The separation of CCDC from UDC will create two independent institutions of higher education in the District. While each institution needs sufficient authority to carry out its mission, state-level leadership is required to help set overarching higher education goals, establish accountability, develop strategic funding mechanisms and financial aid policies, create and maintain a postsecondary data system, and coordinate policies and services between different parts of the system where appropriate. Accordingly, the District government should consider

developing a robust state-level postsecondary education governance structure within the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) that can assist with these efforts. DC's policy makers should also ensure that the District's financial aid policies align with the needs of working adults, and that residents eligible for workforce development training through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) can access community college programs. The funding strategy should incentivize the kinds of programs and outcomes the District wants to see.

Benefits to the District of a Strong, Independent Community College

Building a full-service DC community college will not be cheap—Dr. Lee estimates that a college with an enrollment of 7,000-9,000 could cost the District somewhere in the neighborhood of \$30 million a year. But that cost should be balanced against the benefits that DC will accrue from a successful community college.

The public return to investment in a DC community college is most easily recognized in the form of increased tax revenue. Education contributes to lower unemployment and higher earning power. JBL estimates that over a thirty-year working life, each associate degree graduate from DC's community college will pay \$23,000 more in taxes than would a high school graduate. If 1,000 students on average earn an associate's degree each year and remain DC residents, the District would earn an additional \$23 million in tax revenue per graduating class. The city would receive additional tax revenue increases from students who earned a certificate or developed a skills set that helped them find a good-paying job. The better the job the community college does in achieving student success, the higher the returns on investment will be.

While hard to quantify, there also would be returns on public investment from growth in the local economy through multiplier effects. Some of the community college's annual budget will be spent in the District in the form of salaries, supplies, and services. Employers may be more likely to locate in the District if there is a larger pool of qualified workers, and graduates may become small business owners who hire other DC residents.

There will also be fiscal benefits associated with reductions in the cost of social support programs. A community college education can help students move from dependence on social support programs to economic self-sufficiency; it can also help students move out of the criminal justice system to become tax-paying citizens.

The community college can also improve social outcomes and help the District diminish its economic and social divides. Although hard to measure in pure fiscal terms, increased educational achievement often coincides with a drop in crime rates, improved family health measures, and greater participation in community activities like volunteering and voting.

Conclusion

The building of a new community college in the District presents an exceptional opportunity for the City 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 our region's economy and our residents' lives.