Welcome to DREAM 2020! Please join me in thanking these students from neighboring ATD colleges—Montgomery, Anne Arundel, Northern Virginia and Harford—for welcoming us to DREAM in their native languages.

Following our ATD tradition at the start of all of our learning events, we acknowledge that DREAM2020 is being held on the traditional lands of the Piscataway and Nacotchtank People. We pay our respect to elders, past and present.

I want to offer a warm welcome and thank you to our ATD Board of Directors, many of whom you will meet through this week’s program, a unique blend of highly dedicated community college, policy, research, workforce, and university leaders.

Pam Eddinger, Chair and President of Bunker Hill Community College
Christine Johnson, Vice Chair, Governance Committee Chair, and Chancellor of Community Colleges of Spokane
Lou Testoni, Treasurer, Finance and Audit Chair, Retired Managing Partner with PricewaterhouseCoppers
Eduardo Padron, President Emeritus, Miami Dade College
Javier Miyares, President, University of Maryland Global Campus
Greg Williams, President, Odessa College
Alex Johnson, President, Cuyahoga Community College
Nicole Melander, Vice President with Campus Labs
Mary Alice McCarthy, Founder and Director of the Center on Education and Skills, New America
And, our two newest members via our most recent merger with the Gateway to College National Network:
Barbara Lombardo, leading business management consultant
Larry Kubal, founder of Labrador Ventures

Please join me in thanking them for their service.

I also welcome all our funders, collaborating partners, DREAM2020 sponsors, and all of the leaders from community colleges across the world—in the ATD network and out of the network—to DREAM, the most unique higher education convening of its kind. This is my 15th DREAM. I was in the audience with you for 10 of those DREAM convenings. This is my fifth as ATD’s President and CEO.

We started this evening with the student voice. The ATD Way encourages our colleges to put the student voice right in the center of your redesign work, to bring that voice into the room through quantitative data but also through qualitative data to discover deeper insights about the student experience and to shape “cause to wonder” questions that lead us to answers. I think we can all agree that MIT Professor Hal Gregerson’s new book, Questions Are the Answers, is aptly titled.

So, I want to bring two more students and their stories into the middle of the room tonight.

Ariel Ventura-Lazo’s story is excerpted from a recent Washington Post article. Ventura-Lazo now works as a program coordinator at George Mason University. You may recognize his name. He is also participating in some of the national work around improving pathways for working parent learners. His path forward was not easy. He held a 1.6 high school grade point average and enrolled at a community college after high school. He says: “It was overwhelming. It was scary. It was frightening. I didn’t know the terminology, the ropes. I knew, though, that my mom wanted me to go to college.”

He goes on to describe an experience that nearly derailed him early in his time at the community college.

“I remember the moment I realized how underprepared my background had left me for college. During my freshman year, a professor asked me to stay after class. Once the room emptied, he handed me an essay I had written and said, ‘If you ever do this again, I will have to dock your grade.’

I had no idea what he was talking about, until I looked at the paper and saw the words ‘double space’ underlined. Multiple times.

I had turned in a 10-page, single-spaced essay, instead of a 10-page, double-spaced essay. He thought I was trying to show off. The truth was that before coming to college, I didn’t have regular access to a computer, so I had no idea that double-space existed. I also didn’t think to ask anyone. At the time, the only person in my family who had a college degree was my older sister. I didn’t tell my professor any of that. I just assured him it would not happen again.”

Andrew Martinez, is a first -year student who published an article last fall in Diverse: Issues in Higher Education about his new student orientation...
“When some Financial Aid form wasn’t filled out correctly and you are told to go to the registrar’s office to handle your bursar bill because your registration is on hold, but you don’t know what a registrar, bursar, or a registration hold are, you begin to feel like you are not ready.”

These stories bring me to the work of Raj Chetty, a Harvard economist who founded the new Opportunity Insights Institute, and his findings around economic and social mobility. You may know his work from 2013 when he released a colorful map of the United States showing the surprising degree to which people’s financial position depend on where they happen to grow up. Chetty posits that opportunity does not correlate with many traditional economic measures; rather that opportunity’s cause is connected to social capital, a term that refers broadly to the set of connections that ease a person’s way through the world, providing support and inspiration and opening doors.

In some of the areas on Chetty’s map, perhaps here, there is the presence of opportunity and the presence of its opposite: swift currents that drag a person down. There are, in those places, a few narrow paths to success, and 99 ways to falter. More often than not, paths that have little to do with academic preparation or motivation to succeed and everything to do with social capital.

I am reminded of Dr. Eduardo Padron’s mantra: “I’m a strong believer that talent is universal. However, opportunity is not universal.”

And, I am haunted by the last few words of Janae Parker’s recent testimony to the Senate HELP Committee about her journey into and through a four-year university and then a community college. Janae was one of our now-famous DREAM Scholars, who asked:

Are we all not cut out for college?

Have we all done something wrong?

No, Janae, the designs of our institutions have failed you.

Paul Tough, in his book *The Years That Matter Most*, captures this failure:

“The particular set of decisions we have made in creating our current higher education system—and those include individual decisions, institutional decisions, and public-policy decisions – have produced a mobility engine that functions incredibly well for a small number of people and quite poorly for many others. The ones who benefit most from the system tend to be wealthy and talented and well connected. The ones who benefit least tend to be from families that are deprived or isolated or fractured or all three.”

For nearly 10 million learners across this country, their local community college is their narrow path to success.

Our keynote speaker tonight, James Fallows, will make this case, speaking to his observations that a reliable sign of civic progress—in the towns he and his wife have
visited over the last few years—was whether a community took its community college seriously. He wrote in a recent piece in The Atlantic:

“Just about every world-historical trend is pushing the United States (and other countries) toward a less equal, more polarized existence. Community colleges are the main exception.”

My favorite quote from that article is his reinforcement of what I see from my colleagues when I visit colleges across this country. He writes: “the people working hardest toward solutions, at least among those I’ve met, are disproportionately at community colleges.”

Yes, we are making progress. Many colleges in this ballroom have hit a tipping point and are seeing accelerated student success outcomes. Our most successful colleges:

- Build strong **fundamentals** and know that this commitment is enduring.
- Adopt an **organizing framework** (culture and context matters) to organize, align, mobilize and sustain action.
- Lean on their own unique lever of change (culture and context matters) and stay with it.
- Lead with **patience** and **urgency**.

Yet, even though we may be making progress, by almost any measure, as community colleges we are still not meeting our goals around student success, particularly for low-income students and students of color.

So, I challenge us as we use this week’s time together to imagine a bolder vision for student success...

One that makes completion a progression metric rather than the end goal;
One that embodies a new access agenda that reaches deeper into our communities to open new pathways into and through our colleges for our most vulnerable learners;
One that moves from a focus on whole college transformation to one of whole community transformation;
One that moves teaching and learning and faculty leadership, engagement and respect into the center from the margins to the center of our redesign efforts;
And, most importantly, one that authentically centers equity—especially racial equity—in our institutional redesign work.

To do this—borrowing from AACU president Lynn Pasqueralla in her foreword to the new book, *Equity Talk. Equity Walk.*—necessitates both an honest assessment of, and genuine reckoning with, the structural barriers and hidden biases that pervade our
colleges and organizations...an understanding that to be White is to be in a privileged position with the responsibility to understand the influence and historical power of structural racism. This equity journey begins inside each of us and it moves, with leadership from all parts of our campuses, to a collective institutional imperative, as we say in our ATD Equity Statement, to critically “scrutinize barriers to equity and invest in equity minded policies, practices, and behaviors that lead to success for all students.”

ATD stands ready to support you in taking on these challenges with deeper and more customized coaching; the more intentional release of briefs and toolkits to share what we are learning from you in areas like holistic student supports as well as today’s release of our *Adjunct Faculty Practitioners Guide*, a new grant opportunity in partnership with the National College Transition Network from the ECMC Foundation for eight colleges to be more deeply engaged in their Community College Women Succeed work (visit the ATD website or check out our Twitter feed for more information); and finally, a new strategic partnership with Dr. Shaun Harper and the USC Race and Equity Center to launch the ATC/USC Racial Equity Leadership Academy.

This new partnership will offer 10 selected colleges in the ATD network an opportunity to participate as an inaugural cohort in an intensive three-day program this summer at USC, designed for teams to work together to develop a strategic racial equity change effort that will be launched at their institution during the Fall 2020 semester. Teams will receive ongoing coaching from ATD and USC as they implement their designs and will come together at next year’s DREAM to share progress and lessons learned. The RFP will be released this week. The application deadline is March 18. We will host a Thursday morning breakfast for colleges interested in learning more.

DREAM is a special convening. And dreams are important. Yet we must also be awake as we move as practitioners through this work.

C.G. Jung reminds us of this when he says:

“Your visions will become clear only when you look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.”

Thank you.