## ACES PRESSER SEPTEMBER 13, 2012

## **Becoming ACES**

A Speech by Montgomery College President Dr. DeRionne Pollard Welcome to Montgomery College! It is truly fitting that we are launching this ambitious partnership right in the center of student activity in the Charlene R. Nunley Student Services

Center. This is an entry point for students – the place where they enroll, get advice and encouragement, and seek financial aid—and truly make real their dreams of a better future. This is in fact a perfect manifestation of the Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success or ACES partnership...because MC is the lynch pin between a high school diploma and a baccalaureate degree—but more about that in a minute!

I want to start with a big thank you. There are so many people to thank, so I will just mention a small handful of the many instrumental players.

First, let me say that it has been an absolute pleasure working with **Dr. Stewart Edelstein** of the Universities of

Shady Grove and **Dr. Joshua Starr** of Montgomery County

Public Schools. I am proud to work side by side with two

phenomenal advocates of public education for all. Thank you as

well to **Dr. Erick Lang** and **Dr. Kimberly Stratham** of MCPS

for your leadership as we collaborated on this project.

Walker-Griffea, Dr. Karen Roseberry, and Dr. Brad
Stewart. Thank you for spearheading the College committee.
Thank you to additional co-chairs from MCPS: Ruth Green,
and Laura Newton; and from USG: Robyn Dinicola-Wagle,
and Mary Lang. Thank you to the additional members of our
task force, and the dozens of other individuals responsible for
this day. Thank you for your good and important work on behalf
of the students we serve.

Thank you to members of our board of trustees, including **Chair Stephen Kaufman**, **Trustees Michael Knapp**, **Les Levine**, and **Benjamin Wu**, who are here today. We are so fortunate to have trustees who truly empower all of us to help change lives.

Thank you to the members of the MCPS Board of Education here today: **President Shirley Brandman**, and **Vice President Christopher Barclay**; as well as those from the USG Board of Advisors: **Wendell Rakosky**, **Greg Wims**, and **Teresa Wright**.

Many thanks to **County Executive Ike Leggett** and members of the County Council, particularly the **Education Committee Chair Valerie Ervin**, for their support of our efforts.

As we stand here today, I cannot help but think of the students who have entered through these very doorways...whose lives

changed in that moment. But I also cannot help but think of all the students who never make it here.

It is those students inspiring our three organizations—MC, MCPS, and USG—to create the ACES program. Through ACES, we will create an educational pathway from high school to community college to university for underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation college students—to ensure more of our community's children obtain their bachelor's degree and achieve success in our knowledge-based economy.

We know that there are number of students who do not make it to college, right here in Montgomery County. Our state ranks 25<sup>th</sup> among the states in the percentage of high school graduates going directly to college... a real shame when to earning a living requires at least some post-secondary education. These are the students that we will target through ACES.

Perhaps the student is the first in her family for whom college is an option and is intimidated to even start the admissions process. Perhaps financially, she never thought college was feasible and has not even explored the possibility. For example, at our College we have seen nearly an 80 percent increase in financial aid applications in the past five years.

And, once at MC, we know that students with one or more of these challenges are less likely to complete college. Students who attend part-time, who do not understand college and financial aid process, and students who have financial need are at real risk of failure. ACES will attempt to mitigate these barriers to success so they no longer stand in the way of students achieving a post-secondary degree.

How? We will begin with readiness program activities in ninth and tenth grades, and then continue working with students

until they have completed their baccalaureate. We will work provide extensive services in a vast array of areas—including financial aid, career and leadership development, and student support. We will embrace a case-management approach, meaning each ACES participant will receive a MC coach to provide individualized, one-on-one coaching. Much like an athletic coach, an ACES academic coach will serve as a critical mentor throughout the student's journey—helping to guide training, provide inspiration, and encourage during challenging times. We want all participants to have access to College services, even before they are college students, including coaching and academic support services, tutoring, leadership development, College visits, financial aid counseling and scholarship assistance, and transfer counseling.

As we considered our program, we looked closely to a successful program at a neighboring community college— Northern Virginia Community College. Let me say thank you to Dr. Bob Templin, the president of NOVA, and Karin Hilker for their incredible patience and expertise as we learned from their successful Pathway to the Baccalaureate program. It served as a pathway for ACES, as a tangible example that this intrusive case management approach that begins in high school and continues through to the completion of a bachelor's degree works. According to research from NOVA, "Pathway students are outperforming their peers on measures of retention, grade point average, and graduation rate." That is powerful.

(BIG PAUSE)

I am proud to announce today that ACES is making its first impact in our community! An anonymous donor at The Community Foundation for Montgomery County is providing an initial \$10,000 to seed the new ACES scholarship general fund at the Montgomery College Foundation. The donor hopes that this gift encourages dozens of other county families and businesses to do the same.

## That deserves a round of applause!

I am optimistic that more members of our community will follow this generous lead. After all, this work will enrich the entire community through the individuals it empowers.

The fact that so many students struggle early in their educational journeys and veer off course is unacceptable in the 21st century, particularly in a country that was founded on the very ideal that the American Dream is attainable for all.

ACES provides a unique opportunity for our organizations to come together to help reclaim the American Dream for those students who are at risk of never achieving college degrees...

We will give them a coach, a guided pathway... and ACES will change the lives of our students, our families, and our Montgomery County community.