



State of the Maine Community College System

Address to the 129th Maine Legislature

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MCCS President

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President Jackson, Speaker Gideon, honorable members of the 129th Maine Legislature, Chancellor Page, President Brennan, distinguished guests: I am honored to come today to discuss the State of what Maine's leading labor economist John Dorrer has called "*the* institution of consequence in workforce development."

John is right. Everything the Maine Community College System does, everything the MCCS has ever done is focused on workforce development.

I began my work with the System as Director of Finance at then SMTC. I remember a Computer Technology faculty member, David Pratt, showing up at my door. He had fished a piece of wire out the window of his lab, through the trees and in the window of my office. With that crude connection, I became the first administrator to have an internet connection. A few days later, he was back at my door. I said, "David, that's pretty cool!" He replied, "Imagine what I could do if you put some money in my budget!"

A lot has changed since David snaked that line into my office, but one thing has not: our colleges remain *innovative, efficient, and responsive*.

As I take the reins, three seismic changes compel MCCS to build new, innovative approaches to how we deliver our programming to Maine people:

Number 1:

The workplace is increasingly automated. In this day and age, moving up – and in many cases, just moving in – *requires* a technical education.

Number 2:

Even with increased automation in the workplace, businesses are starving for qualified workers. Demand for skilled labor exceeds supply. Orders are going unfilled, back orders are growing, and Maine's economy is losing ground.

Number 3:

We have become a point, click and deliver society. We expect to get what we want, when we want it, and where we want it.

Those three forces present enormous challenges for those of us charged with educating Maine people and preparing a skilled workforce. The Maine Community College System has responded with a new strategic plan focused on three core principles:

- Provide students with improved **access** to a high quality, affordable education;
- Work directly with **students** to help them **succeed**; and
- **Reconnect** with students to build a pattern of life-long learning.

A responsive community college needs to develop new ways to deliver higher education when students need it, where students can access it, and in a form that truly improves a student's ability to advance his or her career.

- Focusing on the 38% of Maine students who choose not to attend college right after high school, MCCS offers a high school-to-college transition program called *Embark*. Built for students who are unsure about what to do after high school, *Embark* serves 1,800 Maine students each year.
- To address the 175,000 adults in the workforce with some college, but no degree, the Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges secured a \$3.6 million grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation and a \$400,000 grant from the Key Bank Foundation to strengthen programming for adult students. We have built strong teams to:
 - Coordinate shared curriculum development,
 - Ensure that special expertise at one college is available to each college, and
 - Where practical, coordinate the use of capital equipment between the colleges.
- Using increases in State appropriation provided by the 128th legislature, we have invested in over a dozen high-demand-occupation programs across the state.
- We are compressing our traditional semester schedule to offer start and end dates that better align with seasonal needs of certain industries, such as hospitality and construction.
- We have built regional delivery centers for Commercial Truck Driving to make program delivery more efficient and more broadly available.

As we increase access, we must also focus on **student success**; helping them achieve the goals and dreams they bring to us.

- With resources provided by the Kresge Foundation, MCCS became one of the first higher education systems in the country to join Achieving the Dream; a national network of community colleges using evidence-based strategies to help more students persist and graduate.

- Other grants from the John T. Gorman Foundation and Lisa Gorman have provided funding for a program we call “Navigating Success” placing a student counselor – a “navigator” – at each college. We have learned a lot about student success through this program and have committed funding to make navigators permanent at all seven colleges.
- Knowing that algebra has kept many otherwise capable students from getting a degree, we have worked with the Dana Center at the University of Texas to implement Math Pathways. Students will develop the mathematics skills needed for their career and to stay on track to earn their degree. Importantly, we expect Math Pathways to reduce the need for remedial coursework.
- We are intent on strengthening our relationship with the Department of Education. As you will hear from Chancellor Page in a minute, we are anxious to build even stronger operational connections between secondary and post-secondary systems.

Given the large number of Mainers with some college, but no degree, we need to **reconnect** with our students and build a pattern of life-long learning for the entire workforce.

- Each of Maine’s community colleges now allows students to earn college credit for knowledge gained on the job, in the military, or through other life experiences, saving students both time and money.
- We have had initial discussions with Commissioner Libby about building educational programs for those in the correctional system, with a goal of reducing the likelihood of a return to prison.
- We are also working in close collaboration with Commissioner Fortman and the Department of Labor as we strive to meet our shared goal of building a workforce with the skills needed to be competitive in this economy.
- Important work is underway to build new pathways to career readiness and continuous professional development through a series of micro-credentials, called badges.
 - Pioneering work with the Appalachian Mountain Club is supporting the development of our rural economy and has focused on badging as an employee recruitment and retention tool. John Judge, the Club’s president, tells me he first turned to a college in another state to begin a badging program. After six months they were still planning. Then he turned to Lisa Larson, the president of Eastern Maine Community College. Lisa had the program up and running in just three months. Impressed, John is here today and happy to talk with you about their plans.

Leveraging that success, we are in the exploratory stages with Northern Light Health, building a badging program for recruitment and retention of their workforce.

- Another innovative partnership is in development at Bath Iron Works. We are going well beyond traditional training relationships to provide training that supports and sustains a quality workforce for the Yard. Jon Mason, Director of Human Resources Services at Bath Iron Works, is here and eager to talk with you later today.
- Our colleges from north to south are working with Maine employers to support their workforce development needs.

These efforts demonstrate that Maine's community colleges are *innovative, efficient, and responsive*.

Knowing that MCCS is currently educating 35% of Maine's college students with 24% of the higher education budget, I wonder how much more we could do with more money in our budget!

But as we build programs necessary to address today's critical workforce shortages, the workplace will continue to undergo dramatic transformation.

One example: I told you earlier about our new regional delivery center for commercial truck driving – yet we know that futurists are predicting the use of self-driving delivery vehicles by 2028.

To fully meet our charge, we understand that we need to go beyond *training* for today's jobs, we need to build an *educated* workforce that is adaptive and capable of flourishing in the jobs of the future. To transform a workforce that is well trained, to a workforce that is well educated, we need to build skills for today's jobs *and* "know-how" that is adaptive and collaborative; a workforce that can communicate and anticipate challenges -- making businesses more efficient, more profitable.

We are partnering with departments in state government, philanthropic organizations, businesses and industry groups to respond to the changes in our economy. We need the 129th State Legislature as a full partner.

Just over one month ago, Governor Mills delivered to this very body a budget that is, in her words, "about HOPE." Appropriately, in my opinion, the Governor proposed making permanent, workforce funding approved in the budget passed by the 128th legislature. And she also proposed a critical increase in the System's base budget. That funding is essential.

But the demand for workforce development far exceeds our capacity to deliver.

For the budget to provide increased opportunity for Maine people looking to build a better, more prosperous life for themselves and their families, we need a further increase in funding.

Just last month, the Boston Federal Reserve Bank issued a report recommending that policymakers like you provide, quote “robust financial support for public higher education, *particularly community colleges.*”

Let me offer just one example that puts a finer point on how important that is:

I mentioned earlier our strengthened partnership with Bath Iron Works. Through that partnership we have learned that BIW needs to hire 1,000 new tradespeople *this year*. While BIW’s new orders have been strong – they reported another new order for a Burke-class destroyer just last week – most of the hiring is needed to replace those approaching retirement.

MCCS has nearly exhausted all available lines of funding to support BIW. If we can’t support their hiring plan, Huntington Ingalls will have the Mississippi Community Colleges train the people of Mississippi, and Huntington Ingalls will gladly fill the orders that BIW cannot. More jobs will be lost to another state. And more young people will move to states with opportunities for good-paying jobs.

As important as that is – and it is important – let’s not lose sight of the fact that we will build a strong, vibrant economy one person at a time. As our partners at Pratt Whitney have pointed out to us, the programs we are developing are moving Maine people from poverty to opportunity.

One of the most rewarding parts of working at the community colleges is hearing the stories of how students find inner powers they never realized they had and then leverage their newfound strength into building lives with purpose and meaning. Maine’s community colleges change the lives of Maine people. We change them forever. We provide economic opportunity. And we build confidence, aspirations, and the opportunity to dream.

That happens in so many ways. It happens when new Mainers bring new resources to our economy. Like the Wabwende family. Immigrating from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the family’s three children enrolled at Central Maine Community College and gained confidence and the skills they needed to contribute to Maine’s workforce.

Then there is Kate McPherson. Kate registered for college *four times* before she had the courage to actually take a class. Now, proudly maintaining a 3.7 GPA, Kate plans to continue her education and pursue a bachelor’s degree. Kate is here today and anxious to talk with you about her experiences.

Kendra Cummings is a single mom with four kids. She never saw herself returning to college, but she did. Kendra is now working as a Registered Respiratory Therapist and has decided to continue on to a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration.

And Lori Cobb. Lori struggled in high school. She didn't think she was college material, but after attending Kennebec Community College, Lori became a Registered Nurse. Lori claims "without a shadow of a doubt," KVCC changed her life giving her "purpose, hope and inspiration."

The list goes on. The faculty and staff at Maine's community colleges change lives every day. Right now, they are hard at work changing 16,622 lives.

But there are tens of thousands of Mainers in the workforce who lack the skills and education they need to fully compete in this economy. Governor Mills is right: "*Education is the key to helping our people achieve their full potential.*" And, if we increase the funding in their budgets, the community college faculty and staff will help each and every one of them achieve their potential.

Innovative, efficient, and responsive. Your community colleges are doing great work. As evidenced by the fact that 65% of your constituents voted in favor of our bond last November, the people of the State of Maine respect and appreciate the work we do in your communities.

As the new President of MCCC, I am grateful for this opportunity to share with you a small piece of the phenomenal work that I see on our campuses each and every day. I am excited about where we are heading and look forward to working with you to bring hope, opportunity and knowledge to all Mainers. With your continued support, we can do even more.

Thank you.