

## Successfully Serving Our Urban Students

Forum 2007

Friday, October 26

[Introduction by Ryan Merola, a CUNY graduate.]

RYAN MEROLA: My name is Ryan Merola, and I am a graduate of the Class of 2007 of the Macaulay Honors College at Brooklyn College. It is my pleasure this morning to introduce to you Chancellor Matthew Goldstein of The City University of New York system.

In 1999, a report was published that said CUNY was “an institution adrift.” When I started at the university in 2003, that wasn't the case anymore. This is thanks to the man sitting behind me, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, the first CUNY graduate to ever take the helm at CUNY and serve as its chancellor.

When I was called from the chancellor's office and asked to introduce him, and I saw the College Board Forum themes for this year, "Advocacy, Accessibility, and Preparation," I knew that you had the right speaker for higher education, because nothing that this chancellor has done over the past seven years has ever forgotten those three themes. All of his changes and innovations have embodied their spirit, and I'd like to mention two of them now by way of introducing him.

Last year, we had a transition in New York State government from a Republican governor to a Democratic governor, and that was a time that could have been bad for public higher education funding; usually, when you have a transition in government, public higher education isn't always a top priority.

Chancellor Goldstein launched something called the CUNY Compact. It was a four-year plan that was meant to change the way we look at higher education in the state, to promote the growth of CUNY, and to offer a new financing plan for CUNY.

With this compact, the state gave us more funding than ever for public higher education. It made sure that tuition was not increased at the university, and it's the plan that's going to maintain CUNY's affordable education, which millions of New Yorkers have had access to—and that I have had access to and that my parents and my grandparents had access to when they came to Brooklyn College. And for that, this state owes the chancellor a debt of gratitude.

Then there's the second innovation that he's worked hard on for the past seven years. He's emphasized the need for a strong math and science curriculum and focused on new research facilities at CUNY, opening up opportunities for students to truly explore these fields in laboratories and in lecture halls, in ways that public higher education in New York State hadn't

focused on in the past, because he understands that when you get to college you've got to compete with a global workforce, and every student deserves the chance to be a part of that.

He brought his commitment. He partnered with Chancellor Klein, with the extraordinary effort the chancellor of the school system of New York has made in emphasizing the need for a strong math and science curriculum from K through 12. That's the only way students who will come to CUNY and other higher education institutions will be prepared to take on those subjects and do well in them beyond college.

I really wanted to talk about these two examples because I've had the chance to work with the chancellor for the past four years in student government and on the Board of Trustees of CUNY as a Fiscal Affairs Committee member. But, most importantly and personally meaningful for me was [my work with him] as a member of the Macaulay Honors College, right now touted by many as the flagship program CUNY has for honors students and students coming out of the New York City schools—and in fact from across the country—who want to get the same education they'd get at a private university, but do it in a public setting, and do it in New York City. This was the chancellor's innovation back in 2001. It was a dream many people at the time thought couldn't be done, but he did it.

From this program, I was truly able to benefit from college, and I was able to go on and compete successfully in National Fellowship competitions and to land jobs right in the middle of my college education in congressional offices and senate offices, because his program gave me the resources I needed to pursue my dreams in college.

Being a third-generation CUNY student, it is truly a privilege to introduce to you this morning Chancellor Matthew Goldstein of The City University of New York.

MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN: Ryan Merola, thank you for that very generous introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, Ryan is a Truman Fellow, one of the most prestigious fellowships in higher education. Last year we had five Truman Fellows finalists, including four Macaulay Honors College students.

Gaston Caperton, what can I say? Not only are you a wonderful friend, but you've set an example for all of us in education in focus and accountability. I'm deeply privileged, as I always am, to be on the podium with my dear friend and colleague, Joel Klein, who, as you have just heard, is making extraordinary progress in our city schools.

I have seen this man work up close, and what he has accomplished is nothing less than miraculous. He is a leader who listens, makes judgments when needed, and has the courage and resolve to be bold and, yes, audacious in the changes he has made. So Joel, I continue to admire you and appreciate your work, and this city is a better city because of you.

Both Chancellor Klein and I understand how important it is for the Department of Education and CUNY to march in unison. Over 65 percent of our freshmen at CUNY are graduates of the public school system. We have a partnership that is truly a very, very close relationship. We could not exist without the very strong cooperation that we have with the DOE.

Let me just give you a snapshot of The City University of New York, because some of you may not be familiar with this system. We are the third largest system in the United States, certainly by far the largest urban university system anywhere. We started many years ago in 1847. Today we have 23 colleges and professional schools throughout the five boroughs of the City of New York: 11 senior colleges (baccalaureate and master's institutions), 6 community colleges, a graduate school where we house over 30 doctoral programs, a law school, an honors college, a school of professional studies, a new graduate school of journalism, a biomedical institution, and soon to be established, a new graduate school of public health.

Currently, we have an enrollment of about 230,000 degree-seeking students, and an equivalent number of students in continuing education and continuing professional development. Our undergraduate population is like the City of New York. About 15 percent of our students are Asian-Americans, about 28 percent African Americans, 25 percent Hispanic, and about 32 percent are white. Sixty percent of our students come from families with incomes under \$35,000 per year, and 70 percent of our students work part-time or full-time while they are pursuing a higher education degree. Over 50 percent of our first-time freshmen have native languages other than English.

That, in itself, is very challenging. In higher education, at least in the eyes of the faculty, in order to communicate and get results, a small variance in preparation is better than a large variance in preparation, because you can focus your work in a much more intelligent manner.

We don't have that at The City University of New York, but we're working, certainly, on academic preparation as a methodology to reduce variance. We have made, and continue to make, a number of policy and structural changes at this great university. What has driven us from the very beginning is very simple, and that is the desire to increase the credibility of a CUNY degree, and to give all of our students a solid academic experience. That is job one at this university.

I feel as strongly now as I did when we began that we must give students the opportunity to succeed in a highly competitive world, what I think of as the innovation age. We have moved very quickly from an economy driven by brawn to one defined by brains. Those countries that will come out ahead will be those who are leaders in innovation, and that means those with an educated citizenry. China and India, among many other countries, are accelerating their higher education efforts, investing in their universities and in their capacity to produce a highly educated workforce.

This is a wake-up call to the United States. Just as the launch of Sputnik in 1957 shook up this country's complacency and emphasized our need for innovative research and a highly skilled citizenry, so, too, do we need to be shaken up now, 50 years later. Today, students find themselves shoulder-to-shoulder with international students who are often driven, disciplined, and academically well prepared for the rigors of higher education. Unless we do the things necessary to offer a competitive education, our students are going to be shorted in the global environment.

All of the changes we have made at CUNY are ultimately geared toward creating the most enlightened educational opportunities for students. We had to understand the systemic academic challenges that exist when many students come from urban environments that are poor, and whose schools are often struggling, and where the importance of preparation is not always reinforced. In such cases, there is often a difference between the standards needed to graduate from high school and the standards that are necessary to succeed and excel at a university. In concert with the Department of Education, we have a responsibility to address these central issues.

In large part, this means communicating our expectations and our understanding of how to achieve college readiness. This must include taking a full load of college preparatory courses, not just the minimum to graduate; preparing for and taking assessment tests such as the Regents exams in New York State; preparing for and taking college entrance exams like the PSAT and the SAT; and acquiring the skills needed to be successful in college. That means time management, exam preparation, communication with teachers and counselors, completing all assignments, and understanding that different programs have different requirements, from engineering to the humanities.

These are messages that students from more advantaged backgrounds or whose parents are college graduates are accustomed to hearing, sometimes, I would say, to excess. We have to ensure, however, that all students understand the importance of preparation and the resources available to help them achieve it.

This is the context for what we have done and continue to do at CUNY.

Let me briefly take you back in time to about 1999, which is when Ryan Merola started his historical rendition of what has happened at CUNY. At that time, the missions of all of our institutions were somewhat unclear, if not opaque. Admission standards were not terribly challenging. Presidents and other officers of the university were compensated exactly the same, regardless of the size and complexity of their institution. And, there was no process to evaluate performance, since there were few goals and objectives, nor the metrics to monitor or measure progress.

Starting in 1999, we knew that we had to deal with the standards issue, we had to deal with regulatory issues, and we had to get our house in order, and it was—and let me be very,

very clear about this—a major political battle from which we still hear the reverberations today, seven or eight years later.

First, we tiered the system. That is, we have highly selective institutions, moderately selective institutions, and open admissions institutions. Standards across the board for our senior colleges dramatically went up, and a few of our institutions are highly competitive with respect to the best state universities in the United States.

Open enrollment at the six community colleges was retained, and remediation was taken out of our senior colleges and remanded to our two-year institutions. Freshman tests, which we give to all students entering the system, in mathematics, in reading, and in writing, were thrown out and replaced with standardized tests that we can norm against peer institutions. We instituted the CUNY proficiency exam, probably one of the most controversial things that we did. No student is allowed to continue beyond the 60th credit unless they pass a CUNY proficiency exam, and I must say that our students have risen to the occasion, in large part because of the communication that we have with the DOE.

The DOE today, as our partner, understands our expectations. The students, as Joel Klein mentioned earlier, are meeting those standards in record number. We know that we have to work with the DOE to provide teachers—and we provide many teachers for the Department of Education. When we started on this reform movement, about 60 percent of the students taking the certification exams from the SED passed. Today, I stand in front of you and say that 98 percent of our students now, because of the reforms that we have made in teacher education, are passing those exams.

The results have been the admission of better prepared students—as indicated by a very quick rise in scores on SAT exams, as one measure of preparation—increasing retention rates, and, yes, increasing graduation rates. And none of this [could be accomplished without] the partnership with the DOE, which is just so fundamental for this to work. For example, while we raised standards, we also increased programs to help students prepare for college. One that we are most proud of is the College Now program, which enables public high school students to take free college courses. It has grown to serve over 30,000 students now, and nearly 300 public schools are participating.

Our next move that we made after we dealt with much of the standards issue was to create a flagship environment, which emphasized our university's core academic values. We added well over a thousand full-time faculty, and we did it with little or no new investment from the state of New York or through raising tuition. We did it by reshaping our academic budgets to allow dollars to be made available through other parts of the system.

We provided cluster hiring. I have a theme that we have used over and over again: the “integrated university.” We live in a relatively small piece of geography, and it seems to me that our campuses should be working very closely together as we enter new academic areas. We created a concept called cluster hiring in engineering, in new media, in photonics, in education,

in biosciences, in urban environment studies, demography sciences, and other targeted areas. Since 1999, we have replaced 19 of the 23 presidents and deans of professional schools. Leadership matters, and we insist that we get the best possible leadership that we can at these very complex and large institutions.

Perhaps the most far-reaching new development was the implementation of a performance management process, a comprehensive annual review process that we started in 2001-2002. It takes a lot of my time, but it is worth it.

I meet with each campus president or dean of a professional school every year to review the prior year's successes and challenges, and to set general targets for the coming year. We set metrics that we agree upon so that everybody understands the rules of engagement. My staff and other members of the administration work with the colleges to add specificity and texture to these goals, because each campus is a little different.

Evaluation is based on several key areas, including strengthening academic programs, attracting and nurturing a strong faculty, ensuring a solid general education, increasing retention and graduation rates, improving post-graduate outcomes like success on licensure exams, improving student and academic support services, growing or maintaining enrollment and facilitating transfers among institutions, increasing revenues, developing efficiencies, and improving administrative services. Every single year we go through this very deep drilling down to the very bowels of the institution. At the end of that process, all raises, all compensation changes are directly related to that performance management process.

In 1999, every president was paid the same, whether you had a respiration rate or not. Today, performance is a driver in setting compensation.

Lastly, we had to think of a new approach to financing innovation and investment in the university. Ryan Merola talked about the CUNY Compact, which is a very different and innovative approach to freeing up dollars by distributing revenue from not only government but from students, from philanthropy, and from the university—from all of the stakeholders that we have working in tandem—to come up with those precious dollars that we need for innovation. We established the first capital campaign in the history of The City University of New York. Four years ago, we established the target of \$1.2 billion. We have now achieved that target four years ahead of time, and we'll soon be announcing a new campaign for the university, because we have to have those dollars in order for this university to move forward.

The United States must, as Joel Klein has indicated, invest in education, not only in K through 12, but I would say in higher education, as well. For me, this is a national security problem. This is a problem that we all have to wake up to. Scientific literacy, in particular, is a sine qua non for a healthy, vibrant, and highly competitive country. Unless we collectively get our arms around the importance of investing in education and holding people accountable for the work that we do, we will be sliding down relative to other countries that had their wake-up call several decades ahead of us. I know collectively in this audience, you all understand it.

Now it's important for you to go back to your communities and get that very fundamental point across.