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SUNY Roadmap a Model for Collective Education

Posted: 01/16/2013 6:20 pm

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Let me put an end, once and for all, to an ongoing national dialogue questioning the value of a college degree. As a lifelong educator and current chancellor of the country's largest system of public higher education, I know a thing or two about whether a college degree is "worth it" given the cost and time commitments

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associated with getting one in today's struggling economy. The answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

In fact, a degree matters more today than ever before. College costs and student debt have reached all-time

highs. High-paying jobs are as hard to come by as the skilled workers qualified to fill them. We do not have a national system of education that works for every student, from every walk of life.

There is only one way forward. We are going to have to educate ourselves out.

In recent years, the State University of New York has reached beyond its traditional mission of teaching and learning and begun to leverage the full weight of its systemness on creating a more competitive university system that has its hand in education at every stage, serving every student, from cradle to career.

We have increased our presence early on in the education pipeline, partnering with schools and civic program providers to ensure that more kids are coming to SUNY ready for the coursework. We have dedicated new programs and services within SUNY to ensuring on-time, even early, completion and less loan debt. And we are partnering with employers in every region of the state to develop degree programs that strike a balance between classroom curricula and (often paid) on-the-job work experience that prepares our students for success once they graduate.

What we have done is create a roadmap for the effective delivery of public education that can and should be adopted in every state in America.

In the coming year alone, SUNY will bring every online program from each of our 64 college campuses together, on one platform that is accessible to all students. This platform, what we call Open SUNY, will be the largest online learning environment in America. It will be so massive that we anticipate students being able to earn a bachelor's degree in three years' time, a feat that will run complementary to SUNY Smart Track, the nation's most comprehensive and aggressive financial aid transparency campaign.

Our campuses will serve as innovation hubs in every major metropolitan city in New York, fostering next generation research, academic and workforce training and community needs in partnership with our state's economic development czars.

We will ensure that every student, even those learning exclusively online, will have an experiential opportunity, be it a paid co-op experience, volunteering at a non-profit or working with a professor to start a new business. And we will certify their degree with SUNY Plus, a new designation to show that a student has gone the extra mile to prepare for a career in their field.

And these are just our newest strategies. The SUNY roadmap digs even deeper, exemplifying how higher education can answer nationwide calls for more affordability, less reliance on remedial learning, global access, community college-level workforce training and much more.

The need for a college degree has never been more eminent; its value to students and employers alike never more emergent.

As a nation, we must meet this need. And to do so, we must reach higher than our goals to educate more and educate better. We must educate together.

We can have an effective system of education in this country. The SUNY roadmap begins to show us how. But our success is dependent upon our willingness to act as a collective -- as parents and community



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