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Helping One is Helping Many

I AM EXCITED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT attendance at this October’s ACCT Leadership Congress is shaping up to be one of the most highly attended in years. Our return to the Big Apple brings with it a return to pre-pandemic participation. The 2022 conference will be a great opportunity to address a lot of significant concerns affecting community colleges today, from enrollment declines to accreditation concerns. But I’d like to direct your attention to one particular aspect: the conference theme — *Community Colleges: Improving the Lives of Entire Families*.

As a judge who works with families, I know how community colleges make families’ lives better. Many of the parents who end up in my courtroom don’t have the educations that afford them living wages. They have limited options and limited opportunities not because of anything they’ve done, but because limited options and opportunities are the only kinds they’ve ever been able to access. And as inflation continues to escalate costs and the wealth gap grows, these people — these parents — have the most to lose, because if they lose, so do their children. They will not be able to succeed against economic forces without opportunities, and those opportunities come through accessible, affordable educations.

As you read through this issue, I’d like to you think about not only the students who benefit directly from our institutions’ services, but also how those benefits can radiate throughout family connections.

How, for example, students in rural communities who are the first in their families

to attend college will be able to access greater employment opportunities for themselves and potentially help to bring greater opportunities back to those communities.

How Talah Alamar, a refugee from another nation’s civil war, enrolled at Oakland Community College within a month of arriving in the United States and has advanced as a Phi Theta Kappa honors student to the University of Michigan intent on earning a Ph.D. in international relations and human rights with dreams of working for the United Nations. The ripple effects of the opportunities our institutions offer extend far beyond the student who attends. They reach out and transform the lives of immediate and extended families, communities, and sometimes even farther.

I want you to keep this in mind as you read through this issue, as you navigate the hundred-plus educational sessions at the ACCT Leadership Congress, and as you meet with your boards to keep your colleges running at top performance. The role we play as governing board members matters to our students and our communities. It also reinforces the values of families and democracy. The onramp to the American Dream has become steeper over the years, but community colleges are a primary means of getting there. Be proud of the work you do and take it seriously. I look forward to seeing you in New York this fall, and please do not hesitate to introduce yourself if our paths cross.

**James Cooksey**

Moberly Area Community College, MO