

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF STUDENT SUPPORT
CECE CUNNINGHAM

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Note: The following transcript starts at a point that is approximately 5 minutes into the keynote.

...We're being held accountable for outcomes. And so the fear is, take more underperforming kids, those outcomes aren't going to look so good. But as schools get stronger, and every year your school will get stronger as a community, I would like you to consider taking in more and more kids who are underperforming, even if you started with kids at the highest level. My hope for this conference is, after tomorrow, when you've spent more time looking at all the kinds of support, that you will go away understanding that providing this support is a matter of building skills, and providing structures for this to happen, and that you will feel confident that you will be able to do that in your schools, in your communities, by the end of tomorrow.

So, for one minute, I'd like us to think about incoming scores of young people, as a way to talk about fragile learners. What we found is that around the country right now in the 8th grade, there is an English/Language Arts and a Math test that most kids in this country are taking. They are usually given scores, scores are 1 to 4, except of course for California, and I think Texas and Tennessee have 1 to 7 or something, and Michigan has turned it upside down, but 1 being the lowest performing and 4 being the highest performing. All of you know in your schools what your kids are coming in at. So just look at that. That information is for you to look at to determine what the characteristics of your young people are. If in fact 100% of your kids are coming above the 50th percentile, if you could commit to moving that to 10 or 20% in the next year. We will find ways to support those young people and they will join the ranks of our other young people that are getting into college. I do believe we need a mix of students, of performance among students. Because we're all committed to diversity culturally and racially, but a diverse group of students educationally also do a lot for each other. And so the commitment around diversity I would hope would be around those other things also.

I know right now, every one of you could name a youngster who is not getting it in your school right now. Right? Does that echo what your teachers say: 'That kid just does not get it'? So I'd like you to think about that young person in your school. And depending on where you are located, and what the relationship with your partner college is, you have more or less of those young people. We have another looming problem. We're talking about taking in more fragile learners which is going to affect our outcomes in a time of diminishing resources. We are not going to get more people to do this job, that's very clear.

So, you're asked, everyone, to take up more responsibility at this moment and the job of early college is a huge responsibility because of the two institutions. You can't be isolated in your high school or your college. That work across the institutions makes up another body of work that is not in the portfolio of most high school people or college people. So this is a huge amount of work that we're doing. We're doing it in times of real financial crisis. I don't know, is anyone from North Carolina? I saw a memo that the superintendent of schools sent out last week. Things

are so bad, he put as one of his suggestions in this memo that they consider closing the schools down one day a week and only operate four days a week. So it's only going to get worse. So how can we use this economic time as an opportunity?

Early College is an opportunity to save resources. It saves resources for the family and for the state. It doesn't necessarily save resources for our own institutions. I think we have enough evidence from the work that's been done by JFF. Colleges aren't saving money and school districts aren't saving money. But states can save money by combining those years, and of course families can. So how can we use this economic crisis as a way to educate legislators and the public? Here's an opportunity for us to combine and save resources for the greater good, not necessarily for the good of the institutions that we all come from.

In your folder, there is a mind map if you could look at it for a minute. Is it gold? Yellow? Wrap-around Services. Beige. Beige. Champagne. OK. Cream. Cream soda. So that is not a theoretical mind map by people who think this is what schools should be doing. That mind map was made up by guidance counselors in early college in a meeting that we had two summers ago. They certainly couldn't use it as a job description; no one would want the job. It is way too much in our small schools for one human being to do all of that. Way too much. And so what I'd like you to consider are ways that all of those services for our young people get done by distributing it across the community. And by having people take on not only additional responsibilities, but the commitment to get skilled in things that they never thought they'd be skilled at.

I want to just stop for a minute and have you imagine being a teenager yourself, if you can. We have a teacher who's a seminar teacher, and she talks about the exquisite embarrassment of a teenager asking for help. If you can remember for one minute how awkward you felt when you went into a dance, when you went into a class that you were nervous about, when you had to go into a room with people that you did not know at all. That feeling of nervousness compare with the areas that you are skilled in. I'm always reminded about a friend of mine who played basketball for Fordham Prep and then Iona, and he talked about the basketball being an extension of his fingers. He was so prepared to be on that court. Were there things in your life that you were prepared for? I know I was prepared for math tests all the time. But every one of us has one thing. Dakota, you're not thinking of one thing you were prepared for. What? Math tests also? OK.

So, think of those two things, think of how good it feels as a teenager, even as an adult, to walk into a room totally prepared, but remember how awkward you felt as a teenager. So what's our job? Our job is to make sure that every kid walks into a college class feeling that that basketball is an extension of his fingertips. That he's got the skills, or she's got the skills, to deal with the demands in that college class. And it's absolutely possible no matter where kids comes in, because test scores absolutely do not tell a whole story about a young person.

So seminar. We put in place in our schools something we call seminar. When kids start college classes, they must go to seminar. They don't have an option, because they're embarrassed to ask for help. I don't think it's sufficient to say, 'Oh there's tutoring over there, they can go get that.' A young person, a teenager, if they ask for help, that's a signal that they don't belong there. And that's especially of true of children of color and children in poverty. 'Oh I must really not belong

there if I have to go to the tutoring center.’ So building on Uri Treisman’s dissertation, if any of you aren’t familiar I urge you to go online and read it. He put in place in honors classes, where the study component was mandated for every kid no matter what their level of preparation. So there has to be ways of mandating help. It’s not an option whether you get help. We’re giving it to you. Now there may come a point where it’s not needed, but we’re certainly going to give it to you now.

So seminar is a place where students can learn how to prepare for class but also learn how to learn from each other. Learn how, when you go into a new class, you get everybody’s telephone number and emails and make sure that if you’re going to miss a class you can get the homework and the readings assigned. Or that you talk to somebody before you go into a class, ‘Did you do that assignment? How do you think you did on that?’ Seminar is a place where you can learn all of those skills.

One of our schools has as its motto that failure is not an option. That’s not just for kids that motto. It’s for us who work with teenagers. We can’t fail. But in order to be skilled at this, you have to work in community. You have to work with others who know how to do it so that you can learn something else that you may not have thought of and you have to get better skilled at what it is that you are doing with young people. Not only do we have to get better skilled, but the structure of the school has to support all of those things that kids need. So we’ll start with size, we’re all small, that’s a given. Size if it’s done well, and if every adult is very present in the school, kids won’t get lost in the school. Kids are known, their problems are known. The problem with small sizes and small classes is that once you know something about a young person you have to act on it. You can’t pretend that you don’t know that the kid is in mourning, because of the loss of somebody. You can’t pretend that those two kids are going out, and there’s something going on there that’s causing a weird dynamic in the class. And so to deal with those, you have to be more than an academic teacher.

In a survey of our early college students last year, the single most important thing they all said is, ‘My teacher gives me help.’ I’m not talking about tutoring after class, I’m talking about during the classroom, they can get help. And you can do that when you have small class sizes and longer class periods, when the actual schedule matches the college schedule and it’s not just 40 minutes. When you have longer class periods and smaller class sizes, teachers then have smaller case loads, they can actually read students’ papers, comment on them. They have to know fewer students. So the organization of the day and the week has to allow, even though 400 is small, a teacher shouldn’t have a workload of more than 120 kids if you expect them to read papers and get to know people well. We have plenty of examples of schedules that match college schedules but also meet state requirements on seat time.

We’re big proponents of house or advisory. And unfortunately, it’s a buzz word, everybody thinks that’s going to solve everything. Big schools that have a house or advisory think that can solve all the problems of all the kids. It’s very difficult to do. For those of you who are doing it, you know it’s difficult. First of all, whoever comes in has to understand that it’s in their job description that they’re going to be a teacher counselor, or a teacher advisor, or a teacher coach. So the hiring of staff in an early college, there has to be an understanding, you’re going to give a signal to kids that you are available to them for more than just teaching them mathematics. And

then there has to be really good staff development to be a house teacher. So I'm going to read to you from, just very briefly if you don't mind, a section from a manual from one of our schools that orients teachers to house.

House teachers will develop a relationship that is the primary resource for academic advisement and progress, which includes monitoring attendance, programming, and ongoing support at the school. Trust, sincere concern, and honesty are the building blocks of a supportive house relationship. This is a process which develops over time and can lead to honest communication, serve as a motivation to change behavior, improve academic performance, and address those obstacles which may impede student success in school. Relationships will develop through interaction with the entire group or individually in house.

So staff development is critically important for a teacher who takes on that role. And not just the commitment to do it.

There's a study that Kristen found for us. Did you put this summary in their packets? It's from Child Trends. *College and Workplace Readiness*. I urge you all to read it. Because it says in so many words, if nothing else read the executive summary. It tells us that we've been separating out college preparedness from workplace preparedness. And this is a study that looks to see where the overlap is. And it tells us that, in order for young people to be truly successful in either place, they need a couple of things that we don't normally consider when we talk about college preparedness, but we do consider them when we're raising our own children. The physical: they must have healthy, physical habits and avoid risky behaviors. But how does a school work on that?

- The psychological domain: goal-setting, self-management, motivation, self-esteem, resilience and flexibility, a strong work ethic. They are considered important for pre-college. They're what every single college teacher expects. But where are we intentional about how students acquire those things?
- The social domain: social confidence is considered the most important preparation for both work and college. Conflict resolution, cross-cultural confidence, and attitudes like integrity and honesty, and principles like civic engagement. It's more than what Ted Sizer says in his book, *The Students are Watching*. They are watching, but you can't just be a role model. There has to be some intention about how one interacts with these ideas, how a young person interacts with these ideas and advances his own thinking around it.
- And then of course the cognitive domain: critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving. Everybody believes that they're good, right? But are our schools designed for that? I think that's our goal. And many as I've said have been designing by test preparation or dare I say even for what the expectations are of the next level – college – and some of its worst aspects, and so are we actually doing those things?
- The final domain is the spiritual domain, something we never consider in school. We're doing our student conference, we do one every year, in Colorado, in Estes Park. And it's about teacher commitment. And so students are on a jam. Jam is an asynchronous discussion that students can get on over a 24 to 48 hour period. You know we have 30 schools across the country, so we've got kids on the east coast, on the west coast, they're up all night. So, what resonated with the young people as they started to think about

greening of our country is that we must change the object of our desire from material goods to purposefulness, generosity, and being at peace with the earth. This is coming from our young people. These are 10, 11th, and 12th graders. That's the sense of spirituality. It happens within our schools. Are we paying attention to it? Where is the place that we can do it?

So, house can be a place where these things can be taken care of. It also can be the place where career advisement, SAT prep, financial aid advisement, course planning, reviewing grades, report cards, school-wide activities. But teachers need, let's say they're going to advise a youngster on their high school and college plan, they need a lot of professional development in order to be able to do that. For one of our schools, we mostly call it house not advisory, so one of our schools invented the term "housekeeper." And that's the role of the guidance counselor in making sure that the housekeepers can in fact do all that's expected of them. In one of our schools, the students lead house. House meets twice a week, a group of student leaders, two for each house, meet the other three days and construct the activities and lessons that go on in house. And they learn how to facilitate the house. So we have lots of different ways to do it, but it is difficult and it is time-consuming.

I deliberately did not put college application in this list, because as we discussed earlier, I think that college application is an area of concern for us, our students are staying, are they not staying? What do they go in as – freshman without any classes, do they go in as transfer students? I think we have a lot to work out around the college application piece.

Another powerful support mechanism is what our young people call the power of the peer. Having the peers be the role models and teachers for each other helps to create that college, that academic culture, that is most critical to helping unmotivated, or under-skilled youngsters work hard in order to gain the skills that they need to do this. We for years did peer counseling groups. Probably 15 a day. It's great if you have a social worker on your staff, because social workers are good at this, they know how to do peer groups, group counseling. It also is a way to see a lot of students individually that present lots of different needs, and you really having to work with each other, so it's a good economy of resources.

Another strategy that I think that absolutely helps is having a 9th grade cohort. One set of teachers with just the 9th grade by themselves. Because that 9th grade, and I'm quoting from a project zero book called *The Intellectual Community*, that 9th grade is an opportunity to invite youngsters into the intellectual community of the academic subjects. So if you don't have 9th grade tests that have to take place, kids can really use that 9th grade to do intellectual work, problem-solving, group projects, social justice projects, community projects, but teachers need to work together on that.

What about instruction? We talked about that a little earlier, an earlier classroom. What should instruction look like? If critical thinking and problem solving are so important for both places, what does it look like in a classroom? Well, I say it looks like students doing more of the talking and not the teacher, of course I'm doing all the talking right now, so forgive me. But students are doing more. The work is carefully scaffolded with literacy skills. The entire school is committed to numeracy. Every single teacher is committed to helping students unpack the skills needed in

mathematics, not just the mathematics teacher. Math is still our biggest problem, and even in college, unless it's application driven, our students are not going to be able to use any of those tools even if they get better at those tools. And Achieve has just done a wonderful paper and a toolbox on it if you go on Achieve.org.

So what about technology? So do you know that this younger generation, maybe some of you are in that generation, I'm certainly not, spend more time texting than they do on email? Do you know that's all they do is text? So what have we done in our schools? We've banned cell phones so that they can't text to each other. Should we instead think about harnessing the texting instead of banning? Roberta and I worked together on a couple of articles. It's very powerful to write and pass stuff back and forth. We're so concerned about kids cheating. It's only cheating if there's a one word answer on a test. But if a test requires extensive writing, and they have the opportunity to text back and forth to flesh out their ideas to be able to answer, how would that change what goes on in the classroom? That technology is going to go, it's way out of our control at this point. And we're not going to get by by banning it. How can we use technology to change what goes on in our classrooms?

Now I'm going to read from the Jam that kids, we do this online community. We did it last year, did community service in New Orleans, and then afterwards the kids all write about it, so this is what a young person said.

This experience showed me how little I truly I know about the lives and minds of the people I spend hours with every day. I would say I grew closer to my team members because of the online conversations. I have grown in the sense that when I see the opportunity to have a meaningful and more profound conversation with someone, I'll take the chance wholeheartedly because I might not get it again.

So there's an opportunity around technology that we have to figure out, that's going to change our classrooms. And of course producing knowledge. Do you know the music industry is terrified right now that you can produce your own record and put it out there? So who's going to judge what music is going to be bought by others? That is true of all of the technology – youtube and myspace, all of those, right? Kids can produce their own stuff, they're producing it without our intervention. Why can't we use more of that intervention in classrooms?

A high skill level in staff is needed to do this work, and that can only be done in a community. Building community is one of the most important things that we can do as intermediaries, as school leaders, as the leaders in your school community. Building the community in which teachers and students thrive. Leadership is critical. I just had a conversation about it, you have to be so emotionally mature to be a leader because you must bring out the best adult selves in teachers, and you can't do that unless you're a mature thoughtful person yourself. So picking your leader is very critical. Peers should be involved in hiring, being in each others' classrooms to review work, sharing each others' work, developing collaboratively the rubrics to look at school work. None of this can be done without common planning time. In many schools the common planning time is wasted. It's there but not used to its full potential. If nothing else, go back and look at the way that common planning time. There should be a year's schedule of sharing of work and sharing of curriculum.

And then there are the activities that you as a new school developer have the opportunity to put in place. And they are the most fun things, you get to create that. The outdoor activities, the trips, the community service projects that everybody has to work on, the social justice issues that mark the school. They build community and they provide those kinds of experiences both inside and outside the classroom that allows students to put themselves out and work hard academically. Because we're asking them to do a lot more than their peers are doing at this point in their lives. And it's rewarding but they need a lot of support to do it.

So let me go back again and say, I hope that by the end of tomorrow with Rob's careful planning, that you will go back with in your repertoire a few more activities, perspectives, structures, ideas that can help students who come in underperforming and not getting it being part of that cohort of students that are going to get their 24 credits by the end of the 12th grade.

Thank you.