

Dr. Annette Parker, President, South Central College, Minnesota

M: Today we welcome Annette Parker, president of South Central Community College in Minnesota. South Central is one of more than 700 community colleges that have received federal grants known as TAACCCT --The US Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program.

TAACCCT helps community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less, and prepare program participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations.

Dr. Parker, please describe how you fostered a culture of innovation and openness to change at your college.

Annette Parker: I really think that I have learned from some of the thought leaders around the country, the President that I served under at Lansing Community College, my Chancellor at the Kentucky Community and Technical College, Dr. Keith Burr were really big thinkers and had, were a lot of the thought leadership around the change that really needed to happen in the United States. And I was always able to hear them and hear how my work fed into a bigger vision for our institution and for the work that needed to be done nationally.

Annette Parker: It's about really creating a shared vision and making sure that faculty are on board, and that is the kind of change you have to have if it's going to be sustainable over the years. And how you help the leadership at the institution really understand how to move those efforts

forward, creating a shared vision not just internally with your faculty and your administrative team but also with the business community, and that is by developing win-wins that create a shared vision.

M: Can you give some examples of how you created that shared vision? Can you tell us about a time when faculty weren't fully ready to come onboard and what you did to help move the process forward?

Annette Parker: One of my first examples of how you bring faculty along was in Lansing, Michigan and when we were building our new campus all of the curriculum had to be open entry, open exit modulized curriculum and we only had 18 months to do that, plus build a new campus. And what I did was, it was understood from the President that this work needed to be done, what I helped our faculty realize is that the work that we were doing was going to make a difference in the lives of our students and how they were instrumental in helping us to do that, that by them documenting their expertise and their work that it would help our adjunct faculty to make sure that they were instructing properly so that our students had the same experiences across the curriculum, regardless if there was a full time faculty or a part time faculty.

And so by doing that and really helping them to understand their contribution I was able to move them forward. [04:56]

M: Can you talk a little about how you got other colleges to come onboard and how you worked with the other college presidents?

Annette Parker: I was a brand new President and I wanted to make a difference in Minnesota as the Chancellor wanted me to be able to do that relative to this kind of work.

And so I thought, "What does a new President tell a bunch of senior Presidents?" What I figured out was that this was an opportunity for me to do something big with them that would live up to what the Chancellor envisioned so I invited every President to be a part of any submission that we would make, that it was truly their decision, that we would work through the things together, and that it would elevate the entire state of Minnesota.

We really only wanted the people, even though it was offered to everyone, those that thought they could be successful in this work and of the 24 community and technical colleges in the state of Minnesota 12 signed on, including South Central College. They were making a commitment, so it was a thought that we had, those that had some passion and knew that they could be successful that could participate in the grant.

Annette Parker: I think that when you create momentum with a group of the willing, people that have a shared vision, that understand that we're doing something big and we're doing something exciting, that you have got a group of stakeholders

that are truly committed to the work and together we can get through whatever we need to do to be successful. [10:07]

[MUSIC]

M:The other central strategic element in the TAACCCT grant is employer engagement. Can you expand a little on how you brought business and industry together to have a shared vision and support this work?

Annette Parker: So let me first talk about something that I did with the manufacturers even before I knew that I would be on the President's committee and that would lead to a TAACCCT grant, and it's something I did my first event with our business and industry in our region as a new President is I asked them all to take a trip with me, we chartered a bus, and we went to Kenosha, Wisconsin to look at what I think is a best practice at Gateway Technical College. And we spent two days there so that they could capture a vision about what South Central could do for them and what that meant for our community. That built a lot of good will.

From that effort we were able to work at convening all of the manufacturers together to talk about the need across our region so that manufacturing would stay competitive in Minnesota and that we would be a partner to help them to ensure that. So, our staff worked to bring in, gosh, 120 employers, I would say, approximately in two summits, one at each one of our two campuses to talk about the need, and not just to talk about what it meant for us but what do they need from us.

M: How did that initial work with employers lead to involvement from your state legislators?

Annette Parker: The work that we did with our employers led to a lot of good will, a lot of communication I think from our employers with our legislative delegation in St. Paul about the work that South Central was doing. This led to us helping the State Senate to develop policy and legislation that would support apprenticeship broadly throughout the state of Minnesota. We testified in St. Paul at the Senate hearings about what this meant, what it would mean for our state, how do you move these types of efforts forward, and that work has led to a pilot, us being one of the first pilots in the United States for actually free college tuition for technical students as well as a pilot apprenticeship program to support all sectors in Minnesota.

[MUSIC]

M: What is your long-term vision to scale and sustain the great work your college has done?

When I arrived in Minnesota we were in the process of developing a strategic plan for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and it's called Charting the Future for a Prosperous Minnesota. And many of the strategies that are outlined in that particular strategic plan are aligned to the work in our grant, such as having competencies in certification, credit for prior learning, using industry recognized certification and credentials, cross-walking military credit, how we support student

success and persistence in closing the achievement gap, using data to make informed decisions are all part of the Minnesota State College and University Plan. And so we built that into our grant.

Annette Parker: What the grant has been able to do is advance the work of the state of Minnesota, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, as well as the federal agenda about what is important to make sure that we fill the middle skill jobs issue that we have in the United States and to make sure that within Greater Mankato and Faribault, the two communities we serve in South Central Minnesota, that we are working towards strategies to help our community stay strong and our employers stay strong.

Doing that all makes it sustainable, but the real key to that is ownership and commitment to that work, helping the faculty and the staff understand how important it is for us to lead in those efforts. And what that has led to with the success of the grant, working with our faculty, helping them to understand their work, what that is going to mean for our communities and for their students and for the future, has helped us to now move the same work into other sectors within the college that makes it sustainable.

[MUSIC]

M: What are some of the other ways that the work you've done under the TAACCCT grant will be sustained in the future?

Annette Parker: Another effort that this grant has really supported is future grants that continue to support economic development, student success, and making sure our workforce remains competitive by working with our workforce centers and our community based organizations in our region we have been successful in really building strong partnerships that has led to the applications, two applications for America's Promise grants that will support both of our campuses through our workforce centers leading those efforts. And so we are excited about what that is going to mean for our students relative to affordability and success and getting into the workforce with life sustaining wages and careers. [13:34]

M: How have you worked to bridge the gap between for-credit and non-credit programs and how does this bridging help expand opportunities for a wide range of students?]

Annette Parker: We began early on in the strategic plan of looking at how we bridge the gap between credit and non-credit and recognizing all facets of where learning occurs and how do you measure learning in a valid way so that faculty could understand that by looking at it that way that they could award credit, whether it's learned at the workplace, out in the world, in our classrooms, or through corporate training. And so we have been very successful in bridging that gap so that it does not matter where that learning occurs.

Annette Parker: Then when we went to the grant we could also say, "Now we can help all 12 of the institutions understand that we have employers that are in northern Minnesota, that

they're in southern Minnesota, they're in the metro and they all need the same skillsets." So how can we bridge that gap from one institution to the other, which is quite frankly the game changer that will happen in Minnesota? And that is something that is sustainable beyond any grant. It helps make sure that our state stays strong, that the employers that live and work in the state of Minnesota can count on us to make sure that we're continuing to feed that pipeline of future workers, future community leaders for the future to make sure that Minnesota continues to be a prosperous state.

M: Close—Thank you to Annette Parker, President of South Central College in Minnesota. Stay tuned to additional conversations about the impact of TAACCCT with community college presidents in this podcast series. The Labor Department implements the TAACCCT program in partnership with the Department of Education. One point nine billion dollars (\$1.9 Billion) in grants were awarded under the TAACCCT program. For more information visit TAACCCT.org.

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