

# May 22 Podcast Transcript

Eloy: Hi, this is Eloy Ortiz Oakley, chancellor of the California Community Colleges, and you're listening to another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast.

Today, I have the pleasure of being joined by Monica Lozano, president and CEO of the College Futures Foundation. We're going to be talking with her about her role in California and the foundation's role as it looks at this current crisis and the impact that it's having on higher education. Also talk about her work, not only as a business leader but a higher education leader in focusing efforts of her organization on the challenges California faces with the equity gaps that existed in our systems for decades.

Now, this COVID-19 crisis has really upended our education systems, and it is likely driving us into yet another recession in California, which will undoubtedly have an impact on the inequalities that exist in our higher education system. So as California leaders look at the recovery from this crisis, the state's higher education systems need to be at the forefront, leading the way in creating new technologies, revitalizing our economy, and reinvigorating our precious workforce. And of course, the California Community Colleges will be front and center in that role, already serving an integral role in this process as the nation's largest provider of workforce training and the most expansive higher education system in the state.

So we know that we still have many challenges ahead of us with COVID-19. The future is definitely uncertain, but we have to go into this acknowledging the deep impact that this pandemic has already had on the state's college students and that the solutions needed in a near term need to support their success for the success of the state of California. So with that backdrop, I want to welcome our special guests, Monica Lozano.

Monica, welcome to the program.

Monica: Thank you, Eloy. It is such a pleasure to be with you and greatly admire the work that you're doing, leading the California Community Colleges.

Eloy: Well, thank you, Monica. And for our listeners, Monica Lozano is no stranger to California. She has a long legacy of leadership in California, as a business leader and certainly as a higher education leader. Before taking on the role of president and CEO of the College Futures Foundation, she spent many, many years on the UC Board of Regents and also served as the board's chair, so she is no stranger to California higher education.

Monica, let me get started by just asking you to talk a little bit about the College Futures Foundation. What is its mission? How do you see their role, not only before COVID-19 but as we recover? What are some of the things that you'd like to see the foundation do in the state of California, specifically as it relates to some of the equity gaps that you see in higher education?

Monica: Thanks for the question Eloy, and I'm glad that you prefaced it by actually referencing my position on the UC Board of Regents, the tenure, almost 15 years serving as a regent of the University of California. And I actually very purposely stepped down, although it's a 12-year term, you're appointed by the governor. I left the UC Board of Regents to take the position with College Futures because I have such a firm belief that philanthropy right now can play a very unique role in supporting educational equity and long-term systemic change that supports not one segment but supports the students of the state of California. And College Futures is very much focused on doing all of its work through the lens of educational equity. It focuses on student pathways. It is not thinking about what do the institutions need to be successful over time, but how should students be supported as they enter their educational journey. And we understand that that requires intersegmental collaboration. It requires us to be thinking about long-term systems change.

We come to this thinking about how do you actually scale up best practices. Many of the things that you're currently doing in the community colleges, bold, visionary leadership within the community colleges, we're seeing similar leadership at the CSU through their graduation initiative. How do you take what are discrete programs and actually scale them so that they're systematized and they are sustainable over time. And the most important thing is that they need to be, as I said earlier, student-centric. So if you come to this through an educational equity lens, if you think about the student journey and then you think about the relationships across the segments, that's really what drives the work of College Futures Foundation. And we think we can be supportive of the kind of institutional change that you and others like you are trying to do, in partnership with institutions, but also in partnership with campus leaders, in partnerships with external advocates and legislative policy makers.

So College Futures comes to this work with a 360-degree view of what does the state need long term to maintain its competitiveness; to ensure student, not just access, but persistence and completion; a deep focus on student success and outcomes; and then connecting that to the economic and labor force needs of the state long term. So College Futures is actually the only foundation of its kind that is statewide whose sole mission is that which I just described. And we come to this in partnership with institutions like yours and others across the state that are really trying to push this equity agenda forward.

Eloy: So let me talk about some of that partnership. Now, the College Futures Foundation recently joined with some of its partners back in April to launch the California College Students Emergency Fund, which was to provide emergency grants to high-need students in California. So I know in our system, we're very appreciative of that effort. It's sometimes rare when partners step up quickly and recognize the need of our students. But can you share a little bit about what these students that have been receiving this aid are experiencing and why it's so important to ensure that they have access to adequate support in the near term and the long term?

Monica: Well, you know this story better than I do, Eloy. As COVID hit, and all of a sudden, campuses were needing to take measures that were quite extreme, in many cases, shutting down, sending students back home. Students that had work study plans and, all of a sudden, you're no longer employed and so you've lost that income, you're sent back perhaps to where your family is and it might be in areas of the state that has very little connectivity. The issues of broadband became immediately apparent. We know that students, and you know this quite well, and College Futures actually supported a survey, a student expense survey that was done last year, that calculated that close to 60% of students in a 30-day period were either food or housing insecure across the state of California. Add to that the impact of COVID and the economic issues that you just raised in terms of, you know, three-plus million Californians out of work, a recession like we've never seen before.

So College Futures does not typically do direct student support. As I mentioned earlier, our work is really around systems change. But we saw what was happening on the ground and you can't be equity-minded and not just, you know, say we've got to do something. We need to stand up and support students in this great moment of need. And so in conversation with the systems leaders from the community colleges, the CSU, the UC, we took it upon ourselves to actually stand up the first and only emergency student support fund of its kind in the state of California, and we believe of its kind across the country.

And why is it so unique? Because we don't decide if it's going to go to the LA Community College District or someplace in the Central Valley or up in Northern County. It's going to be available to students from the community colleges, the CSU and the UC. Those students are the ones who have been hardest hit - so the lowest income students in California, those who don't have access to CARES federal stimulus money because they're undocumented, and students that were already housing-insecure or foster students. So those were the three primary targets.

We wanted to raise a lot more money because we know that the need is just, you know, enormous. And we set a goal for ourselves. We ended up raising... College Futures contributed \$1 million. We were able to, through partnership with other foundations, get that fund up to just under \$2.3 million, \$2.4 million, and we're giving \$500. If you meet those eligibility criteria, students get \$500. We call them hardship grants. And they can use it as they need. We're not going to tell them go buy a Chromebook. We're not going to tell them go spend it on transportation. It's student directed and it's what they have determined is going to keep them on the path to completion. So that was the only issue that we really wanted to double down on was this had to be about continuing your education.

And we know right now that, and you've seen the surveys that have come out recently, you know, the large number of students of color, low-income students that say, you know, this might just be too much. And they're actually, unfortunately, making decisions that, you know, maybe an educational pathway right now is not appropriate for them. So that's a long way to answer the question. We've given out the \$2.3 million, \$500 to the students that most needed it. We wished we could have done more, but very proud of the work.

But I will say one thing, Eloy, that was an emergency response to an emergency. But COVID and what it has...it has exacerbated the inequities that we knew were already in the system. And so that's where we want to pivot. That's where we think the state needs to pivot, and we need to take a longer-term view about how do we actually rebuild towards something that is more purposely designed to be equitable, to be resilient, and to support these students on their pathway, not just through education, but into the workforce.

Eloy: Right. So on that theme, I mean, obviously, you've just painted the picture. There's just so much need. The generous grants that were provided went quickly and we still see an enormous gap in the demand for resources and our ability to provide resources to students, particularly those attending our community colleges who are, in many ways, the most economically vulnerable and have been directly impacted by COVID. And even before COVID, they were already experienced in economic challenges. They were experiencing the challenges of paying for the total cost of their education and their basic needs.

So as we look ahead, in your estimation, how can the state prioritize equitable support? I know this is a tough issue to tackle, but I know that you and the College Futures Foundation have been thinking a lot about it. Are there vehicles like Cal Grant Reform or other finance reforms that we should think about to ensure that students can access the education that they need to enter or to re-enter the workforce, particularly as we move into an era of recession?

Monica: Yeah, that's a great question, Eloy, and this is one of the bodies of work that College Futures has really been exploring prior to the pandemic. Affordability is clearly one of the threshold issues and supporting students' basic needs, issues around total cost of attendance, the way in which the financial aid system is actually designed to frankly not support students like the ones that come through the community colleges because many of them are part-time students, many of them are adult students, don't qualify for much of the federal and California financial aid, and then you put that together with a recession of the type that we've never seen before. So we thought, at the end of last year going into this year, that there was opportunity to actually really double down on reforming financial aid in the state of California. And we actually called it modernizing it because it was designed for a student body of the past, not our current student body.

I still think, even with the economic challenges in front of us, there's an opportunity for us to continue to do things that will support the students like yours, especially because for California to recover from this recession, it needs a robust higher education system. It is one of the key ingredients for coming out of this stronger, healthier, and more able to maintain the kind of growth that we'd seen in the past.

So are there things that we can continue to do to simplify, to expand eligibility, to focus on the lowest-income students so that you reorganize who gets aid in a way that the students that, you know, most need it are the ones who are first in line for that? I still think there's opportunity to do those things. And as you know, California is fortunate to have a very strong statewide ecosystem of public policy and advocacy organizations, and they have clearly identified this as one of their longer-term priorities. So having said that, just around financial aid, it's going to be tough. But I think that, you know, there may be some things that we can get out of this.

More broadly speaking. You know, for those of us, you and I and others that have gone through other crises, whether it is what happened in 2008 or, you know, natural disasters, there is always a moment of reflection where you have to ask yourself, "How did that just happen? That the most vulnerable among us were the ones who were most dramatically disadvantaged?" And so if you start to dis-aggregate that data and you ask yourself those questions, it can point you in a direction where you actually do begin to redesign the system, more broadly speaking, and to redistribute resources so that they go towards the kinds of students supports that we were talking about earlier.

Every one of the segments, yours, the other public four-year institutions, they're going to have to take a step back and actually ask themselves, "How do I redeploy the resources I have so that they in fact are actually in support of the longer-term needs?" And I think what we're going to find is institutions are going to have to be more flexible. The courses are going to have to be portable. If students don't want to leave where they are right now and go back to a campus, can they actually stay where they are, enrolled as a community college student, but taking their courses on the campus of a four-year? How do you upgrade this online experience so that it's not remote teaching but it's actually distance learning? What sort of professional development is required?

So I think there's going to be a shifting of priorities that are going to be much more student-centered, hopefully more equity-minded, and that will, in some ways, be more efficient and allow students to move through in a way that, you know, they don't end up with undue burden, their time to degree is improved, and they're able to get into the workforce in a career of their choice that's going to give them long-term economic opportunity.

Eloy: Right. No, I mean, I certainly hope that we take the time to reflect and use this opportunity, use this crisis as a chance to reset and re-engage in what the future of higher education can and should look like in California. So speaking of California and the recovery in California, as we begin to hear the governor talk about those next steps, you were recently appointed to serve on Governor Newsom's Business and Jobs Recovery Task Force, of course, for your extensive experience in business as well as in higher education. So as one of the sole voices representing that higher education background on the task force, what do you think will be the key to ensuring that California's college students can continue to succeed through this COVID-19 recovery? And what can we do to support that recovery, to ensure that, you know, our most under-resourced students don't lose any more ground than they were already losing before this pandemic?

Monica: Yeah, thank you for that question, Eloy. It's a big question. Lots of parts to it. Let me just take a step back and talk about the governor's task force for a minute and then we'll put it in that context. And I'm obviously very honored to have been invited to serve on the task force. It's 96 individuals that represent the public sector, the private sector, what they call communities or philanthropy, NGOs, and government...labor, I'm sorry, so it's public, private, labor and philanthropy and nonprofits. And the composition is very deliberately multi-dimensional because an issue like the one that's facing California has to be approached thinking in terms of, you know, this sort of a multi-sector collaboration. Nobody can do it by themselves. That's very clear. The focus is what you just said, which is how do you... And I sometimes really don't

necessarily like the term "recover" because you don't want to go back to what you had before. This really is a reset moment, and that's the mission of this task force.

It's to think of it in the very near term -- how do you reopen, how do you deal with the pandemic and all the issues around public health -- the midterm, and the long term, so that, in fact, California is more resilient, is able to actually rebuild its economy in a way that's more equitable and greater inclusion and participation by all Californians. So the 96 are divided into sub-committees. My sub-committee is the Workforce Committee. We will meet for the first time next week. We will build off the work, I'm assuming, that the Commission for the Future of Work has done, which is to really understand, and you know this so well because the community colleges are, in many ways, the embodiment of what we look for in our educational systems.

And I've referenced the term community. California is such a large state. Each region has its own economic advantages and its own economic needs. And the role that institutions of higher education can play, not just across the state. I mean the work that the UC has been doing most recently in terms of research, its science, you know, the cutting-edge work that they're doing to identify the origins of this virus, I mean that is just exactly what a research university like the UC should be doing. The community colleges, deeply committed to local communities, understanding regional workforce needs, thinking about ways in which we can be more, what I call, employer-driven and making sure that the delivery matches the demand, and so you're actually building an economic underpinning that is sustainable over time. But having said that, we also want to make sure that the quality of the work leads to higher economic opportunity, not just for the employer but for the individual.

And that's where, frankly, and you're familiar with this, some of the work that we've started to identify and help to pilot in the Central Valley is precisely those sorts of workforce pathways that are built on the strengths of the local community colleges, identify whether it's, you know, advanced manufacturing, or green technology, or any other industry, that's important to local inclusive economic growth, and build that in unison between the community colleges, local employers, and the broader civic community. That's what I hope to bring to this governor's council, which is an awareness of how to actually build those linkages and to build off of all of the good work that we're doing, and to leave in place not just career technical education, not just training and upskilling, but a real dynamic model that allows for that to continue to be built upon, and that, like I said, rewards both employers and employees with dignified work that gives them an opportunity to succeed long term.

So I hope that answered your question.

Eloy: It's great. No, absolutely. So we will look forward to some of the work that comes out of the task force and again, hope that we can use this as a chance to reset, as you put it. So as we start to wrap up, first, I want to say I really appreciate your leadership in California, Monica, all your commitment that you've made, the commitment that you've made to higher education, we really have benefited from it. So as we close, I want to turn it to you. Is there anything that you'd like our listeners to know about the College Futures Foundation, the work that it's doing, and what you see sort of going forward into the future in terms of the leadership role that the foundation is planning on taking?

Monica: Thanks for asking that, Eloy, because I didn't go into our strategic plan and the various...

Eloy: That's another podcast.

Monica: Exactly. ...the various bodies of work that we have. I talk about movement building, and I talk about movement building as it relates to a reaffirmation by California to recognize and invest in our institutions of public higher education. Not because we want to just continue to direct money into organizations, but because this is about an investment in our people. And there is nothing more important to economic growth, to opportunity, than building human capital. And that's what education does. It actually gives people an opportunity that they otherwise may not have had.

And I worry that public higher education does not occupy the mind space that I think it deserves. And so we are about building influence and expanding this sense of commitment to public education precisely because it's integral to the long-term economic sustainability for the state of California. And for us to continue to be the great state that we are, we need to be in partnership with all of California as we reaffirm this commitment.

Eloy: Well, great. Well, on that note, thank you, Monica, for spending some time with us today.

Monica: Thank you very much, Eloy. I enjoyed it very much. Keep up the good work.

Eloy: All right, thank you. We will. And you have been listening to my conversation with Monica Lozano, president and CEO of the College Futures Foundation. And this has been another episode of the California Community



Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast. Thank you to our listeners. Thank you for being with us again and we will be back to you again shortly. Bye-bye.

Announcer: Be sure to join us for the next California Community Colleges podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.