



California Community Colleges

Transcription

California Community Colleges Podcast Episode 16 – Marshall Tuck

Eloy: Welcome. You're listening to another edition of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast. I'm Eloy Ortiz Oakley, chancellor of the California Community Colleges. And today, I'm joined by candidate for superintendent of public instruction, Mr. Marshall Tuck. Welcome, Marshall.

Marshall: Thanks so much for having me on, Chancellor, and thanks for focusing on K-12, and it's obviously so connected to the work you do in our community colleges. So appreciate you focusing on our kids.

Eloy: So, Marshall, thank you for being with us. It's hugely important that we hear from the candidates for superintendent of public instruction, since it is so closely tied to the work that we're doing in the community colleges. But first, for our listeners, for those who may not know what the superintendent of public instruction does, why don't you take a few moments and tell our viewers, from your point of view, what does the superintendent of public instruction do, why do you wanna do this job, and why is it important to the state of California?

Marshall: You know, I appreciate that question. Ultimately, the reason I wanna do this work is I believe that every single child in California deserves a quality education and really needs a quality education to have a chance at being the person they wanna be in the 21st century. You know, I believe that there's really not much more important to our communities than strong thriving public schools, and that belief comes from my upbringing. I was raised in a family of educators. My mom was a teacher. My grandma was a teacher. I went to public schools. I have a seven-year-old son that I send to public schools. So public schools have been really a key part of my life from day one, and it's been the vast majority of my career. You know, I got in education full time in 2002 and

have led 2 different public school systems in Los Angeles, all serving low-income kids, that first organization called Green Dot Public Schools, which ran a nonprofit organization running charter schools in Inglewood and South L.A. and East L.A.

And then I worked in district public schools and focused on turnaround efforts in the partnership for Los Angeles schools, which was a unique relationship between the former mayor of L.A. and the school district to turn around the most challenging schools in Los Angeles. And during that journey, we had significant success, the partnership for L.A. schools. Our graduation rates in 2008. When we first started working, there were 36%. They're 81% today, far more kids going to college, both community college and university, and completing college. But during that journey, I became convinced that, if we don't change the politics of education, we'll never educate all kids. And that's what ultimately led me to running for state superintendent in public instruction.

And as you mentioned, not the most well-known position in our state, but I think it's amongst the most important, because state superintendent is the only job where, every single day, you wake up and work on behalf of the 6.2 million kids that depend in our public schools, and the state superintendent runs the California Department of Education, which is really supposed to be serving and supporting our school districts, supposed to be the liaison between our K-12 system and our community college system and our university system, and really should be the advocate fighting and pushing for our students and their families in our communities every single day. But unfortunately, as you know, that's not the way this job has been running, and unfortunately, our state, even though our public schools are so important, we're not getting the job done right now in our public schools, you know.

As you and I are talking on this podcast, there are 6.2 million kids in public schools in the state of California, and over 3 million can't read and write at grade level. And I think we all have to think about what does that mean for their future in the most competitive economy in the history of humankind, where low-skilled jobs pay poverty wages. We can do better for our kids, and we need to drive change. And the work I've been doing for the last 16 years has been delivering strong results for our neediest kids and looking forward to working with you and others throughout the state to dramatically improve our public schools and bring real change to our public schools, because this current system just isn't working for all kids, and particularly, it's not working for our low-income kids.

Eloy: Well, thanks for that background and explanation, Marshall. And we appreciate you committing yourself to our kids here in the state of California. So you mention working with the California Community Colleges, and as you are probably aware, the California Community Colleges is comprised of, now, 115 colleges, and that's governed over 73 districts in the state of California. And we're driven upon the long-standing principle that higher education should be made available to everyone. And in recent years, we developed a vision for success, which is our guiding document for our system that outlines our goals for the future, things like improving access to higher education, increasing the number of transfer students, improving the amount of community college students who attain an associate's degree, a career certificate, or any other skill set for the success in the workforce, and as well as a very important goal, which is closing the achievement gaps that have existed and persisted in both the regions across the state and statewide.

So, as we look at the future, we're looking at a lot of research that's coming from all parts of the country that suggest that a high school diploma just is not enough any longer for a young adult to get a decent-paying job in today's workforce. So how do we get more high school graduates to complete a college credential, especially those low-income students and students of color, as well as those students in the rural communities that have not always been well-represented in higher education outcomes?

Marshall: Yeah, absolutely. So first, congratulations on your 115th community college. Excited by the initiative you've been leading and then governed or led around an online community college. I think it's a really good path forward and a good example of change and innovation in our schools. So I know that's something you were talking about, and I appreciate your leadership there and appreciate your leadership, as you mentioned, for our lowest income kids. Because, as you know, you've been doing this work for a long time, like I have, and we're not getting job done for our lowest income kids. And there are 60% of kids in public schools in our state now are low income, and they all qualify for [inaudible 00:06:05] lunch in our K-12 school system. And we need to do more for them, and that's been the work that I've done, really, for the last 16 years.

As I mentioned, my work has been in Inglewood and Watts in South L.A. And I think, when we think about how do we improve completion rates in terms of community colleges and our universities, it has to start with better preparation in K-12 and making sure that our young people have

the core skills to be successful. Because, as you mentioned, the economy requires more skills beyond just high school graduation today. 1972, only 28% of all jobs required post-secondary education. As you know, that number is above 60% today, and climbing. And so the question is, what do we do about that, and how do we make those changes? And I think it has to start at the K-12 level and really start at the pre-K-12 level, because, as you mentioned, our most disenfranchised communities that have the lowest achievement gaps, it really starts in pre-K, where wealthier families in the state have access to pre-K, and our low-income families do not. And so it's time for California to truly make sure all kids have access to pre-K.

When we get to our schools, you know, we should do some of the stuff that we did in the schools that I led, you know. Our schools were serving all kids of color, majority Latino, some African-American, all kids that were low income. We raised more money for our schools. We raised over \$100 million over a decade for the partnership schools to help our neediest kids have more support. We really invest in our teachers and principals to ensure that our young people of greatest need had consistent high-quality instruction from teachers and principals. We actually make sure our kids have the right courses. As you know quite well, a lot of our low-income kids, both urban and, you mentioned, rural, which is really important, they're not even offered the courses needed to get into college and be prepared as successfully as possible, either for a community college degree or for a four-year, or both.

And so we have to do comprehensive fundamental change at the K-12 level and the pre-K-12 level, because the system isn't working, and we need a lot more innovation, a lot more investment in our teachers and principals, and we gotta increase funding. And then some of the efforts that you're leading, I really love what you put forward in vision for success, and how do we make sure, when our young people go to our community colleges, they, one, need to be more prepared from pre-K-12, but two, they need to add more supports when they're in our community colleges. And I think a lot of the efforts that you're taking in terms of more mentorship, more counseling, more support for students when they are in their post-secondary education is just essential. I think the number is over 40% of students in our community colleges are first in their family to attend post-secondary. Like, that, they need support. And so I really applaud the efforts that you're doing and your leadership, but we have to fundamentally change our K-12 system. The status quo is not working. Get our kids better prepared and then give them additional supports in our community colleges and beyond.

Eloy: So, in your experience, Marshall, what has been working for students of color? Now, I know a lot of people will debate whether or not we should be doing anything different for any group of students, but the reality is that the largest percentage of our workforce is now Californians of color, whether they come from Latino backgrounds, African-American backgrounds, what have you, and they tend to be and have been the least represented in our higher educational outcomes. What have you seen works from your experience?

Marshall: Well, I think, to your point, we have to do something different for our children of color and our low-income kids. And we have massive achievement gaps that exist, particularly for our Latino students and African-American students, and we see those gaps at the K-12 level, where if you just take math, you have, you know, Asians at 73% proficient at math, Whites at 53%, our Latino students at 25%, and our African-American students at 19%. So when you have those kind of gaps at the K-12 level, you're just destined to have the significant gaps that you see at the post-secondary level. And so what changes can we make?

It starts, in my opinion, with the fact that, in our K-12 system, our low-income kids of color, they have less experienced teachers and principals that turnover much more often than wealthier kids, and that has to change right away. And as I mentioned, I've led schools for over 12 years, and the work we did, we prioritize making sure that our kids of color and our lowest income kids actually had high-quality teachers and principals at their school that stay to their schools. So we paid principals more to work in Watts and East L.A. and South L.A. and we gave them more support. And I also believe we have to differentiate compensation for teachers that are willing to come work in our low-income neighborhoods. We have to actually pay them more and give them more support, because they are more difficult jobs, because they usually require more time and more energy, given that our kids are coming into school further behind. And then we also have to have much more connection between our K-12 and our Health & Human Services, as well as, I think, our community college system and our Health & Human Services.

So we know our young people, kids of color, low-income kids, are coming in with more challenges that relates to what's going on in their communities, more challenges that relates to overall access to health care. Some of the schools that we led, we were able to bring health

clinics onto our campuses so that we're able to address both the academic needs of our kids but also the mental health and the overall health needs of our kids and provide comprehensive services. And that's another key thing that you've seen be successful, and it was one of the reasons that our schools had such great success getting more kids from historically really challenging schools going to post-secondary education. And then we have to continue those priorities in post-secondary, where some of the work that you're leading, we're really identifying those young people that are more at risk, making sure we're getting the right courses at the community college level and really getting the strong counseling and mentorship support during their journey so they can have success.

Eloy: And as you think about what you might do, should the voters, to make you the next superintendent of public instruction, how would you use the role of the SPI to create that connection with the community colleges, and specifically between the California Department of Education and the chancellor's office?

Marshall: So, one, I plan on talking a lot more with you, because I think you and I should be collaborating, and our team should be collaborating on a regular basis, because it's essential. Right now, our K-12 system and our community college system, while there's a lot of pockets of collaboration, I don't think are as connected as they should be. And I really think we should be thinking about, as a state, a pre-K through 16 system, right. It's all interconnected. And so, to me, step one, as state superintendent, is I'd like to work with you, also work with our university leaders on how do we put in place a pre-K through 16 data system. California, the technology capital of the world, is one of a handful of states that doesn't actually have one system in place so we can truly see the pathways for each of our students from kindergarten all the way through community college. And so I look forward to working very closely with you on that.

Secondly, I look forward to working with you, and appreciate the work you have done in terms of changing how we think about placement tests and admissions and really lining up more the community college curriculum with the high school curriculum in our K-12 system. And I think that the more aligned the curriculum is, the more our teachers and administrators are talking with each other, the better it's gonna be for kids. And I think we always have to remember that, you know, every single decision that we are making should be about what's best for our kids. And the current system, which isn't working, doesn't always

prioritize our kids with every decision. Oftentimes, we prioritize adult interest versus kid interest. And so I think that, really, much more articulation between our high schools, and particularly with our community colleges, is essential, both in terms of curriculum and in terms of collaboration amongst the administrators and teachers. And if we really do that and step up, then our kids, they'll soar.

You've seen and I've seen it in our career. You know, we both work with a lot of wonderful kids, with some really challenging circumstances. And when the system really steps up for them, embraces them, puts our kids first, they'll be successful. But right now, in California, we have a lot of work to do, and it's time for us to make sure we have educators who have led this work before helping to lead the charge for our kids.

Eloy: Right. So let's talk a little bit more about admissions, and you brought up placement exams. And certainly, the community colleges have been doing a lot here in California and throughout the nation, to move away from standardized placement exams, which we have seen through data collected across the country that shows how those tests disproportionately impact low-income students and students of color. But there's another series of tests that have similar results, but we continue to hang on to them, and that's the SAT and the ACT. And, you know, the superintendent of public instruction is also an ex officio member of the University of California Board of Regents, as well as the Cal State University Board of Trustees. So you have an important role in communicating how students move from high school to the universities. So given the data that really shines a spotlight on the SAT and the ACT, it's really being more about student's family's wealth rather than whether or not they are truly prepared for college. What things do you think we can do to move away from those standardized admissions exams?

Marshall: Well, I think you mentioned it, that we can't have our university systems relying too much on one standardized test. You know, I think there's a role to play for the SAT and the ACT, but, as you mentioned, if that is really being utilized as the top priority criteria, that just doesn't take any consideration to the fact that a lot of young people didn't get the extra tutoring, because they're not coming from homes where they get SAT tutors. It doesn't take in the fact that a lot of our low-income kids, the kids I work with throughout my career, have jobs every day, because they gotta help actually make sure the family has a dollar. It doesn't take in the fact that a lot of young people have a lot of trauma in their neighborhoods. And so I think we have to look at admission systems that, you know, certainly utilize standardized test as a criterion

and a factor but don't make that the, you know, priority factor or the only factor. But I also think it's important to recognize that the biggest issue for getting our young people of color into our universities is the fact that we're not preparing them at the K-12 level. In California right now, only 1 out of every 10 African-American males that starts in 9th grade graduates high school with the courses necessary to go to UC or Cal State. I mean, it's just unacceptable.

And, as I mentioned, you know, I've led schools. We went, in 2008, to the most challenging schools in Los Angeles, and over half of our kids weren't even being offered college prep classes. So I certainly think we have work to do on how we think about admissions at the university level, but the bigger issue for this state is to recognize that our K-12 system has not been preparing our African-American and Latino students, for decades, to even give them a chance to get into college. And my top priority as state superintendent is gonna be, really, to shift the inequities to make sure our young people have access to those courses, have access to the teachers and principals they need. That's what we did in the schools that I led. That's what we're able to dramatically increase our graduation rates. And I think that's the most important thing we can do, in terms of really shifting getting more and more young kids of color into our universities, is to make sure they're being prepared at K-12, and right now, the majority of them are not. And that's why this system needs to change, and that's why I'm running for state superintendent.

Eloy: Thanks for that, Marshall. So let's talk about another group of students. This group of students has been in the news a lot, since 2016, and that is our undocumented students. California has certainly stepped up and made clear to the federal government that we value our undocumented students and we want to ensure that we provide access to quality public education for them, so that they can continue to contribute to our communities and to our state. As superintendent of public instruction, how would you engage with this engage, and how would you work with the other segments of public education to support undocumented students?

Marshall: Yeah, I would engage very directly to support our undocumented students as well as possible. The good news about me is that I'm an educator. I'm not a politician. I've done this work for a long time. So people can look at my record and see the work I've done, which really leads up to what I plan to do. And my work in education has almost entirely been in Los Angeles, and in East L.A., in South L.A., in

Inglewood. And all of our schools had, you know, large populations of undocumented students. So this is an issue I'm quite familiar with and have been working closely on, really, since 2002. And, you know, in the early years, it ranged from us scrambling to try to find, you know, raise money for our students who are undocumented, who graduated, to be able to actually go to college and pay for college, which we did a lot of. It came to, at times, helping to find legal help for our undocumented students. And also, you know, in the early days, we hired, when I was at Green Dot Public Schools, we hired a person on our team to really focus, an incredible leader, Alma Marquez, to focus on how do we maybe make some changes at the policy level to better support our undocumented youth, and this was well over a decade ago.

And so you can see, throughout my career, I've been fighting aggressively to ensure that our undocumented students have safe environments to learn in, have environments that are high quality, to make sure they are getting the right instruction and the right supports that they deserve, to make sure that we are absolutely fighting back on anybody who is trying to make it difficult for undocumented students to learn. And then, obviously, we all collectively, I think, have to keep pushing, in Washington, D.C. in particular, to see if we can win and make DACA permanent as fast as possible. It just doesn't make sense that we haven't actually ensured that our young people who came here, that they need to be able to stay here and that that law needs to change. And then we obviously gotta work on larger longer-term immigration reform. But what you'll see from me as a state superintendent, and you've seen this throughout my career, is somebody who fights every single day to ensure our undocumented students are safe, that they actually get the education that they deserve. Because we shouldn't forget, it's not just about keeping them safe in our schools, it's about ensuring they actually have a chance to be successful long term. And it's also really fighting to make policy changes long term, while in the short term giving them the chance to finish a quality level of high school, go to post-secondary education, and have a chance to be who they wanna be.

And so I'm a strong advocate in this area, my record shows it, and we're gonna keep pushing for our young people to ensure every single child, whether they're undocumented or documented, whether they are high income or high poverty, every single child gets what they deserve, which is a quality public education. And right now, our state is not delivering on that promise, and I plan to be a part of changing that, and I look forward to working with you and others to keep moving forward. We have to do

better for our kids. That's why we need change in public schools, and that's what I plan on focusing on.

Eloy: As we wrap up, let's talk about our teachers. Obviously, and for many reasons, they are key to our student success. And we have been working with both K-12 and the CSU system, as well as our private independent nonprofit colleges and universities, to improve the teacher education pipeline, especially in those regions of the state where we see teacher shortages. So, as superintendent of public instruction, how would you suggest that we create a stronger teacher education pipeline?

Marshall: Yeah. I think this needs to be our number one priority in our public schools, because there's nothing more important to a child's success in school that a school really has control over than the teacher in front of that child and the principal supporting those teachers. You know, there's just nothing more important, and yet we don't treat our teachers that way. You know, as you mentioned, we have a teacher shortage in the state, because we don't pay our teachers enough, we don't support our teachers enough. We give them way too many kind of rules and bureaucracy to follow rather than letting them be creative and innovative. And we need to fundamentally change how we think about teachers and supporting teachers. And so that will be a top priority for me, as you've heard throughout this podcast. I usually start with instruction and teachers when talking about improving our schools. So, to me, step one is I'd like to see us actually give scholarships to anyone who wants to commit to teach for five years or more. Let's pay for their college for free and have them commit to teach, and basically give them no interest loans that are waived if they teach for five years, and certainly prioritizing that, first and foremost, in our low-income neighborhoods, in our subjects that are tougher to staff, like math and science. and special education, and bilingual. So we have to prioritize that.

Secondly, over time, we've got to find a way to pay teachers more. I think we need to look at our teacher training programs, ensuring that our teachers are getting the supports they need, so they have a chance to be successful. I'd like to see more of the curriculum for teacher training pushed in the undergrad and have that fifth year be a residency year, where a teacher, you know, new teachers learning from experienced high-quality teacher for a year before teaching on their own. Because we gotta both increase compensation for teachers and increase supports for our teachers.

And, you know, the last thing I'll say here, because we've talked a lot about our low-income kids that had been most left behind, you know, we're in a state right now where our kids of color, in general, have less experienced teachers that turn over more often than our wealthier students. And that absolutely has to change. If we're gonna educate all kids, that will be a top priority of mine. And as I mentioned earlier, that's about, one, I think we should compensate teachers more that work in our needier schools, and two, we need to support them more to make sure we have a more stable teaching force in front of our kids. But when you bring it back, you know, schools are all about how do we maximize support in our teachers so they can maximize their impact on our kids. And that's been a priority for every school system that I've led over the last 15 years, and it's gonna be my priority as state superintendent. Because all kids deserve quality instruction, and our teachers deserve our support and our help to make them be as successful as possible.

Eloy: That's great to hear. So, as we close, Marshall, I wanna turn it over to you and give you a minute or two, just to tell our listeners who is Marshall Tuck and why should they consider you as the next superintendent of public instruction for the great state of California.

Marshall: You know, I'm somebody who believes deeply in public schools. And as I mentioned, I was raised in a household of teachers. I believe strongly that, particularly in the 21st century, for a child to truly be who he or she wants to be and have a chance at a really successful life, they have to have a quality education. And I really believe our public schools are the foundation of our communities. But right now, our state just has not treated them that way, and California has not prioritized our public schools, and it has not prioritized our neediest kids. And we need to change that. And we can educate every child. We know we can do it, because we've all seen really good schools. Eloy, you and I both work with so many young people that have overcome incredible odds, because we've supported them and believed in them. And our students really step up when we believe in them and we step up for them. And so it's time for real change in our public schools.

I've led two school systems over the last 15 years, two public school systems. I'm an educator in this race. This position really should be the top education official. It shouldn't be held by a politician. And I'm an educator and not a politician. I am somebody who has actually done the work and delivered results in the past. As I mentioned, I helped create 10 new public schools, 8 of those 10 schools all serving kids of color

recognized by U.S. News & World Report amongst the best high schools in the country. I then led the turnaround of 18 public schools in Los Angeles. We had the highest improvement of any school system in the state, double graduation rates as a school system. I've seen what's possible for our kids. We can get it done. And we need to make sure that we're all working together, and we have to prioritize our kids first, no matter what.

So I think this election is pretty straightforward. I think if people believe we need real change in our public schools, that we need an educator who has delivered results, then they should get behind my campaign. And if, you know, folks believe the current system is working pretty well, then there's another candidate for them. But, you know, our kids need...they need us to do better, and they all deserve great education. And that's what I look forward, to bring in my expertise and passion to do whatever I can to put every single child first in every decision and give them the education they deserve.

Eloy: Well, thank you, Marshall. You have been listening to another edition of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast. I've been joined by candidate for superintendent of public instruction, Mr. Marshall Tuck. Thanks again for joining us, Marshall.

Marshall: Thanks a lot for having me. I appreciate it.

Eloy: All right. We will see you all again soon. Thank you for listening.

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