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America's College Promise: An Opportunity We Can't Afford to Ignore

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What if every student, nationwide, who desired a college education and was willing to do the hard work necessary to earn a degree, was given the opportunity to do so?

That is exactly what The America's College Promise Campaign is aiming to accomplish: debt-free tuition at community colleges for responsible students who have demonstrated academic success. The future of this movement is looking bright, as several states, beginning with Tennessee and its Tennessee Promise, as well as several initiatives including the recent introduction of the America's College Promise Act of 2015 in the U.S. Congress, are moving this issue to the forefront. As a result, we need to encourage a solid commitment, at all levels, to making college just as universal as



Though some colleges, like Miami-Dade, have already put scholarship programs into place to create access for low-income students, it's time for programs like America's College Promise to bring that mentality to the national scale.

high school.

The goals of the College Promise are to help more Americans meet the

knowledge and skills demands of a growing global economy, without assuming decades of debt. Our

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nation needs community colleges and universities to increase our number of college graduates so that America can benefit from a competent and committed workforce. It is within our power to regain the world's top position in educational attainment.

The premise of America's College Promise has already been implemented with success at Miami-Dade College, where we have provided more than 10,000 high-performing and mostly low-income students with the American Dream Scholarship since its 2010 inception. Also, since 2002, MDC's Honors College has provided thousands of eligible students with the Honors College Fellows Award, covering the cost of in-state tuition and books.

America's College Promise will allow MDC, and other colleges and universities across the nation, to do even more for bright, responsible students. Opportunity truly pulses through MDC's heartbeat. The tuition-free programs we have implemented thus far have

made great inroads in student accessibility, affordability and completion, but we can't afford to stop here. We need to do more. We need positive momentum, and we need to start at the local level to make gains state- and nation-wide.

I know we are up against an enormous challenge, but this is a challenge we are equipped and prepared to tackle. The benefits of this increased investment in higher education will extend to students, to businesses, to our economy, and to society as a whole. We will all benefit from a more educated citizenry.

Community colleges remain the key to upward mobility, and we must continue to help responsible students who struggle financially to fund their educational dreams. Tuition is not the sole barrier to completion, but it is a large one that America's College Promise can remove from the equation. Providing debt-free community college to responsible students could potentially grant access to an additional nine million students across the country who dream of

attending college, but are hindered by financial restraints.

We can no longer rest on our laurels. We must provide greater accessibility and affordability to college students. We can all agree that a high school diploma is no longer the golden ticket that can lead Americans to productive, rewarding lives. Tomorrow's jobs demand a college education. Miami Dade College has accepted the challenge, and we are ready to help make the dream of a college education a reality for every responsible student who desires one.

The EvoLLLution is an online newspaper dedicated to non-traditional higher education. It is the brainchild of **Destiny Solutions**, a company that creates software for universities and colleges to help them successfully attract, manage and maintain their non-traditional students.