

# TLSD Conference keynote speaker discusses attaining equity in higher education

WORCESTER — Quinsigamond Community College was host to the 2021 Teaching, Learning, and Student Development (TLSD) Conference earlier this month. This year's conference was held virtually with over 1,000 attendees from all 15 Massachusetts Community Colleges in attendance. The main focus of the Conference was the disparities students of color face in the higher education system.

"This is a time where we have reached a crossroad in our nation and as educators we can lead the discussion on systemic racism and bridge the gap that divides our nation," said QCC President Luis G. Pedraja, Ph.D.

The event featured keynote speaker Danette Howard, Ph.D., Senior Vice President & Chief Policy Officer for the Lumina Foundation, and offered attendees 36 breakout sessions, access to teaching resources, as well as live questions and answers periods with speakers and presenters.

"COVID-19 has exposed inequities across our state, and it has been made clear that we in higher education must look in the mirror and be willing to change the way we do

business," said Carlos E. Santiago, Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education.

Keynote Speaker Dr. Howard has spent the bulk of her career improving and increasing student access and success in postsecondary education. She oversees several of the Lumina Foundation's key strategies to increase Americans' attainment of high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials, including strategic work in both state and federal policy and efforts to leverage states as the drivers of credential attainment. She also leads the Foundation's Equity First efforts to embed racial equity and justice in all aspects of Lumina's strategic work and operations.

"Most of us are still reeling from 2020. It seems the ground is still shifting beneath our feet," Dr. Howard said, noting the nation was dealing with two pandemics — the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's reckoning of the sordid history of racism.

During her keynote, Dr. Howard addressed the disproportionate way in which the COVID-19 virus affected communities of color, devastating those

already struggling to survive. When the pandemic struck and colleges and universities went to 100 percent virtual learning, inequities in these communities widened, as many students were without broadband access and depended upon smartphone connectivity for access to their courses. She suggested it might be time to consider broadband access, "in the same way we think of electricity and water."

Additionally, with today's students representing 42 percent people of color, 40 percent working full-time, 37 percent non-traditional students 25 years of age or older, and 40 percent attending community college, there is a need for an equity lens to be used in higher education that honors students' lived experiences.

"These students need to be identified and supported," Dr. Howard said.

When it comes to overall educational attainment (associate degree or higher), Massachusetts exceeded the national average (61.6 vs. 51.9 percent), yet it lags behind in short-term credentials, which are of particular benefit to under-served communities.

"What could community colleges be

doing to lean into the need to have short-term credentials?" she posed.

Another area Dr. Howard addressed as a way toward equity is assisting the thousands of adult learners who started college but never finished. In Massachusetts alone, 636,015 people have some college credit but no degree.

"How do we put a strategy and plan in place to target this population?" she asked.

In 2020, the Lumina Foundation recognized Massachusetts as one of five states that have demonstrated a commitment to improve higher education attainment for students of color.

"The nation is watching Massachusetts with great interest to see what you do with equity," Dr. Howard said, adding, "Justice is achieved when the underlying policies, practices and root causes of inequitable outcomes are eliminated."

For more information about QCC, contact Josh Martin, Director of Institutional Communications at 508-854-7513 or jmartin@qcc.mass.edu.

## Tips for planting blueberries

A trip to the produce aisle at a local grocery store can unveil a host of healthy additions to anyone's diet. Such a jaunt also can raise eyebrows, as produce, particularly organic fruits and vegetables, can be very expensive. Consumers may feel helpless to corral the cost of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, but all hope should not be lost. That's especially so for people willing to give gardening a try.

Blueberries are one of the healthiest foods people can eat. The USDA

National Nutrient Database notes that blueberries, which are low in calories and high in fiber, are great sources of the vitamins C, K and B6. However, organic blueberries can be among the most expensive foods in the produce aisle. Various factors, including where blueberries come from and whether or not they're organic, dictate their cost. But it's not uncommon to pay roughly \$4 for a six-ounce package of organic blueberries. For some, such costs are prohibitive.

Growing blueberries in a home garden can save blueberry lovers substantial amounts of money while ensuring they reap all of the benefits of this highly nutritious and edible berry. The following are some tips novices can employ as they plant their first batch of blueberries.

- Consult a local garden center. The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council recommends consulting a local garden center before planting blueberries. The professionals at such centers can re-

commend the best variety of blueberry to plant. That's an important first step, as the USHBC notes that farmers cultivate dozens of varieties of highbush blueberries across North America. Lowbush varieties also may be a gardener's best option depending on where he or she lives. A local garden center can help you determine which variety best suits your local climate.

- Plant where there is ample sun and

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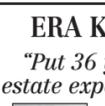
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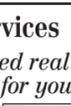
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