

McCurdy brings a new day at Baltimore City Community College

By: TIM CURTIS

Job No. 1 for Debra L. McCurdy will be restoring confidence in Baltimore City Community College.

McCurdy, who took over the presidency of the college this month, sees her role as improving communications and instilling confidence both within the institution and externally.

"We can no longer be a sleepy two-year institution where we expect that everyone will deliver for us and we have not put all of the effort and energy in the delivery back into the community," she said. "I think people will see a new level of effort and engagement."

McCurdy is the first president of the college appointed since the state legislature overhauled its board. Legislation passed in 2017 tasked the new board, led by Kurt Schmoke, former mayor and University of Baltimore president, with focusing on making the community college more relevant to businesses and attractive to city students.

Baltimore's community college is unique among the state's community colleges in that it is a state entity, not under the control of its local jurisdiction like other two-year institutions.

The realignment plan under the new board has created a direction for McCurdy to take the institution. She called it a "clean slate" for the college.

"I think the big challenge is already looking at a number of areas that have to be strengthened, renewed, enhanced, realigned and put in place," she said. "I think the opportunities, though, are probably similar that when you come in and you have an opportunity to reinvent yourself."

A 2016 study by the University of Baltimore Schaefer Center for Public Policy found that the college struggles to meet the needs of city residents and businesses,

is not financially sustainable, frustrates local businesses and drives city students to community colleges in Baltimore County even though courses are more expensive there.

The college under McCurdy hopes to change some of those perceptions. Already, a city initiative grants free tuition to city high school graduates.

McCurdy said the next step is making the college an attractive place for them. It is important for students, faculty and staff that the college become their first choice.

"I think we just stand ready to be a very different place wherever our students are, wherever many have chosen to go. I think this is the opportunity for us to work together internally to strengthen all of our procedures, our practices, our outreach," she said. "Wherever those students are, it's our responsibility to go get them."

The college also has to improve its relationship with the city's businesses so it can become a place they turn to to grow their workforce.

McCurdy envisions the college stepping in to help fill needed positions in the STEM, health sciences and technical fields.

"I think the workforce side of what we provide in terms of the workforce opportunities for our students, I think we would provide a great deal to many of the business and the corporate community where there are so many shortages," she said.

McCurdy comes to the college with a reputation as someone with experience improving institutions. She previously served as president of Rhodes State College in Lima, Ohio, where she was credited with growing its associate degree offerings.

She was also an architect of enrollment growth at Georgia Perimeter College, where she served as provost. While



Dr. Debra L. McCurdy, president of Baltimore City Community College. (Submitted photo)

McCurdy was there, enrollment nearly quadrupled.

Dawn Kirstaetter, the college's vice president of advancement and strategic partnerships, said McCurdy is not afraid of making the changes necessary to improve the college.

"There's been a lot of leadership changes over the years, a lack of stability and all of the legislative challenges we've had leading to reform with our board, not just once but twice," Kirstaetter said. "We are coming in knowing there is a need for change."

With all of that change, McCurdy wants to make it known that she is not hoping to make quick fixes that don't achieve lasting improvements at the college.

"I'm here for the long haul," she said. "I'm here for the heavy lifting. I intend to be front and central. I am not an absentee landlord. I will be both an internal and external president."