

Testimony to U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee

Chairman Kline, Representative Grijalva, Representative Salmon, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk on behalf of Pima Community College. Along with nine other community college districts in Arizona and the more than 1,100 community colleges in the United States, we work every day to help students achieve their academic and career goals.

Today I want to talk about the important role that federal investment in education plays in helping PCC prepare students for jobs and careers in the 21st century. Tucson, PCC's home, is the sixth-poorest of its size in the U.S. Increasing our competitiveness in an unforgiving economy is a top priority. But because of globalization and technological advances, we know we're up against firms from across the U.S. around the world.

The approximately \$46 million investment that the federal government makes in PCC helps us achieve multiple goals, particularly improving student retention, engaging underserved communities, and meeting the needs of area business and industry.

Recently, PCC was awarded two grants to help adult learners transition into the workforce. Each grant contains an element that requires us to engage the private sector. In 2010, Pima secured a five-year grant to

provide education and services to low-income individuals so that they could enter the fast-growing healthcare sector in a variety of professions, including health information technicians, licensed practical nurses, and community health advisors. PCC has aligned with a key partner, Pima County One Stop, which provides Workforce Investment Act-funded services to nearly 4,000 job-seekers.

More than 1,000 people have enrolled in the HPOG program to date, with 210 of these formerly jobless men and women finding employment in the healthcare industry at an average wage of \$11.84 an hour.

Similarly, the first three years of our participation in the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program, better known as TAACCCT, has been extremely successful. As part of a community college consortium in Arizona, PCC prepares students for skilled, high-wage jobs in the energy industry. This program is geared to helping military veterans and other adult learners. Working in partnership with the local utility, the Tucson Electric Power Company, we have developed an Electrical Utility Technology certificate, and will be adding an associate's degree concentration as well.

Tucson Electric Power or its subsidiaries have hired 63 percent of the 50 students taking part in the program. We are working with Southwest Gas Corporation to develop a similar program in the gas industry.

Regarding student retention, many PCC students are of extremely modest means who often are the first in the family to attend college. PCC strives to keep its tuition low, but the reality is these students cannot afford to attend college without federal financial aid, including Pell Grants.

The number of PCC student receiving Pell Grants has declined from more than 16,000 in 2011 to about 10,000 this year. PCC is joining with the American Association of Community Colleges in asking that Congress reinstate the Year-Round Pell Grant, which will increase student success in summer classes, as well as the Ability to Benefit requirement, and the 18-semester cap on eligibility. The average age of a PCC student is 27; many are balancing work and family obligations while attending school part-time. Making these changes in Pell eligibility will help our students as they piece together the credits they need to reach their educational goal.

Regarding engaging underserved populations, Tucson is home to about 80,000 to 100,000 adults who lack a high school credential. These men and women will face hard lives, as you know, marked by chronic unemployment and an ongoing need for various types of government assistance I'm proud to say that PCC Adult Education, the second-largest provider of Adult Education services in the state, has helped Arizona achieve a No. 2 national ranking in the success of Adult Education students. PCC Adult Ed serves more than 6,100 students a year. The high school equivalencies these women and men earn give them a chance to climb the economic ladder. Also, PCC is developing new contextualized learning initiatives that integrate Adult Basic Education with occupational skills training, so that the student is put on the fast track to a postsecondary credential.

Pima Community College is committed to aligning its curriculum and services with the needs of industry to keep the talent pipeline filled with workers who have the skills business needs now and in the future. Each of the College's more than 120 occupational programs is assisted by an advisory committee composed of representatives of from local business who can provide us with real-time, ground-level insights regarding industry needs and emerging trends. These insights result in real change in our programs. For example, we are working with a consortium of more than three dozen area manufacturers to alter our Machine Tool

Technology curriculum so it meets National Institute for Metalworking Skills certification standards, and aligns with high school Joint Technical Education District curriculum. Also we are working to establish a Business Intelligence Competency Center that will give us the ability to sift through mounds of data to recognize patterns, detect trends and unearth opportunities. A robust Business Intelligence tool would allow Pima to better align its resources with other entities in the community to further economic development of the region.

I would like to conclude with the words from Andy Grove, the founder of the computer chip maker Intel, who coined the phrase “strategic inflection point” to describe a time of profound change, risk and opportunity. The United States is at a strategic inflection point as it seeks to retool its economy for the 21st century. Education remains a key element in achieving that goal. The federal government’s investment in PCC helps us assist students as they seek to gain the education they need for the middle-skill jobs that will form the core of our economic recovery. Maintaining federal funding levels to federal student aid programs, to Adult Education and Literacy programs, and to workforce development programs is crucial for Pima Community College to keep the talent pipeline filled with motivated, capable employees. The return on the federal government’s continued investment in the next generation of workers has been and will continue to be tangible. For individuals, it

results in entry into the middle class. For our nation, it provides the backbone of stable, prosperous communities and gives meaning to the words, “The American Dream.”