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### Dr. Jill Biden: What's happening in community college classrooms is 'extraordinary'

March 28, 2012

By Bonnie Schultz, for NewsWorks

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Dr. Jill Biden and Deputy Secretary of Labor Seth Harris were part of a roundtable discussion Wednesday at Mercer County Community College to address the importance of employer partnership programs through the nation's community colleges.

All you need to do is take the first step. Community colleges help you and guide you, to a better future.

-- Dr. Jill Biden

Representatives from five of New Jersey's 19 community colleges discussed how the programs continue to provide students with training for high-demand careers.

MCCC President Dr. Patricia C. Donohue started the discussion by reminding everyone that Dr. Biden herself is a community college teacher and that she knows "our story, so that when you share it, we know our story is really there."

"In her bag are English papers from her students that she has to grade, because she taught yesterday and has to teach again tomorrow...so this comes from the heart and she is your spokesperson," Deputy Secretary of Labor Harris told the panel.



Dr. Jill Biden is joined at Mercer County Community College by MCCC President Dr. Patricia C. Donohue and Deputy Secretary of Labor Seth Harris. (Bonnie Schultz/for NewsWorks)

Harris mentioned President Obama's recent State of the Union address, where the President set a goal of training two million workers through community college employer partnerships. He mentioned that the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Community College Career and Grant Training Program will make strategic investments of \$2 billion over four years in community colleges that partner with local employers.

"For the last 18 years I've seen the power of community colleges to change lives. I've seen moms juggling jobs and child care, launch themselves into new careers.... I've seen people in their 40s and 50s who've been out of work so long that they've nearly given up hope, and now they finally get that second chance. I've seen what has happened in community college classrooms, and it's extraordinary," Dr. Biden said.

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Raoul Momo, co-owner of the nearby Terra Momo Restaurant Group, which operates four New Jersey restaurants, is no stranger to the MCCC employer partnership programs.

"Having the opportunity to connect the students to the real world, that is so valuable and so needed in America," Momo said.

"We've been in business for 30 years. To have a successful restaurant, there are so many skills that you need...we find ourselves teaching people and as a small business, it's very difficult to do that."

Momo said his company hired graduates from "fancy, top notch, New York City, very impressive" culinary schools, but when they came to work for him, his response was "what did they teach you there?"

Frank Caponi, a graduate from MCCC Culinary Arts program, is now a sous chef at Mediterra, one of the restaurants operated by the Terra Momo Restaurant Group.

"The classes at MCCC are wonderful," said Caponi, "my teachers taught me everything from textbook to real world, food costs to how to talk to employees at the restaurants."

Caponi described the culinary arts program as one of the best in the state and maybe even in the country.

"All you need to do is take the first step. Community colleges help you and guide you to a better future," Dr. Biden told the audience.

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