**Remarks: Covid 19 and Impact on Education and Child Care**

**Thanks to the Covid 19 Forum Planning Committee for assembling this series.**

**This forum along with our recent series called UNT Dallas Responds are examples of our commitment to provoke thought and action during this remarkable time.**

**At UNT Dallas, we are proud of our growing role in the educational ecosystem of metro urban Dallas.**

**Most of you know that we have been officially listed by the state as the fastest growing of Texas’ 38 public universities in percentage increase. Last fall our enrollment surged over 4,00o.**

**More significantly even, is that since 2015, our number of graduates has risen from 475 to nearly 900 during our last cycle – that’s nearly a 90 percent increase in just 5 years.**

**We’re scaling as no other university in North Texas, and we’re doing it by focusing on students from the Dallas ISD, the inner ring suburban districts and Dallas College. We welcome students from anywhere, but 95 percent come from this urban suburban landscape.**

**No other university is anywhere near as local as UNT Dallas. We are unabashedly local.**

**Most of our students are first generation college students, they work, and they are ambitious to improve their circumstances through educational attainment. We are a pathway to social and economic mobility.**

**A few years ago, I invited the dean of admissions at Harvard to speak at our May commencement.**

**I called him, knowing that like many of our students, he had grown up in poverty, and had risen up and made a meaningful life for himself and his family through education.**

**I told him about our boisterous commencements. 500 grads. 5000 plus extended family in the mega church pews having a loud and wonderful celebration for our mostly first- generation graduates.**

**Mega church, he asked me, I’ve never set foot in a mega church.**

**Well come on down, I said. And he did. We had a great time bonding with him. And our grads appreciated that he made the effort and he clearly appreciated our students difficult journey.**

**What he said that night is instructive to our topic today.**

**While he has done an admirable job diversifying Harvard’s student body, it’s no secret that his graduates mostly go off to elite professional and graduate schools, consulting firms, investment banks or the Silicon Valley.**

**Harvard remains a place for the privileged few, regardless of background.**

**UNT Dallas grads, on the other hand, typically go out into some of North Texas’ highest need jobs: bilingual teachers, police officers, health care workers, accountants, mental health counselors and more.**

**We’re also sending grads to medical school and to prestigious grad schools like Columbia and Johns Hopkins, and those students are coming from our urban metro Dallas recruitment area.**

**Local students for local careers. We like to say.**

**The reality is that the Harvards of the world are not going to solve the growing educational disparities gap in America.**

**The reality is that the gap is going to be closed by our community colleges - like Dallas College - and regional four year universities - like UNT Dallas -working in tandem with school districts, foundations and industry to increase the college going population.**

**Just as Chancellor Joe May works closely with us at UNT Dallas, and we work together with him and we both work closely with Dr. Michael Hinojosa of the Dallas ISD to provide opportunity for an increasingly diverse student population. This is a rich and significant mission.**

**Joe’s students look like our students and our students look like Michael’s students.**

**We are all proud of our diversity.**

**Not since the Gilded Age in the 1880s has our nation been so divided by wealth, by the haves and the have nots.**

**The creation of high schools more than 100 years ago helped close the attainment gap then, but the challenges of today’s disparities require more. More partnerships, more collective action, a deeper awakening to what is happening with so many young people being left behind.**

**A year ago May, Texas graduated 330,000 seniors, the second most in the nation, second only to California. The difference being that Texas’ numbers continue to grow and should reach nearly 360,000 grads in a few years, while California’s numbers are stuck around 400,000.**

**But you know what, 160,000 of those grads last year did not enroll in any kind of post- secondary program. Those 160,000, by the way, equals the total number of graduates in Florida, our 4th most populous state.**

**In too many cases, we are eating our seed corn by not connecting with this student, and it must stop.**

**Make no mistake, our vision has never been clearer at UNT Dallas: through educational attainment, we provide our students with a pathway to socioeconomic mobility.**

**And most of us on this call know America lags the developed world in economic mobility. No longer is it a given that the newest generation will do better than the last.**

**And if you’re stuck in a cycle of poverty, it’s even harder to escape to a better life.**

**Don’t believe anyone who tells you a bachelor’s degree doesn’t make a life altering positive difference.**

**The national statistics a very clear on this. Not only do career earnings skyrocket with a bachelor’s degree, so does life expectancy and quality of life.**

**Just a few years ago, a Nobel laureate in economics found that the “deaths of despair” in this country – suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse – are overwhelmingly hitting the less educated among us and have risen alarmingly fast since the mid-1990s.**

**This is a crisis of monumental proportions. And it was coursing through the arteries of America way before this pandemic, way before our commercial stability was shaken in these last few months.**

**You can see the consequences already in unemployment claims between those with degrees and those without:**

* **75 percent of Dallas County claims came from individuals without a post secondary credential.**
* **If you had some college but no degree, you were in the same boat as a high school grad.**

**And the only way to stop it is to double down and get closer to the other side of our divided cities and make a difference.**

**Partner with the Child Poverty Action Lab. Big Thought. Dallas College. Local school districts. The Commit partnership. United Way. UNT Dallas.**

**There is a way out, and you can’t get from here to there without hope and determination.**

**Today in Dallas County – amid all the wealth, glitter and canyons of skyscrapers – only 5 of 20 early earners between the ages of 25 and 34 earn a living wage of $50,000 a year or more. If you are Black or Latinx, the numbers are 4 of 20 and 3 of 20 respectively.**

**How do you attack this huge equity mismatch, where whites between 25 and 34 are three times more likely to earn a living wage than their Black or Latinx counterparts?**

**Joe May, Michael Hinojosa and I were invited to be a part 20 person collective action steering committee brought together by the Commit partnership and the Dallas Regional Chamber. I’m pleased to say the recommendations of the steering committee have turned into a massive action plan for Dallas County.**

**The plan, called Dallas Thrives, will be announced any day now with a plan to double living wage jobs for 25-34 year olds in a single generation.**

**It calls for a unified and massive commitment to dramatically enhance the workforce pipeline for young adults.**

**For businesses: they need to step up there engagements with local schools and talent development.**

**For educators: integrate more career experiences and programming into your curriculum.**

**For policymakers: design policies to reduce barriers and incentivize desired behaviors.**

**And for Community Leaders: close the gaps and level the playing field for all students.**

**This is why UNT Dallas is such a dedicated partner with Dallas College, the Dallas ISD and our industry associates.**

**The days of universities operating in an ivory towers, isolated in self interest, are long gone.**

**As both a minority serving institution, and a Hispanic serving institution, with the largest blended diversity of any public 4-year university in Texas, UNT Dallas believes it is helping to prepare the next generation of leadership in our state.**

**Just as Dallas College is, just as Dallas ISD is, just as Big Thought is, because we are a young state and with 70 percent of our 17 and under population being Latinx or African-American.**

**That makes us America’s most diverse state for young people.**

**There is too much on the line. Too much at stake to help this next generation soar and lead.**