On April 29, 2009, a wave of excitement swept through the community college world. President Obama had just nominated Dr. Martha Kanter as Under Secretary of Education – the highest-ranking role for higher ed. within the Department of Education.

Across the country many people were just getting to know her name, but in California we knew her then and now as a powerful force ... A force that deeply believes in our students, particularly those who are the most vulnerable, and that her work gives substance to that conviction.

My introductory remarks for Martha Kanter will touch on three recurring themes central to her work that were in evidence as early as the ninth grade, maybe even sooner, and continue now with the College Promise – Equity, Innovation, and Accountability.

**Equity**

Dr. Kanter’s enduring commitment to equity began early. The oldest of five, a young Martha saw very early in life that the playing field is not level while she was teaching reading to third graders at a local “Settlement House” in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Coming of age in the civil rights era, addressing inequity became a lifelong journey for Dr. Kanter.

Martha Kanter pioneered early equity work in California’s community colleges, creating spaces for students to learn and grow. One of the many examples.....In 1977, she established the first program for students with learning disabilities at San Jose City College.

**Innovation**

On a personal note, as a rookie administrator in Oregon in the early 2000s, I was inspired by, and closely tracked, her innovative work as she galvanized efforts to leverage technology to advance student achievement and learning. A vocal proponent of open educational resources, Kanter has always been an innovator seeking to improve affordability, access and achievement of higher education.

Our ACCJC standards call for leaders to promote innovation. Standard IV.A.1 reads, in part:

> Institutional leaders create and encourage innovation leading to institutional excellence.

Dr. Kanter’s work exemplifies the letter and spirit of this standard – encouraging innovation leading to institutional excellence.
Today, she credits the interrelationships among poverty, race, income and education as what drives her to innovate and improve our systems for all students through the *College Promise* campaign.

**Accountability**

One central way that Dr. Kanter has given substance to conviction has been her focus on accountability and outcomes.

During her tenure and at the height of the financial crisis, Pell Grant funding more than doubled, providing millions more low-income students with opportunity for higher education.

She has navigated with skill the often-rocky terrain between practice and policy to address institutional responsibility for not just access, but completion.

While opening doors for students, she also boosted student achievement and preparing students for quality employment through an ambitious completion agenda.

**Closing**

Dr. Kanter carries the conviction that education is not only an economic imperative but more fundamentally a civic imperative, that education is necessary to individual freedom, and essential to a healthy society and a vibrant democracy.

When asked to introduce Dr. Kanter, I found myself looking for the best way to very quickly capture the essence of her leadership, courage, and vision. What I ended up with is a kind of rapid gesture sketch, a blend of comparisons to current and legendary figures:

- the unwavering commitment to our democracy of a Lincoln, or a maybe a Jefferson,
- but with lines of intensity, intelligence and creativity of a Steve Jobs wanting a world that was more accessible, efficient, and beautiful,
- and a few pragmatic dashes of Angela Merkel’s fondness for policy and civic responsibility in a healthy society,
- all taking shape with gracious lines of Michelle Obama’s charisma and ability to inspire an entire generation to care and to act,

My dear community college colleagues, I am honored to introduce to you the one and only Martha Kanter!