It is my pleasure to welcome my colleagues to another new and exciting year in the history of Wayne County Community College District. I am appreciative of all members of the team who assisted in planning for the 7th Annual District-Wide Conference Day.

This is another very special day for the WCCCD family as we come together to celebrate our theme “Student Success: Everybody’s Responsibility.” I want to thank each of you for the contribution you have made to the success of our students as well as the businesses and communities that we serve. Whether you are a member of the Board of Trustees, a faculty member, a member of an office staff, a technician, a custodian or a maintenance person, or an administrator, your work is very important to “student success.” I would also like to recognize our friends and colleagues from our sister colleges.

Today I believe the essential question is this:

*How best can we mobilize our skills – and those of our co-workers – so that all of us will remain current today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow?*

Our theme “Student Success: Everybody’s Responsibility” reminded me of a beautiful statement that caught my imagination and reads as follows:

*It’s common to say that trees come from seeds. But how could a tiny seed create such a huge tree? Seeds do not contain the resources needed to grow a tree. These must come from the medium or environment within which the tree grows. But the seed does provide something that is*
crucial: A place where the whole of the tree starts to form. As resources such as water and nutrients are drawn in, the seed organizes the process that generates growth. In a sense, the seed is a gateway through which the future possibility of the living tree emerges.

So then, is WCCCD not the gateway to the future for the thousands and thousands of people that we empower to achieve their career, academic or other life goals?

So you see, we must be concerned with how to nurture the minds of persons of all ages, including those of the younger generation who will become the citizens, workers, and leaders of tomorrow.

Now let’s talk about change. For example, what about the pros and cons of different pedagogies? What if our current practices are not working? Are we educating students who are?

• Literates,

• Immersed in the Arts,

• Tolerant of Immigrants, and others who are different than themselves, and

• Skilled at conflict resolution.

No group can remain isolated from the rest of the world. Respect for those from different racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds becomes essential rather than a polite option. The world of the future will demand capacities that, until now, have been mere options.

An unknown individual said, “Change is inevitable. Progress is optional.” None of us asked to be born at this time in history, but here we are. We are the first generation of people capable of destroying the world, and we may be the last generation that can save it. Much will depend on how we educate our people. Education is that important, and the future is coming at warp speed. There is no place to hide.

Forget the status quo. It is a ticket for becoming obsolete. There is no more business as usual.
The challenge is clear. As individuals and as an institution, we cannot be frozen in time. Instead we need to see ourselves as works in progress. Unless we lead the progress toward WCCCD’s best future, based on an emphasis on student success, we will become irrelevant and society will invent a new open door of educational opportunity.

We must embrace change and innovation, in spite of our heavy workloads.

Before I welcome our speaker, I will share a story. It is a story that I constantly embrace in my own professional and personal journey. The story is from a book titled Secret Place.

“On the island of Jersey, in the English Channel, stands an old stone building. It has withstood the ravages of time, even though much of the cliff on which it was built has been worn away by the water and storms of the passing centuries.

The walls of the building are made of stones of all sizes and every member of the community contributed at least one stone – the best he or she could carry. The Master Builder used them all. And they are there to this day. The rocks brought by the men have their place in the foundation. Stones, large and small are there, and even pebbles that mothers had placed in the tiny hands of the babies are there.

That old building stands as a symbol of what an institution can be in a community – each person and worker being an essential living stone. We are needed, and the Master Builder has a place for each of us.”

While this story is about an old building, it is apropos for the Wayne County Community College District. Everyone here represent a living stone in this beautiful edifice called WCCCD. Each of us, and whoever else comes to us, enriches the District and the individual campuses by becoming an instrument for progress in the quest for student success. It is everybody’s business.

Speaking of everybody’s business, our speaker, Dr. Bill Cosby, has this to say: “No matter your economic status, no matter your age, no matter your race, no matter your gender, and no matter your religion, we are all allies in changing our future for the better.”
Dr. Cosby cares about Detroit. In speaking about Detroit’s large population of people in poverty he said, “When I come back and come back and come back, I’m making a statement that this is for real. You’re about to listen, absorb and to challenge yourself to move in a positive direction. Strength, that’s what we’re after.”

In his most recent book, *Come On People, On the Path from Victims to Victors*, he has this to say about Community Colleges:

- He says, God bless the community college! In our experience, the community college provides a safe harbor for those who blew off high school and veered off course.

- He says, the front door of this institution welcomes you like your own personal Statue of Liberty – give us your slow starters, your late bloomers, your high school dropouts, your born-again victors.

- He says, to become a victor you have to have a calling, and a community college is a great place to find one.

- He says, if you haven’t graduated from anything, if you quit in the third grade, if you can’t read – community college is waiting for you.

The following quote from Dr. Cosby goes directly to what we are focusing on here today:

- A great virtue of the community college system is that students can go there and be guided by a real human being. Someone will talk to them about their interests and their goals.

In my experience, no one gives what Dr. Bill Cosby gives. He gives his energy, his passion and his presence to this cause that is so crucial to the well-being of our communities. No one needs to be introduced to Dr. Cosby. Instead, it is an honor and a pleasure for me to welcome my friend, our friend, Dr. Bill Cosby to WCCCD as our District-Wide Conference Day keynote speaker.