



February 2, 2018
James O. Sawyer IV, Ed.D.
Inaugural Address

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for joining us today. It is a testament to the amazing impact of Macomb Community College that we are hosting such a broad cross section of the community, including Macomb Community College's current board of trustees; former board members; university and college delegates; Macomb students, faculty and staff; elected officials; community and business leaders; and friends of the college.

To the faculty and staff, I am very appreciative of your work and support over the last 15 years. I am fortunate to work with such an accomplished and dedicated group of professionals.

I offer special thanks to Macomb's most recent past presidents, Dr. Al Lorenzo and Dr. Jim Jacobs, who are with us today. Please join me in recognizing both of these great leaders. I have had the good fortune to work with and learn from both. Their distinctive legacies continue to positively impact the trajectory of the college and the community.

I would also like to thank my family for their continued and unwavering support. I would not be the person I am today without you.

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I want to start out by being completely honest with you and admit that I was really uncomfortable with the idea of holding this inauguration.

I have lived in Macomb County since 1976, when my family moved from northwest Detroit to Sterling Heights. I graduated from Utica High School. The majority of my family and friends reside here in Macomb County.

I love this community. There is something special about the people that live in Macomb County. We are not afraid of – and in fact — embrace hard work. We are focused on maintaining our commitments, supporting our families and building our communities.

In Macomb County, it's not about seeking the limelight or credit or creating a stir; it's about getting the job done. People here are authentic – we are who we are and we do not make excuses for anyone.

Which goes back to my discomfort at holding an inauguration. But, after much feedback from both staff and community members, I came to appreciate that this is a milestone for the college. It marks a point in time in which we are undergoing a transition to our next phase of evolution. And, it provides the college with the opportunity to celebrate our students, faculty and staff for the great work they have done, and to reaffirm their commitment to extending that to the future.

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How do I feel about being president of Macomb? Words that come to mind include thankful, appreciative, privileged, awestruck, humbled...and lucky. However, if I had to pick one word – I would choose honored. It is truly an honor to serve this institution, our students, our staff and the community.

When I joined the college in 2002, I can safely say I never imagined being president. In fact, I thought I would spend a couple of years at Macomb and then return to industry. My previous employer, New Haven Foundry, had abruptly closed, leaving about 400 of us without work. Initially, I was unemployed for a few months and then was fortunate to be re-hired by the former owner to perform due diligence as he pursued other potential acquisitions.

This period of time made a significant impact on me. Up to that point, I had had a great professional life with continued career progress. And, then I learned first hand that bad things can happen to good people. Good people can be negatively impacted due to a situation out of their control. It deepened my

sense of empathy, made me appreciate my personal network of support and helped shape me for the better.

It only took a short time at the college to become enamored with the students, faculty and staff. I found talented colleagues committed to inspiring and supporting students. I found playing a role in helping students achieve their potential is immensely gratifying. And, I found a lot of good people dealing with circumstances beyond their control who turned to Macomb Community College to help position themselves and their families for a better future.

I still have a hard time believing that this is where my career has taken me. But, I can think of no better purpose than inspiring potential, fostering success and transforming lives.

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Macomb Community College is a vital asset for the community. With more than 180,000 alumni, virtually everyone in the county has either attended Macomb or knows someone who has.

Macomb provides affordable and accessible education and training that connects residents to workplace and economic opportunity. Macomb connects college programs to industry needs, helping sustain and grow local business, and stimulating economic development. And, Macomb connects residents to enrichment opportunities that supplement educational objectives, span generations and enrich community life.

As you likely know, Macomb is open to all who aspire to a college credential. Some of our students rely on Macomb as a high-quality yet affordable alternative to their first two years of a bachelor degree. Others turn to the college for career preparation programs – such as nursing – which directly link them to meaningful workplace opportunities. We have some students who come to the college only to take specific classes, whether to help them with their job or simply for personal enrichment. And there are others who have been displaced from the workforce and are retraining to gain in-demand skills.

We have nearly 20,000 students in degree programs and another 15,000 individuals in workforce and continuing education programs.

So, what more can we do?

Education has always been important. But today's reality is that education is an essential factor in moving our residents and community along the path to economic vitality. As a result, we must engage with and effectively support the post-secondary credential completion of a greater percentage of our residents than ever before. Credential attainment is not only important for personal growth and success, a highly skilled workforce as evidenced by credentials earned by community members is important for business attraction and economic development.

We know that high quality programs, affordability and access alone doesn't automatically translate into success.

We are looking closely at who are students are and what they need to be successful – whether their plans are to transfer to pursue a bachelor's degree, to complete a career preparation program or to retrain to build skills and regain a strong foothold in today's workplace and economy.

For many of our students that means we have to address barriers and obstacles that have the ability to hold them back from taking advantage of education and training that can position them for success.

While we have highly prepared students who enroll at Macomb, we also have those who are not ready to perform college-level work when they first arrive on campus.

More than 70 percent of our students attend part time because they have other obligations which may involve supporting a family, and a significant number of them face barriers and obstacles outside the classroom that can curtail their ability to attend school.

I'm committed to continue working with Macomb's talented faculty and staff in developing meaningful resources and support to help students overcome these barriers that sometimes interfere with their goals. We've made a good start in enhancing student success, including:

- Integrating a guided pathways approach that helps students make good choices about a program early in their college career and provides a clear road map of courses and offers ongoing support,
- Establishing Reading and Writing Studios that help students at all levels effectively address these foundational skills that are critical to academic success and to be a engaged citizen
- Deepening existing relationships with our K-12 and university partners to enhance educational pathways that allow our residents to reach their educational goals efficiently by minimizing duplication and loss of credits. The college is part of an education continuum and it is essential all educators at all levels work together for the good of our students, the community and society in general.

We will continue to innovate, while maintaining the agility to address change and to create relevant learning experiences that enable more students to advance.

Macomb County residents rely on Macomb Community College as an indispensable resource for education, enrichment and economic development. I am committed to this institution, and I am committed to this community. I know that through the dedication and talent of the college's faculty and staff, along with community's steadfast support, Macomb Community College will continue to help our resident and community move along the path of economic vitality.

I thank you all for your support and partnership. We appreciate you joining us today to celebrate and recommit to Macomb Community College's future.

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