



## **An interview with Dr. Paula P. Pando, President of Reynolds Community College.**

### **What does equity mean to you?**

When I think of equity, I think about fairness. It means a society in which every person can achieve their full potential, and fully participate in the American Dream.

### **What does Equity Through Action look like?**

*Equity Through Action* is about intentionally focusing time, energy, effort, and resources on the things that actually help move us forward in addressing social and economic mobility. Dialogue is important. It is an important foundation that identifies the issues and opportunities to be addressed. But without action and without resources, dialogue alone becomes a collection of words. Priorities are articulated by words, but those priorities are truly demonstrated by how we spend our time and money.

### **What role does education play in the health of an individual?**

Education and policy play crucial roles in health. There is a vast and growing body of research that makes very clear that education is a fundamental social determinant of health. People with an education – a degree or credential of high quality – are less likely to be unemployed, more likely to work full-time, have a rewarding and fulfilling job, and earn higher income. As such, health improves because they have a greater sense of control over their own lives, higher levels of social support, and control over their well-being, including access to quality medical care. Evidence of this in Richmond: residents living in neighborhoods with low levels of educational attainment have an average life expectancy of 63 years; in neighborhoods where educational attainment is the highest, life expectancy is 83 years. It is for this reason, Reynolds Community College is opening a new site in Richmond's east end. We believe our mission demands an intentional commitment to serving people who want good jobs and economic security, but have lacked avenues to the education that provides them.

### **What do you think is a big opportunity for Richmond?**

Opportunity is defined as a set of circumstances that make it possible to do something. I believe that the region is unified in addressing issues of equity, social and economic mobility, and justice. The stars seem to be aligning in Richmond in a meaningful way. I have met with countless thought leaders and practitioners in virtually every sector – business, education, philanthropy, faith-based, community, public service, etc. You can feel the synergy in not just

the conversations, but more importantly in the partnerships and coalitions being formed that are mobilizing to elevate the entire region. Demographics do not have to equal destiny. I am a living example of that, as a kid who grew up having very little. That beginning did not dictate my trajectory in life, nor should it for anyone else.

**What has delighted you most in your first year in Richmond?**

If Richmond's biggest opportunity is common purpose, its biggest asset is its people. What has delighted me most in my first year here is exactly that – meeting its people; their warmth, their generosity, and their love of this city. My family and I feel so blessed to be part of this community.

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Dr. Paula P. Pando serves as the fourth president of J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. She assumed office in September of 2018. Dr. Pando is a strategic, forward-thinking educator with nearly 25 years of experience in both public and private higher education. The daughter of immigrants, she was the first in her family to earn a college degree. She is fluent in both Spanish and English and has a profound commitment to educational opportunity and equity.