

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HEARINGS ON PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA'S PLAN TO MAKE COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE: A BETTER BARGIN FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS.

THE PARENT INSTITUTE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION (PIQE), VICE PRESIDENT OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PATRICIA MAYER OCHOA TESTIFIES

CSU DOMINUEZ HILLS, November 14, 2013– PIQE Vice President of Program Development Patricia Mayer Ochoa spoke to the U.S. Department of Education during a hearing with under Secretary Kanter, and Deputy under Secretary Studley in regards to the president's plan to make college more accessible, affordable, and attainable for all American families on Nov. 6, 2013.

Key Points Addressed:

The creation of tools that will help students and parents get the information they need when shopping for colleges. PIQE recommends that the President's plan be inclusive to tools that are accessible and understandable for communities that do not speak English and first generation students whose parents do not understand in many cases an intimidating system.

The proposal of funding colleges according to performance- PIQE urges the President's plan to not create a performance-based system that results in unintended consequences.

During her testimony, Mayer was applauded and commended for her statements on behalf of PIQE and the families it represents. The hearing took place in the Student Union Center located on the CSU Dominguez Hills campus. This is the first of a series of hearings planned by the U.S. Department of Education.

PIQE is committed to Student Success and Creating a College Going Culture.

The following is Mayer's complete testimony:

Good afternoon, under Secretary Kanter, and Deputy under Secretary Studley, my name is Paty Mayer, I am the Vice President of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). Let me first express my appreciation for the opportunity to testify and share our feedback to the administration as you pursue the President's initiative. The Parent Institute for Quality Education is a statewide non-profit organization whose primary mission for the past 25 years has been to provide low-income and immigrant parents with the tools and information they need to send their children to college. We have graduated over 550,000 in 16 different languages from a rigorous nine-week training course where they learned how to access resources, what questions to ask and how to put their children on the path to college. This course is offered at no cost to the parents and independent studies have demonstrated that students whose parents take our course achieve higher high school graduation and college entry rates.

In short, our mission is to make sure that families, who traditionally do not see college as attainable, after graduating from our course, not only understand the benefit of getting a college degree, but are now equipped with the understanding to make it happen for their children.

I want to limit my comment to two main areas:

The first one is about the creation of tools that will help students and parents get the information they need when shopping for colleges. We want to applaud the President's initiative to create tools that provide information that is understandable and comprehensible. I would like to encourage you to make sure that those tools are also accessible and understandable for communities that do not speak English, first generation students whose parents do not understand the system and actually find it very intimidating. We in PIQE have found that in particular low-income and Latino parents are intimidated by debt. When they don't have access to information about the many financial aid options, they don't even dare to dream. We encourage you to make this information and these tools available in multiple languages and be very intentional about targeting underrepresented communities, as early as middle school. We urge you to embark in a massive information campaign directed to low-income communities who might not have access to online resources.

The second area deals with the proposal of funding colleges according to performance. We agree with the idea that colleges that are effectively providing access and quality education to underrepresented communities should be rewarded.

As you consider how to do that, we urge to ensure that you do not create a performance based system that results in unintended consequences. For example: We should not reward colleges that improve student performance by merely skimming of the top and becoming more exclusive in their selection process. Many public universities, as part of their mission are committed to provide an opportunity to students who may not come with the highest GPA and/or the most rigorous course work. In fact, many of these students may need remedial education in order to succeed in college. You would not want to punish colleges who have taken on the greater challenge of giving access to traditional underrepresented students, who have different learning needs than other college student population. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that many students, who come from underrepresented backgrounds and low-income households, face difficult economic pressures and family circumstances that can lead them to temporarily interrupting or delay their studies along the way in order to provide for their families. College, universities and community colleges, which welcome these students and support them, should be rewarded, even if students follow a different and longer path to graduation.

In closing, we agree that what works should be rewarded, but what works may look different depending on the student population that you are serving, and we encourage you to continue to taking testimony from parents and students that come from underrepresented communities like the ones PIQE serves. We are looking forward to the opportunity to have you meet some our parents tonight and find out more about their experiences and continue our dialogue.

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ABOUT PIQE: PIQE's mission: We are committed to connect families, schools and community as partners to advance the education of every child through parent engagement. PIQE is a California statewide and national 501(c) (3) community-based organization dedicated to innovative educational reform by informing and motivating low-income and immigrant parents to become knowledgeable about how to navigate the school system and seek the educational opportunities available for their children. Since its inception in 1987, PIQE has graduated more than 550,000 parents and impacted the social and educational development of over 1.5 million children.