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**HISTORIC CELEBRATION FOR FIRST-EVER L.A. COLLEGE PROMISE GRADUATES**

LOS ANGELES—The first-ever graduating class of students who enrolled in the Los Angeles Community College District’s L.A. College Promise Program were honored this week in a special ceremony featuring Los Angeles **Mayor Eric Garcetti**, **LACCD Chancellor Francisco Rodriguez**, Ph.D., **California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley** and many other civic and educational leaders who gathered to highlight the historic occasion.

More than 150 students, together with about 500 family members, friends and other invited guests, also heard from LACCD Board of Trustees member Scott Svonkin; Monica Garcia, President of the Los Angeles Unified School District’s Board of Education, and Dr. William Covino, President of California State University, Los Angeles, where the special program was held at the University’s Luckman Fine Arts Complex Theater.

Student guest testimonial at the event was provided by Llisela Mateo, from Los Angeles Harbor College. She and the other College Promise students at the ceremony will officially graduate at their colleges’ commencement ceremonies on June 4.

Mayor Garcetti, who provided a 19-minute keynote address, said the event filled him “with joy, with pride, and above all, with hope.” He reminded the students that the L.A. College Promise program, which first began with them in 2017, has now helped put them into a position where they can achieve anything they want to pursue.

“Be fearless, be humble, be a good listener and lead with love,” Garcetti told them. “We need your grit. We need your hope,” he said, adding he hopes their achievements will also help improve Los Angeles.

The event marked a significant milestone for the L.A. College Promise Program that LACCD launched more than two years ago with support from Mayor Garcetti, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the City’s philanthropic community, other civic leaders and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

The LACCD program, [www.lacollegepromise.org](http://www.lacollegepromise.org), is creating a college-going culture that seeks to help underserved and economically challenged families and students who previously felt a college education was unobtainable. The program provides free tuition, priority registration and other academic counseling services to all first-time, full-time, first-year students entering any of LACCD’s nine colleges throughout Los Angeles County.

“The L.A. College Promise Program is working exactly as it was envisioned,” Chancellor Rodriguez said. “Students are enrolling in record numbers from high school and they are completing or transferring to four-year universities in two years.”

Now in its second year, the program currently includes about 10,000 students (both first- and second-year students) who are enrolled in LACCD colleges throughout Los Angeles County. About 72 percent are Latinx and more than 80 percent are considered low-income based on financial aid application information.

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Since the program began, full-time enrollment of LAUSD graduates as first-time LACCD college students has increased by 54 percent. Next week, about 500 students will be part of the first-ever cohort to officially graduate on June 4, with most transferring to a four-year college or university of their choice.

Program participants are also eligible for special internship opportunities with the Mayor's Office and can apply for sponsored overseas travel opportunities through the Mayor's Young Ambassador program, <https://www.lamayor.org/mayor%E2%80%99s-young-ambassador-program>. Earlier this year, Mayor Garcetti also announced a partnership with the Annenberg Foundation and the Foundation for the Los Angeles Community Colleges that will provide free laptops to all Promise students entering the program beginning with the Fall 2019.

Chancellor Rodriguez congratulated the students at the ceremony and told them that they "are the pride and the promise of our community." Quoting from Archbishop Oscar Romero, he urged students to use their education for careers that will allow them to "aspire not to have more, but to be more." He also reminded students that "those who know more, must do more" to improve our society.

State Community Colleges Chancellor Oakley echoed the comments, telling students the future is wide open for them, and working together, they can help change the world. Trustee Svonkin, who was LACCD Board President in 2017 when the program began, thanked Garcetti for his leadership and determination to make the program a national model.

"Without your help we could not have answered the call from President Obama to increase the number of college graduates and we did," Svonkin told the audience.

Current LACCD President Mike Fong also offered his thanks to Mayor Garcetti for his commitment to the L.A. College Promise Program.

"Thank you Mayor Garcetti for your steadfast leadership and support of the District and our students. The great partnership you have created between the City and the District for this program is making Los Angeles a true City of Graduates," Fong said.

The L.A. College Promise program also helped spur legislation, AB 19, by California Assemblymember Miguel Santiago, to provide first-year tuition at all California community colleges as well as new, follow-up legislation, AB 2, also by Santiago, <https://a53.asmdc.org/>, that he announced with Mayor Garcetti last December to expand free tuition to two full years. California Gov. Gavin Newsom has since announced his support of free, two-year tuition at the state's community colleges by designating funding for the program in his proposed budget.

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#### **About the Los Angeles Community College District**

LACCD ([www.laccd.edu](http://www.laccd.edu)) is the nation's largest community college district, educating about 250,000 students annually at its nine colleges that serve the residents of more than 36 cities and communities from 900 square miles of Los Angeles County. Since 1969, the District has been providing an important learning pathway for students seeking transfer to four-year colleges or universities while also offering two-year degrees and certificated training programs to Southern California's diverse workforce in many specialized trades and professions. Follow us on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/LACCD>, @LACCD, and on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/laccd> @laccd and Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/laccd\\_edu/](https://www.instagram.com/laccd_edu/) @laccd\_edu.

#### **Members of the Board**

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**GROUP PHOTO ON STAGE: VIP SPEAKERS AT HISTORIC L.A. COLLEGE PROMISE CELEBRATION INCLUDE, FROM LEFT, California State University, Los Angeles President William A. Covino; California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley; Los Angeles Community College District Chancellor Francisco C. Rodriguez, Ph.D.; Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti; LACCD Board of Trustee Scott Svonkin; Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education President Mónica García and LACCD Dean for Student Success Deborah Harrington.  
(Credit: LACCD/ Gary Leonard)**



**STUDENT SPEAKER: Student Testimonial Speaker Llisela Mateo from Los Angeles Harbor College addresses crowd at historic celebration (NOTE: name is spelled correctly as “Llisela Mateo”)  
(Credit: LACCD/ Gary Leonard)**



(Credit: LACCD/ Gary Leonard)