

December 7, 2014

Members of the Search Committee
Collin Community College District
(Submitted electronically)

RE: Application for District President

To Whom It May Concern:

With the longevity of President Israel and the extraordinary record of his and the Board's leadership and vision, Collin College today is an exemplar institution. Dedicated to the core mission of teaching and learning and already connected to every part of its broader community, Collin College works well for the economic benefit of the entire region. As written in the search materials, the next president does indeed have large boots to fill. With this firmly in mind, I approach my application to serve as the next district president of Collin College with humility. I appreciate your consideration.

In nearly three decades serving in higher education at every level, it has been my incredible good fortune to work with gifted and insightful leaders – people of heart, passion, savvy, intelligence, and compassion. I have been privileged to contribute and often shape well thought out policies that have lead to successful and measurable outcomes in student success, recruitment, and retention. Those mentors and successes have shaped my work ethic and passion for student success. Moreover, it has instilled within me a strong drive to create sustainable opportunities for those served by our community colleges. The life changing pathways that community colleges provide are not just my passion but also the back- story of my own life. Growing up in Orange, Texas and coming from middle class roots, I have been personally transformed by my own educational journey. For that reason, serving students who come to us for their “on ramp” to a better life resonates in my heart and soul. Working purposefully to provide seamless delivery of services enabling students to realize their individual goals energizes me. Doing so in a manner that promotes transparency, inclusion, and honest buy in followed by world-class execution that yields clear results emphasizes my work style.

Part of the attraction and the challenge to leadership in a community college environment is the wide spectrum of students we are charged to serve. Ranging from honors and transfer programs to professional and technical training to developmental and adult basic education, community colleges cut across all socioeconomic levels at a comparably low cost point. Part of the joy that feeds my passion is weaving these multiple missions and activities into a seamless whole that is part of a vibrant, college-bound community. Doing so in concert with the needs of business and industry and fueling local and state economic development opportunities is a true value-add mission.

In my career, I have a history of positive relationships with stakeholders from within the campus community to the state house. I have been privileged to teach full time for seven

years and additionally as a lecturer at a number of institutions. Having served as the president of a nearly 16,000 student campus, I know the demands and challenges of a comprehensive community college and working collaboratively within a region. When in Illinois working under a board comprised of legislated members along with governor's appointments, we formed a new entity under the aegis of the Board of Higher Education to serve all of education. This new entity, the Illinois Century Network, in its first four years brought Illinois from forty-ninth to first in the nation in educational technology according to independent national reports. Given that the board was comprised largely of stakeholders with a far range of visions, my work took on a whole new dimension in diplomacy and creation of a shared vision. In every leadership role I have undertaken, my commitment to diversity was clearly evidenced by the hires and composition of the workforce that resulted.

Allow me now to briefly address each of Collin College's Strategic Goals and provide examples of relevant past efforts:

Improve academic success by implementing strategies for completion: I spoke to my passion for finding real solutions for developmental education in my Educational and Leadership Philosophy submission. I referenced Gallup's recent findings regarding student motivation. When I arrived as president of San Jacinto College Central I was told by the chancellor and members of the Board that the campus, albeit the original and flagship campus, was the anchor of the district, slow growth, no growth, land locked and that I would be lucky to hold on the enrollment I had. Enrollment was right at 11,900 students in 2008. I spent time with every stakeholder both on the campus and in the community and learned through excruciatingly direct conversations how the community perceived my college. It was seen as a bargain by many but business and industry confessed it was not their first choice solution. In just over four years, we grew enrollment to almost 16,000 despite demographic studies that said that kind of growth was highly unlikely. The solution was multifaceted but included partnering with local high schools, investing in areas where business and industry had been ignored, and making the campus a truly student friendly locale.

As a result of these specific successes, I was asked to head up a district wide committee comprised of both internal and external stakeholders to create a five-year economic development plan that was adopted and approved by the Board. For me, it was a crowning achievement that brought about needed investments in our technical programming as well as launching academic and technical maritime programming that continues to thrive today on all three campuses. Improving academic success requires partnering with business and industry, K-12 schools, and local city and county government to be a leader in strategic economic development for the region.

Provide access to innovative higher education programs that prepare students for constantly changing academic, societal and career/workforce opportunities: A second accomplishment at San Jacinto College of which I am particularly proud has everything to do with this particular goal. Partnering with the Pasadena Independent School District, I led the creation of a successful Early College high school program. We could have located that program in any one of the six high schools in the district but we chose to start in a 97% Hispanic high school with 92% free and reduced lunch students. As a result, starting in the 9th grade, students had the opportunity to earn their associate's degree by the time they completed high school. Moreover, the program showed that dedicated parents, faculty, and administration were able to make a real difference when working together

toward a shared goal. It was not easy. Even achieving the Texas Education Agency approval was a hill to climb that took over a year to achieve. Outreach and partnership with school districts in the service region is necessary to build vibrant college-going communities.

Innovation is not limited to high school partners. In Louisiana, I have had the privilege to lead and establish performance targets for the Work Ready U effort, a \$13.4 million (combined state and federal funds) adult basic education program that now leads the nation in three out of four success measures. Partnering with Lumina, Jobs for the Future, and most recently JP Morgan Chase to build education and employment pipelines. These life changing programs are inclusive of assistance to achieve high school equivalency, life skills, and job skills through a network of services often resulting in industry based certificates and a real, middle class life sustaining wage, Work Ready U has been an exemplar in providing a step up for 36,000 adult learners through a network of thirty-four providers.

Engage faculty, students and staff in improving a district-wide culture of adherence to the Collin College Core Values: Having served as a full time faculty member for seven years, I am keenly aware of the difference leadership brings. For five out of seven years I felt valued, listened to, and had ample opportunity to make a difference in the lives of my students. For two years under new leadership, I had the opposite experience and it ultimately led me to seek employment elsewhere. Faculty and staff are the academy. When I arrived at San Jacinto College Central I found an able faculty and ample funds and facilities but, as one individual put it, the attitude was largely that “It would be a great place to work if it weren’t for the students.” How could an institution with ample resources and talent allow such malaise?

I witnessed a mixture of disrepair and lack of cohesion in serving our students. I introduced a program that was called the Director of First Impressions Seminar (borrowed from a college president in Virginia with permission). We brought in a national expert to speak with the 102 student facing staff members to help understand their role in attraction and retention of students. Parking lots were redone adding flowering trees and drainage and we gave the student center a face-lift with new paint, murals, and a food court. We added campus furniture in open spaces and created a student friendly environment that better reflected our shared values of service. The faculty organization came together and adopted a litter program that asked each faculty and staff member to voluntarily pick up four pieces of litter each and every day – including the president! A combination of small and not so small steps aligned with our shared values to create a great work environment for all. There is nothing more powerful than understanding the desired outcome and having concrete steps to contribute.

Enhance the College’s presence in the community by increasing awareness, cultivating relationships, building partnerships and developing resources to respond to current and future needs: While at San Jacinto College I had opportunity to create new programs in order to target the needs of the region as well as make strategic investments in current programming. This required interfacing routinely with representatives from every stakeholder group in the region in order to hit our desired outcomes. Those investments paid huge dividends and were a direct result of building strong relationships in the community.

Similarly, my work in Louisiana has been largely relationship building, working successfully with the Board of Higher Education (Regents) to repair fractured relationships, working with executive leadership at the campuses, and interfacing with legislators as needed on a variety of initiatives. My most recent accomplishments were to secure the largest grant ever received by the LCTCS Foundation from JP Morgan Chase to invest in workforce initiatives. That one million dollar gift was leveraged by using Workforce and Innovation for a Stronger Economy Fund dollars on a four to one match thus bring five million dollars to bear on workforce training initiatives. I was involved with the heads of the other education systems as well as the Board of Regents in developing the ground rules for the WISE Fund dollars garnering almost \$12 million in new dollars for the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

A strategic builder and communicator, I long ago realized that achieving and maintaining honest relationships with every stakeholder was essential for lasting credibility and success. People know instinctively when they are sincerely respected, when their opinions and input truly count, and when the leader at the helm values them as individuals. When a leader can be the catalyst to get the majority of stakeholders to participate not only in forming a shared vision but participating whole-heartedly in the service to their students and stakeholders, no obstacle can stand in their way. What I bring to the table is mutual deference, openness, fairness, humility, and sincerity with an ethical foundation that has served me extraordinarily well in building credibility and maintaining the respect of my family, friends, colleagues, and superiors. It is my belief that this background, coupled with the ability to form cohesive strategies in complex environments, may position me to be a fit for Collin College and the region.

Knowing that a cover letter is the beginning of a conversation and not a book, allow me to close here by saying that my wife, Janyth, and I are excited about the prospect of returning to Texas and particularly to Collin College. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H. Neil Matkin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

H. Neil Matkin

Enclosures:

Curriculum Vitae
Statement of Educational and Leadership Philosophy
Professional References