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Michael B. McCall | 'Super Sunday' for college

By Michael B. McCall

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Every day at each of the 16 colleges of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, students like Carltez Hampton enter our doors.

Carltez, 32, is an African American and a graduate of Owensboro Community and Technical College. Soon after high school, he dropped out of college and engaged for several years in a number of self-destructive activities that eventually led to a prison sentence. At the age of 27, he dropped by OCTC and encountered a supportive counselor who helped him get back on the college track. After graduating from OCTC with an associate of arts degree, he transferred to Western Kentucky University, where he received a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. He now has a successful career as the assistant director of a non-profit community center in Owensboro.

Although there are many success stories at our community and technical colleges across the commonwealth, there are many other Kentuckians who are not fortunate enough to discover the path that eventually led Carltez to his success. Therefore, on Sunday, Feb. 27, KCTCS is sponsoring a statewide Super Sunday event designed to enhance the college-going rates of students who are often most at risk of not achieving their postsecondary educational dreams.

On that day, each of the 16 KCTCS colleges, along with the system office in Versailles, will partner with African-American churches in their communities to host college information fairs for prospective students and their families. This event is patterned after a highly successful program at California State University, now in its sixth year, that is credited with substantially increasing the college-going rate of African-American students in California. By partnering with churches in local communities, KCTCS hopes to create partnerships and programs to stop the leakage that exists in Kentucky's educational pipeline, resulting in only 57 percent of minority students graduating from high school, 42 percent entering college and 8 percent graduating from college.

As the state's only open-access postsecondary institution with locations within a 30-minute drive of most Kentuckians, KCTCS is perfectly positioned to take the lead in ensuring every citizen receives the education needed to achieve a successful career. It is predicted by most economists and policymakers that in the future it will be impossible to earn a living wage without some higher education credentials.

But the decision to attend college is a complex process particularly for first generation and lower-income students who lack the necessary resources and knowledge to navigate the complicated system of college choice. Events like Super Sunday are essential to helping students connect with an advocate who will help them understand the wide range of career and educational offerings available. Advocates are the key to fixing our state's educational leaking pipeline.

As Carltez said, "The community college helped me more than I even thought it would. Everyone at OCTC really embraced me and looked out for my best interest." Trends in future college enrollments predict the majority of growth will come from students like Carltez; students from minority, first-generation and low-income backgrounds. In order for Kentucky to move forward it must reach out and

embrace these students by advocating for their future. The Super Sunday event is one of several activities KCTCS has planned to get the message out to all Kentuckians that, “Yes, You Can Get a College Degree. Yes, You Can Have a High-paying Career.”

However, KCTCS is not the only institution with a dog in this fight. Quite frankly, it requires a collective, statewide effort between every organization charged with enhancing the employability of Kentuckians to ensure every citizen has the education needed to be successful. Our state has thousands of citizens like Carltez who just need someone in their corner, someone to advocate for them. Without a college-going culture, Kentucky will continue to lag behind other states economically and continue to lose business opportunities in the form of new jobs and wages. More partnerships like Super Sunday are needed to ensure a vibrant, economically healthy future for Kentucky and all of its citizens in every corner of the state.

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