

Judy Burton
Pomona College Commencement 2011
May 15, 2011

Good morning, everyone, and thank you so much for the opportunity to make a few brief comments to just let you know how very special this day, and this honor, is for me.

You see, I am doubly honored to be among the many recipients, recipients of distinction who have been recognized by Pomona College, because every single day that I get up and go to work, I have the honor and the privilege of serving students and families in communities that are among the most challenging communities in Los Angeles. Communities where, historically, kids don't only not go to college, they don't graduate from high school. I have the honor, the privilege, of working with teachers and principals who believe that's not right, who are willing to roll up their sleeves, make the commitment, and do whatever it takes to prove to these students and families that they can learn, they can achieve, they can graduate from high school, and they can enter colleges such as Pomona College.

You see, I believe that the civil rights issue of our time is access to a quality public education. Right now in our country and right here in our city, there is inequity, there is injustice. If you read this week's *Los Angeles Times*, you would have seen these numbers, and if you read them you should be sad along with me.

Five years ago, the Los Angeles Unified School District passed a policy that required that in order to graduate, students must take and pass A-G college prep courses and pass those courses with a grade of 'C' or better in order to receive a diploma. Five years ago. This is yesterday: 24% of Latino students passed A-G courses with a grade of 'C.' 20% of African American students passed A-G courses with a grade of 'C.' 40% of white students passed with a grade of 'C.'

That is not acceptable for anyone, and it should not be acceptable to anyone in this audience. It's not someone else's job, it's each of our jobs to roll up our sleeves, take action, and do something about it.

That's why I am honored, privileged every single day, to wake up, go to work, and prove that those statistics do not have to be what they are.

In the fall, you will receive many students from a Alliance college-ready public schools, who come from communities where nearly 95% of the students are eligible for free and reduced meals, many of whom will be the first in their families not only to graduate from high school but to ever even get a chance to go to a 4-year university. That won't be good enough for us. Success for us means that I will be able to come back here four years from now and see some of our graduates sitting in the rows of these young people who are here today.

Thank you so much. I'm deeply honored for this recognition.



About Judy Burton

Judy Ivie Burton is president and chief executive officer of the Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools, a non-profit, charter management organization aimed at promoting high achievement and college enrollment among children from disadvantaged communities. Based in Los Angeles, the Alliance currently includes 18 small, public high schools and middle schools, with approximately 6,000 students, more than 90 percent of whom are Latina/o or African American and are from low-income families. Prior to her current position, Burton served as superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) largest local district, serving more than 80,000 students. She previously served as the assistant superintendent, heading the LAUSD's Office of School Reform. She began her career in education as a teacher and principal, and is a nationally-recognized speaker and advocate on school reform. In 2010, she received a James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award as well as the Excellence in Education Award from the Harvard University Club of Southern California.