

(West Windsor, NJ) – On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Rush Holt and Undersecretary of Education Martha Kanter visited Mercer County Community College to hear directly from students about their views on higher education and their needs as they enter the job market.

“As a former educator, I see a vital need for federal investment in education,” Holt, who represents central New Jersey in Congress, told a group of Mercer County students and faculty. “If America is going to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world, we need to have a smart, well-trained workforce.”

Kanter, who was the chancellor of a California community college before she joined the Department of Education, said that she views community colleges as critical in preparing students for the workforce.

“It’s really important that community colleges lead the way in moving our country forward,” Kanter said.

Community colleges, she said, can play a particular role in ensuring that students who start college end up graduating. “Half of students aren’t finishing in six years. You have family and work and other obligations, but we want to help you finish what you start.”

Although many students expressed confidence that their education would help them to land good jobs, several had concerns about the high cost of college – concerns that Holt said he shared.

“College affordability is something that we as a society have not faced squarely,” Holt said. “We would be much better off as a country and an economy if we made it easy for middle-income students to go to college.”

Holt said that he has focused in Congress on making college more affordable, including sponsoring a law to provide \$16,000 in upfront tuition assistance for math, science, and foreign

language teachers. He also promised to oppose a Republican plan to cut Pell Grants by \$2,500 annually and restrict eligibility, a change that would deny grants to approximately 30,000 New Jersey students.

“We should be helping to advance the American dream for all,” Holt said, “not scaling back our hopes.”

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