



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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REMARKS FOR TED AADLAND
ACE LEADERSHIP HIGH SCHOOL OPENING CEREMONY
Albuquerque, NM

Thank you Tony [**Tony Thomas, AGC of NM Board President**]. And thank you to Lt. Governor Denish [**Diane Denish**], Maria [**ACE Board President Maria Guy**] and Tony [**Monfiletto**] for making the time to mark this important occasion. And of course, a hearty congratulations to Vicki Mora, the CEO of the AGC of New Mexico and all the members of the Construction Leadership Council, who together have been the driving force behind this ambitious and unprecedented institution.

One of the things you need to understand about the construction industry is that it is made up primarily of small businesses that have been handed down from one generation to another. As you might imagine, ours is an industry that is singularly preoccupied with making sure that we have people ready to fill our shoes.

Thanks to Vicki and her team, there are a lot of contractors in Albuquerque breathing a little easier today. That's because the future of our industry is in good hands with the opening of this school. That's right incoming students... no pressure here but pretty soon it will be up to you to build the New Mexico of the future.

The launch of this new school isn't just important because of what it means for the future of the construction industry. This school also holds the promise of a better future for our national approach to education. In too many cities today, we have a broken education model that all too often fails to graduate as many as 80 percent of all in-coming freshman. Nationwide the picture is not much better, with 30 percent of U.S. freshman failing to graduate every year.

One of the main reasons for that failure is that for too long, we've told students that the only path to success lies in mastering a standardized test, instead of acquiring practical skills. Instead of selling students on the dream of doing, making and building; we've intimidated them with the promise of filing, assisting and sorting.

In short, instead of giving students many reasons to work hard and many ways to succeed, we've narrowed down their options and downplayed their potential. And while there is nothing wrong with office work, I for one believe that if we want students to succeed, we need to give them many paths to success.

That is precisely the premise of this school. In preparing students to meet the challenges of tomorrow, this institution will teach young adults to become critical thinkers and problem solvers... today.

And by giving students an opportunity to master skills like construction that will win them good pay and earn them rewarding careers, we're giving these teenagers another reason to work hard and another way to succeed.

We know from experience that this approach works very well. Indeed, at similar construction-focused high schools across the country that the Associated General Contractors helps support, we've found an effective educational model.

In St. Louis, for example, 92 percent of students graduate from the Construction Careers Center Charter High School, while only 72 percent graduate from the local city schools. Meanwhile students learning construction skills at Washington, D.C.'s Phelps High School and the construction academy in San Diego County, California, score significantly higher on their high school exit exams than their fellow school district peers.

These construction schools are providing students with a better education experience and preparing them for successful careers for significantly less than comparable public school programs. In Oregon, St. Louis, Reno and Washington, D.C., construction-focused schools are graduating students for as little as 60 percent of the cost of other public schools.

In other words, our education system and our graduation rates would be significantly better if schools like the one we are opening today were the rule, instead of the exception. That is why we are taking this occasion to call on our leaders in Washington and state capitals across the country to embrace the kind of project-based education programs we are launching here today. Schools like this should serve as a model for communities nationwide.

Our education departments need to do more to encourage, support, and finance schools like this. And not just as charter "experiments" but as full-fledged, fully-incorporated parts of the public education program. Having a 30 percent failure rate is no way to run a business and it should be no way to run an education system.

The good news is more and more of our elected leaders have come to understand and appreciate the value of a skills-based education. It is encouraging to see Lt. Governor Denish here for example, as it is heartwarming to listen to President Obama and Vice President Biden talk about the need to train a new generation of skilled workers.

Our goal is clear. We want schools like this to be special. We want schools like this to be inspiring. And we want schools like this to be as widespread as they are successful.

Thank you and good luck and congratulations to all of you.

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