**Dr. Michael Baston Podcast Interview Transcript**

**Student Success & Equity**

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast, it's a privilege to have Dr. Michael Baston, Dr. Baston is the seventh president of Rockland Community College in New York. His work to improve student success has been featured on MSNBC, the Chronicle of Higher Education, The Atlantic, the Community College Times and Black Enterprise magazine. He's also contributing author to Race, Education and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens and the Handbook for Student Affairs and Community Colleges. Thank you so much for being on the Student Success podcast, Michael.

**Michael Baston** [00:00:33] Good to be with you. You know, you're my brother from another mother. We are Queens natives together. And so I'm so proud to be with you and you're doing so many great works to educate our community. So I'm so glad to be with you today.

**AS** [00:00:50] Oh, you don't even know how much that means to me, that really does. So we met it in March of 2019. We were in Indianapolis. I remember hearing you speak and I said we got to have dinner. And we had dinner that evening and we found out we're from almost the same neighborhood. And we even graduated high school the same year. And yeah, because, you know, the seventies and eighties and Queens and Brooklyn was an interesting time.

**Michael Baston** [00:01:23] That's a good word.

**AS** [00:01:26] So we have kind of these shared experiences as kids. And I just connected with you right away on that level, but also, in terms of getting results for students equity and change.

**AS** [00:01:41] And we just are like minded. And so I'm so excited to have you here.

**AS** [00:01:47] Before we get with any questions. For the audience, is there anything beyond all of your experience in higher ed, all the great things you've done, anything personal or anything about you that that audience should know about?

**Michael Baston** [00:02:03] Well, I want to I don't want to brag, but I am an avid golfer. I love golf, miniature golf, that is.

**Michael Baston** [00:02:16] I like to travel because when I travel, I look for a miniature golf course wherever I go so that I could get my putts in.

**Michael Baston** [00:02:25] I'm not a big course person, but I do like the mini golf. You know, that's something that I the.

**Michael Baston** [00:02:33] When you go to these golf courses, you have different monuments and windmills. I love to go to you know, there are some pretty amazing mini golf courses in the country that have all kinds of themes, whether it is the haunted house theme is a park. The there's a you know, I love the to see the creativity of those who decided to put this together. And it's just good fun. And, you know, I enjoy, you know, fun. I my mantra for 2021 is at the end of the day, we got to have some fun and 2021. We couldn't do it in 2020 but I hope we'll have some fun in twenty, twenty one.

**AS** [00:03:27] So when is pandemic's over, we got to go hit some rounds of golf, then you got a lot of fun, I'm looking forward to that. Because of your work to improve student success over the years, you have this national presence. You do a lot of engagements throughout the country. A lot of your work has been around diversity, equity, inclusion. Can you unpack that work that you've been doing with colleges?

**Michael Baston** [00:03:58] Well, as you know, both of us share a real important connection to the work around guided pathways in the country. This idea that we should have experiences for students that are structured that provide them an opportunity to get access to the kind of life that they deserve.

**Michael Baston** [00:04:19] And that begins with the end in mind, helping them to determine the path and how to get on the path and stay on the path and earn and grow and become the aspirations that they have for themselves and even achieve things that they could not have thought about for themselves. Our institutions are in this process of learning how themselves to grow. We oftentimes think of students as the only ones that are learners. But I would argue that institutions have to be learners if they are going to be effective. And one of the areas right now that we need to help institutions learn and grow in is in the area of equity, diversity, equity and inclusion. You know, we have in the community college space really focused significantly on access and trying to make sure that students get into the institutions. And that's a start. We have talked in meaningful ways about inclusion, trying to get people to feel like they have a sense of belonging, and that's a part. But equity, this idea that outcomes are going to be achieved by thinking deeply about the systems that produce the outcomes, that requires a plan. And from my point of view, student success is going to be ineffective if we are not thinking about the critical junctures of the students experience, but also the critical junctures of the experience of the employees of the institution that actually are responsible for partnering with the students to produce those successful outcomes.

**Michael Baston** [00:06:10] And so I think people get comfortable with diversity because diversity makes us feel good. Everybody should be included. Everybody gets a T-shirt, you know, but is everyone's t shirt a t shirt that fits them and, you know, are we making sure, you know, hey, everybody can dance on the dance floor, but do we have enough music so that everybody can have the music that they're in tune to to be a part of the experience?

**Michael Baston** [00:06:39] How are we ensuring that people's opportunities are significant and real and institutions often like to talk about what's wrong with students and don't always like to talk about what is wrong with the institutions that ultimately don't allow the students to reach the goals and aspirations that they have.

**AS** [00:07:02] I have a series of quotes that I have shared throughout the years. One of them is for institutions to achieve student success, educators need to help each other succeed. I really appreciate what you said, because when you when you're on an airplane and they do the safety speech. What is it that they tell you about the mask that you you got to put it on first right before you put it on a child? And often equity. I mean, it is important. It's critical for students, but we don't often think about equity for the employees.

**AS** [00:07:42] So can you unpack some more then, given that that is your philosophy? What are some nuts and bolts things that you've done to help raise awareness and improve diversity, equity and inclusion?

**Michael Baston** [00:07:58] Well, let me start by giving a framework, because I think that institutions that have a framework are then able to sort of have a starting point, some measurements, some ways to move the work forward, which is why I think a lot of the work around the pathways has been so helpful for institutions interested in institutional redesign, because it provides sort of a way of thinking, a way of approaching the matter.

**Michael Baston** [00:08:26] If we are going to look at equity as an equity based reform strategy at institutions, we first ultimately have to answer the question, why? And so I think more than anything else, institutions must answer the question why should we engage in equity based reform? Now, there are a whole host of reasons why institutions should do that. But unless an institution has done that work of conversations within the community to actually lift voices, often voices that are not heard in that conversation, you don't get to the why. And if you don't have a commitment to the Y, you know, we know that transformation doesn't happen if there's not a commitment to the why of the transformation. And so I think in our institution, I'm president community college, as you mentioned, you know, we started our work with first, of course, important statements. But we have a program called Steps Beyond Statements, because while you have statements and statements are important, if you don't, then come with specific steps that you're going to take to bring to life the platitudes that you espouse, then ultimately you can't be effective. You may have a wonderfully well written and thought of mission statement, vision statement, value statements. They may be glorious. They may give you a sense that you really are an anti-racist, equity focused, justice oriented institution. But if you can't kick the tires of those statements by the critical junctures of the student experience and the outcome of students and those junctures or the critical junctures of the employee experience and the outcomes of those employees at those junctures, then it's statements and no steps. So let me go into a little bit of detail about sort of the student experience, and then I'll go into some detail about the employee experience for those practitioner listeners who basically say, yeah, we want to do equity based reform, but we don't know exactly what that means. You have critical junctures that really have come to sort of, you know, solidify the student experience now over a decade of work that we've done around the country in the guide, the Pathways movement from completion by design, from, you know, from guided pathways institutes, from all of the different things that we have done. You know, we've talked about pillars and those sorts of things. But I really focused on the the lost momentum framework of completion by design as a very important framework to look at for purposes of assessment in the student experience.

**Michael Baston** [00:11:20] You have four critical junctures, connection. How are we getting the students interested and how are we helping them apply to an institution entry? What does that first year experience look like? Progress after they finish those gatekeeper courses and move into their first year? They've completed the first year. So to what extent are we monitoring their progress or are we doing just in time interventions so that we have the best opportunity to improve the outcomes and then, of course, completion? Are they completing credentials of value that will enable them to be effective in the marketplace as they go into work or as they go into, you know, a four year program or whatever and somewhat transition if you're an. At school, you're going to know your transition, but I want to stick with those for the purposes of this conversation and each of those junctures, there are equity questions that you can ask. Think about connection. To what extent are you having the kind of incoming classes that are reflective of the community? To what extent are you steering students in their connection process into academic programs that are going to give them a viable chance for a good life and a good living? How are you examining their opportunities? And if there are students who don't have minimum basic qualifications and programs because their primary education was not what it needed to be, what boot camps are you doing for them in advance and the connection process so that they can be given the supports necessary to have viability in STEM fields, for example, where ultimately there's a lot of economic opportunity, but sometimes students start to come in and they don't have the primary skills based on the institutions they were in before they got to you. So how are we looking at that? Are we taking poor people and steering them into academic programs that are going to keep them in poverty? Those are the kinds of questions that we have to ask from an equitable perspective and connection. And you can do the same analysis at the junctures when you think about the first year experience, if you disaggregate the data, how many people are in first year seminar classes and how many of them have educational plans and finance plans and career plans, and how many of them have mentors that are helping them to monitor those plans and making the adjustments? Who and the progress phase is actually doing the intervention so that they can complete the courses, that they can maintain momentum, that they can actually move forward and to the aspirations, who's telling them what semester they need an actual practical learning experience, whether it's an internship or a volunteerism opportunity so that they can have a competitive advantage as they move into the transition phase. Who's helping them with the applications? Where when you look at where the students are going, if they're transferring to four years students, institutions, is there a disparity in the types of institutions that people go to from race, ethnicity, gender, those classifications?

**Michael Baston** [00:14:32] So if you look at those critical junctures, there are systems that are connected to each of those critical junctures that you have to interrogate. You have to interrogate your application system. You have to interrogate your recruitment system. You have to interrogate your system of placement of students within a first year seminar classes. You have to interrogate the systems that allow people to look at what places they want to transfer to. Are you going to how people do transfer applications to institutions where they can go to higher quality institutions, but because they don't know you haven't given them the academic counseling to get them to the places that that would lift their prospects post baccalaureate? So so all of those are systems at these junctures that are currently producing the outcomes for institutions have. And so if we really are going to be serious about equity, focus reform, you have to look at outcomes first and disaggregate data and the systems that are producing those outcomes to determine what your strategy will be at each critical juncture of their students experience so that you can improve the overall institutional outcomes if this is truly a priority beyond your statements. And so guess what? Now I'm going to shock everybody that to works for employees. So in the connection phase for students, I call it candidacy for employees because guess what? The candidates that are going to come to your institutions, they have to go through a process. So what is your recruitment process and what is your sort of the composition of those who are sitting around the table with you deciding who gets to be a part of your community? How diverse is that? You know, when they when you go to the you know, the entry phase and the student experience is what I call the new employee experience, what is the first year of that new employee? Do they have a professional development plan? Do they have a mentor? Do they have opportunities to see themselves as contributors to your community and meaningful way so that they can build a pathway within your institution in terms of professional development, which would be the progress phase? Are they getting committee assignments and opportunities to write in present at conferences? Because those will probably be gatekeeper experiences. If one day those faculty members want to have rank tenure and promotion opportunities or if your other staff want to be promoted to higher levels of authority within the institution and when they leave transition, what exactly if you if you both started on the same day?

**Michael Baston** [00:17:20] And you both leave on the same day.

**Michael Baston** [00:17:23] We should make sure that both of those people, irrespective of race, irrespective of gender and respective of of of sort of intangibles, that they should be able to walk out with a similar package and have a similar connection to the college. All of those are very specific systems. Your H.R. system is a system, your recruitment system is a system. Your ability to do rank, your promotion as a system, how people get committee assignments, the systems. These are all systems that if we look at the systems and we look at the outcomes presently that those systems that are currently in existence provide and we begin to work on that, then your statements actually have steps that change outcomes that actually improve institutions. So from my perspective, you know, it is wonderful to say we are antiracist.

**Michael Baston** [00:18:19] It is wonderful to say we value everybody. We love everybody. That's one is important. And you have to have some sentiments. You have to be able to stand on your values, your values. We have a value for diversity. You should be able to. But but Taco Tuesday is not diversity, OK? Having ribs and chicken. And for Black History Month, that's not diversity. Having one person who happens to be a person of color on one committee a year is not diversity that one person can get. The chief diversity officer is not the chief diversity officer. Everybody has to be a part of the diversification of our institutions and to make us what I would call inclusively excellent.

**Michael Baston** [00:19:05] That is a process which has starts and plans and execution. And everybody has to be a part of that.

**Michael Baston** [00:19:12] And so from my perspective, we've had a lot of people give a lot of reports.

**Michael Baston** [00:19:18] You know, I love all of the presentations that all of our campuses where we say, well, equality is not equality and this is the ladder in the box of the fence and whatever like that, we are beyond that, that that was first grade educational institutions that are really interested in doing something have within their ability to do something. It doesn't matter how many how many unions. You have about five unions on my campus. Does it matter how many unions you have or whether you state funds you? Well, it doesn't fund you well. It's your institutional prerogative to determine and decide what the experiences are for students and employees.

**AS** [00:19:57] As you know, I use the momentum points, the loss and momentum points, for example, with student success team work. I say here is a framework for you to use.

**AS** [00:20:11] When I work with campuses to create their master plan, the strategic plan, I fold in the framework that you mentioned. What I'm learning from you is that, having a framework for your for your staff, for the employees. Culture is a stubborn thing to change, right? And so we're going to work on a framework for students. We need to have people have beyond buy in. Buy-in as in I agree with this. They need to have ownership.

**Michael Baston** [00:20:51] I've never I've never subscribed to buy-in. If we create we got a better chance of of refining and agreeing and then defending.

**Michael Baston** [00:21:05] I don't I don't need you to just be sort of you know, I don't believe in governance.

**Michael Baston** [00:21:14] That is non participatory.

**Michael Baston** [00:21:17] I don't believe in what I call perfunctory government governance, perfunctory governance is where we just get to say, well, we agree with the the decision of the faculty. I do agree with the decision of the administration or we disagree with the decision of the administration. So what when you have participatory governance, we sit down, we outline what's at stake.

**Michael Baston** [00:21:44] We are transparent and we redefine what transparency is. That means that you get to veto everything or approve everything. But with the things that you have the right to veto and approve, you will have a voice and the things that you don't, you'll know about it. So that is transparent, I think. I think we don't make very clear to many in the institution what role governance plays. Participatory governance says we work together on things that we can work together on and we inform you versus involve you when there are areas that you don't have a responsibility to be. But you have to be able to be transparent about that, because otherwise, when you don't go to folks and tell them every little thing. You're not being transparent now. You have not defined transparency. There are things I'm held accountable for you ain't held accountable for. So the things that I'm held accountable for, you're informed, you're not involved, the things we together work on, then you're involved and then we inform those who have authority over us. So but that is part of the process. If we are going to help institutions grow and get stronger. And I have found that, unfortunately. But like you were just talking about that buy-in stuff, it's like buy-in is trying to make people think that what they don't like or what they really don't want to do, you know, that some kind of way they are going to say, OK, well, you know, we yield. We we do know that that's not going to strengthen your institution.

**AS** [00:23:23] You're talking about transformational change. And in transformational change, there are people who, for a variety of reasons, fight it, I find more often than not it stems from fear, just a fear of change. That's why I really appreciate you mentioning that you have a, quote, unquote, student journey, but it's an employee journey framework where you can have these conversations. But even within that framework, what have been some obstacles that that you experience where people are still have a healthy skepticism about it? And how do you get them to create when they're still against the fence?

**Michael Baston** [00:24:06] Well, I think that you can't decide that people are wrong because they don't want to participate or they have a contrarian point of view. And I think that what ultimately happens is some institutions, as they begin to demonize the people who don't agree with you, you know, and you begin to ostracize them. And that is not helpful from my perspective. You allow the voices of opposition to give you alternative visions that move things forward. And oftentimes I found that those who are not able to articulate the why or how you could do a thing differently, ultimately over time, if at least don't become obstructionists because they can't contribute to the conversation. But you can't take those people who you disagree with or who are the opposition and act like their Uncle Fred or Aunt Jane, that you're going to lock in the cellar somewhere because you don't want them to be seen or heard like that. That doesn't work, because then that's exactly what they said.

**Michael Baston** [00:25:13] Well, you know, they don't want to hear me. You know, I'm going to say this because I know everybody that doesn't want to hear what I have to say.

**Michael Baston** [00:25:19] The same people oftentimes who say to me, why don't we have somebody look at the water shortage and the left building is the same person. I say, great, look into the water shortage and left building and let me know what we need to do to address it. And what are you committed? So don't when you come back with the solution, make sure you're not giving other people work. Tell us what you're going to do. Because what people like to do is to decide what other people can do and not take ownership about what they should be doing. Or so before you come back to me with a solution that provides a job for somebody else and more work for somebody else to do, tell me what you're going to do. Tell me what we collectively have to do to actually resolve the problem that you raised. And I think that's the way to approach it. You know, I don't I think that you're never going to get one hundred percent of the people on your side no matter what you do. If you give ice cream, wonderful ice cream for free on a hot day, some people are going to say it's too cold, you know, so our goal here is not to get everybody to blindly agree or go along. It is to say to the majority of the masses, here's how we can do it. And if you have ways that make it better, we're open and then really be open in your work in transformational change.

**AS** [00:26:45] You mention the word systems a lot and you often have to work with the system that you inherit. And part of the all community colleges, you know, there they for the most part, are run through committees, the committee structure, participatory governance structure that can often get in the way because of the miscommunication or the lack of coherence within or among the different committees. So even when everybody's well intentioned, they have the why, they they try to create, there's still that obstacle of just how community colleges are are built with these these committees. Have you done any work or have you put any thought to that and or have done any work to reimagine that committee structure so that they can actually achieve this transformational work that they're all willing to co-create in?

**Michael Baston** [00:27:44] I don't have many standing committees. I have work groups. Work groups are a time limited. Work groups oftentimes get staff assigned to them, temporary staff that is assigned to help them do some of the administrative work so that you're not depleting the folks ability to do the day to day job that they're getting paid for as they do this additional work for the betterment of the institution. I believe if you're going to have a whole bunch of committees that you're not going to, as an institution, appropriately resourced them with technical support or, you know, adjunct support in some meaningful way, then you're asking people who are already stretched to do more and not get anything from it. So from my perspective, I don't believe in these big, long committees. I believe in focused action, learning projects with dedicated support staff, and it does not have to be permanent full time professionals. It can be a consultant, it can be an adjunct professor. It can be someone that gets a little release time to help do some of the administrative trivia with the committee being lean with tight timelines and actionable outcomes that then are communicated to the community. So people don't feel like we just. Ran around in a circle. I have I people who know me know I do not like lots of committees that take forever and don't go anywhere and are limited to a few little people. I think you have to have good broad coalitions that focus intently on specific topics, who have a time sensitive structure and administrative support to get it done within that time frame and then appropriate resources to follow up and integrate and scale as best as you can. So that that's you know, and and I agree with you that there are a lot of people who are in governance. I do not agree that there are a lot of people in participatory governance. There are a lot of people who are in perfunctory governance. The up and down voters there just want to they want to analyze. They want to criticize. They want to complain. I'm not interested in the complaint department. We actually let those people go. There's no more complaint department at the college. So really what we want are people who are action oriented who are going to get things done, that are going to make meaningful contributions. They're not going to get everything they want, but they're going to get some of the things because they have to be tied to our strategic directions, not our strategic plan, because as covid-19 proves, that can be blown up, but strategic. We still have to be working in a strategic set of directions. We should be moving in a specific way. You know, when I came into my college, you know, we cut down lots of committees, decommissioned committees, set up working groups, made sure that they were diverse perspective and positions and time sensitive, appropriately, administratively staffed, producing implementation plans with some sort of check on how you how the implementation is going over time. Without that cadence of execution, institutions are ineffective.

**AS** [00:31:07] But, Michael, you're getting rid of my committee, and it's been here for 20 years and we have a budget.

**Michael Baston** [00:31:14] Yes. And what is it produced and what are our aspirations? So let's now look at your work as the legacy, as the foundation and what are we now aspiring to based on that foundation. And so if we think about it from that perspective, and I always say this to folks, put me in a position to ask somebody for money to bring you to the next level, put me in a position because of the foundation work you did and now they reimagining you work. You want to do that? I can go to a philanthropic agent of a donor of some sort to now resource the next leg of your journey if it is successful and if it aligns with our strategic directions.

**AS** [00:31:57] I have the privilege of working with so many presidents. It's so important to have a strong bench. And what I mean by that are really strong VPs, a really good working relationship with the faculty, specifically the academic senate president. What's your approach? And I'm not suggesting this is a problem at Rockland, but in previous experiences where the bench can use some improvement.

**Michael Baston** [00:32:31] You start with improvement. And if that doesn't work, I have to leave. I mean, at the end of the day, you can't do big things if you have small minded people.

**Michael Baston** [00:32:42] So you coach, you encourage, you inspire and then you invite to leave. If it doesn't work. I just think that you can't spend too much time to improve outcomes without investment. So I believe very, very firmly in professional the best investment at all levels. And then as a president, you have to be honest with whether this investment is bringing a return to the institution or not.

**Michael Baston** [00:33:18] And it may not be that the person is bad. It's just that they are not able to contribute here for where you're going. Now, they may have been phenomenal where you were, but if they're not able to contribute to where you're going, then you have to be honest with them. You have to support them. You know, I'm not the type of person to say, OK, we'll get rid of people right away. No, I don't believe in that. I believe that you have to make sure that you are clear about your expectations, that you adequately support people, that you give them information along the way so that if a person is ultimately asked not to continue service with you, it should not be a surprise. It should not be a surprise to them or anybody else in the institution, quite frankly, if everyone is really coalescing around our larger strategies. And so I think that you are humane and you are decent and you are honest and how you work with people, how you support people, but that you are clear that we have objectives and we are creating an environment that actually requires a certain level of engagement. And for those who are ill equipped at that level of engagement or if you're in the wrong place, sometimes you got the right people in the wrong place. And so you have to be willing, you know, in our institution. Yes. Some of the senior leaders I started with were not there, you know, early on, because we needed to move a little bit differently. But much of the sort of restructures and how people rose, the majority of the people that got higher positions and my time at the college have been people who have been at the college who didn't see themselves as more than what they were because they weren't put on committee opportunities and they weren't given an opportunity to have their voice heard and they weren't able to enact some of the things that they wanted to do that they saw were wrong, that they believe could improve things because no one gave them a voice. And I think if you're a president, a practitioner presidency, I'm a practitioner president. So I understand the work at very deep levels. And I don't try to stay in the weeds to tell people what to do as a micromanager. But if you're not conversant with the various areas that you can't culture people to coach their people. And so as a practitioner president, it's important to me to make sure that people have support, professional development. And if this is not the right environment, let us get them to an environment that's better for them and for us.

**AS** [00:35:59] One of the many things I appreciate about you and I learned about this when we first met is you talked about coaching, which I've made my work. And you are a coach at your campus.

**AS** [00:36:15] And I remember you, I think you had some "C's." I got my own C's, but I appreciate the yours as well. Can you explain them?

**Michael Baston** [00:36:30] Oh, it's the "L's". I have these "L's" where I talk about, you know, you have to have this has to be a lot of levity. You know, I'm saying you have to be able to lift people's spirits, you know, so this levity that has to be there, there is leverage. You have to understand how you balance all the competing priorities with all the possible opportunities. So you've got to kind of have that leverage. There's got to be learning you as the coach, have to be a learner, not just a teacher. If you're going to be effective, don't tell everybody what you know until you understand what they know. And then you try to fill in to the things that they know and sort of and grow there. And, of course, and everything. You have to have love. You have to love your people, and you have to create an environment where they have the best chance to truly love the student. That doesn't mean giving a student whatever they want, agreeing with the student, you know, supporting students, things that are not right. But it is that they know that they are going to be supported. And the things that they do and say that they are going to have resources. You do not have to be a rich institution to resource your people. Your people can be resources. Do you know how many coaches you have at your institution that you don't even realize have the capability to coach? And so to what extent are you leveraging your own internal resources to make sure that people can move forward, how are we making sure that we have interdisciplinary teams when we are making decisions so that the person who is responsible for implementing is also at the table who can say, well, it would be hard for me to do this and this and this if we don't do that. So it is it is when you're coaching, you are a learner and you have to listen. You have to listen more than you speak. That's why you have those two ears and one mouth. So you've got to listen. You have to learn. So that means you got to make sense of what it is that you are listening to. You have to recognize the power of leverage. How can you use all of these different ideas and the experience of your people to really leverage it and as well as the external community, you know, how do you bring levity to the conversation? You know, how do you make sure that everybody understands it's hard work, but it doesn't have to be like, you know, like we can't laugh, we can't have some fun. We can have some sense of connection to one teacher. And then you've got to love you got to love the student. You got to love the work. You've got to love your coworkers.

**AS** [00:39:22] Well, I love you, man.

**Michael Baston** [00:39:23] I love you too, my brother.

**AS** [00:39:27] It's beautiful because you have a framework. You create common language at your campus for both students and employees, you are able to reimagine and help clean up, if you will, the committee structure, and have more of these work groups, which I'm sure you embed these these internal coaches right into these different work groups. This is how you create, build and continue to have momentum and get results over time. One of the questions I have is because students spend most of their time in college in the classroom. And at the end of the day, it's a teaching and learning institution. We've seen the data. We've seen these stories countless of times. So, for example, I'll just pick chemistry. There's a chemistry instructor who has a. 80 percent success rate, another one has a twenty five. And when you disaggregated, it's even worse for disproportionately impacted students. Same content, very different outcomes. So here we're not talking about a work group, a committee or VP. We're talking about faculty, who we can't just say to them, well, it's 20 percent, later, if they're tenured. So how do you help that faculty member that consistently has that 20 percent student success rate?

**Michael Baston** [00:41:06] The question is, does the faculty member want the help? Does the faculty member understand the challenges to a faculty member, even understand if they have withdrawals? We look at withdrawals, you know, when in the semester are the majority of students withdrawing? Are they really withdrawing at the end? Are they withdrawing in certain specific weeks? Because maybe that is where we need to bring em academic intervention so that in the more difficult parts of the class, the students have the supports so that they can successfully complete the course. To what extent are you getting the faculty member help from other faculty members in terms of those sorts of things? And to what extent have you empowered the deans that are responsible for the area and program directors responsible for the area to help the faculty, to get the faculty member the support that the faculty member needs to be successful? So you have to start from the position of have we as an institution provided this person the resources and the tools to be successful and in the process, have we also provided the students who are currently being instructed by that faculty member, the supports in real time as the infrastructure can improve? We're still making sure that the student has a quality experience. When you say some of us say, well, send them off to the to the learning lab, but they don't go. So that's that's on them. They don't go no embed. You know, this particular faculty member has a 20 percent success rate. You know, that in this particular subject is where most of these people drop out. Why are we not embedding somebody? Why are we not saying to somebody from the academic support center that for these sessions you're going to be supplemental instruction to assist, to ensure that these students have a better opportunity and chance to successfully complete the curriculum. And faculty member, let's make sure that you have additional teaching, you know, supports so that you can be effective. And if not, then we have to take other steps. But you don't start with all your numbers are terrible. Well, what are you going to do about it? Because if you don't do. No, we're going to do something like that's not a strategy and it doesn't help the current students in the current situation right now. So any faculty member that has poor outcomes and they happen to have high withdrawals in critical subject areas. When you look at the timeline of when students traditionally withdraw, you know you know, you got to embed academic support clearly at this critical juncture of this particular course. And clearly, you know, you've got to provide additional supports for the faculty. And clearly, you know, you know, you will ultimately not want to have to reassign the faculty member to some other kind of thing that comports with your collective bargaining agreement, but that ultimately provides support for students in a different way. But all of your options, you can't disarm yourself either.

**AS** [00:44:17] And I think what you've done with this, the structure that you set up to to change the systems is it allows people to have a-ha moments. I think, we've had this notion that, students don't come to us prepared, and I've tried to tell colleges, no, we're the ones that have to do a better job being prepared. And so that's when I hear people say, "Well, I make sure that I have a very rigorous content and curriculum but they're just not prepared for it." And then I also think about all the antiquated grading policies that are still out there. They're not equitable. I got to believe that with the structures, the processes that you set in place allow people to have these conversations that go back to the why. So people have these a-ha moments and have this mindset from external attribution, meaning that everything's external. Blame it on the students, their background, but it shifts more to an internal attribution about what can I do to be better prepared.

**AS** [00:45:35] Do I have that accurate?

**Michael Baston** [00:45:38] Absolutely. I think that every collective bargaining agreement should have a faculty provision that talks about professional development. And in that contract, it should say if for whatever reason, the faculty member is able to meet certain minimum thresholds in terms of outcomes for student performance, that they automatically have built in an expectation that they're going to avail themselves of professional development, but also a commitment from the institution to ensure that that that opportunity for that development is available.

**Michael Baston** [00:46:15] Because then you're not penalizing people, you're preparing people at the end of the day, we can do whatever we want to do and I'm going to tell you why you could do whatever you want to do, because when cholera hit all that stuff about I don't want to teach online, went out the window, all that stuff about I can only do this time to this time went out the window. All that stuff I did, I don't do pass fail. All that's out the window. I don't want to I can only have X amount. All the stuff that we say we can never do. We can never do it. All the what we could never do we doing now. So you know, now is the time to say, listen.

**Michael Baston** [00:46:53] The schedule, blow it up. Up.

**Michael Baston** [00:46:58] Where you want to who you want, but I want this classroom on the left side, in the right corner.

**Michael Baston** [00:47:03] Blow it up.

**Michael Baston** [00:47:04] You there now, you know, I mean, I know for some it's gone. It's like, oh, my God, what are you talking about? This is the way we've always done it. And guess what? These are the results we have because of the way we've always done it. And you can't no longer make the excuse. But I'll give you a perfect example. You know, as we close the campus, when when it snows too hard because the hard snow people can't ride on the roads. We can't ride on the roads. The roads are crazy. Came right. And we closed the campus. Guess what? Not no more. Yeah, the campus may be physically closed, but you get on your zoom and you have your classroom. There are no more snow days. Oh, so. So I mean. Get with it and understand that, for example, in a community college space, we are the one that took the biggest hit in enrollment.

**Michael Baston** [00:47:58] Those students who changed their mind about coming to college this fall, I think is I think CCRC said it was like two times more likely that the community college person changed their mind versus the community versus the four year school. So the majority of our students changed their mind. And it's not just because they didn't like the or the online modality or they didn't have a wife. Some of them had covid was skeptical of it or to care somebody that had Kopit. I mean, that's just the reality.

**Michael Baston** [00:48:32] But you have a lot of people that still, from the groups that would normally come to us, went to the for profit, they got three percent or better from clearinghouse data, three percent or better enrollment from the population that which additionally come to us. They are more expensive, they have less support. They don't have this good outcomes. And guess what? Our students went there and they didn't go into their buildings. They went into their classrooms virtually. So you can't tell me that there's something wrong when we charge a fraction of the price with a whole lot more support and students that would normally come to us even in covid with their. So if we want that to continue to happen, we just don't do nothing. Just do what we've been doing. But if we want to make sure that people can stay employed, not furloughed, not fired, if we want to make sure that people can stay engaged in the communities and pay your mortgage and send Junior Geni to college, we got to get with the program.

**Michael Baston** [00:49:38] If we want to be competitive, we have to understand shorter term credentials. People can stay for years for a two year degree. They can't and they are not going to stay for that long. So we better figure out what these accelerated studies are going to look like and what you do in the winter session and what you do in the summer session. Wow. You going to have to do that in the fall and in the spring, you're going to have to figure out that the sacred cow of scheduling, it's not going to work, not in this environment. With the whole shift. You got to understand that your own programs that you love so much that nobody actually goes to can't stay on the books when business and industry is hitting the reset button. And we haven't. They're going to create jobs that don't exist now, 5G telecommunication, you're going to see great advances in that area. Zoom Castor, Zoom casting is a job people actually do for a living putting together Zoom cast.

**Michael Baston** [00:50:38] Well, guess what if we are not thinking about how business is resetting because of the COVID reset of everything and we just go right back to well, let's roll over the calendar from the last let's roll over the schedule as we do that, roll over the schedule, we will increase increase the market share for for profit institutions who will gladly take students that look like students that come to us and charge them so much more than we ever would and ultimately put them at a disadvantage. And we should do better and can do better.

**AS** [00:51:13] You're such a forward thinker, an inspiration. For people who are, it doesn't matter, where they are at the college, if they have aspirations of one day being a college president. As you know, there's faculty that become college presidents, and from student services. I even know presidents who have a background in institutional research who became presidents.

**Michael Baston** [00:51:38] Right.

**AS** [00:51:39] What kind of what advice would you give them as they aspire to be a president?

**Michael Baston** [00:51:47] Mark Sanborn wrote a very little book. That's a very important book. I used to give to a lot of my students. "You don't need a title to be a leader." And in that book, he basically lays out what the "ROI" is in your work, it's not your return on investment, it's your relationships, it's outcomes and improvements. It does not matter what position you have at your college, build good relationships.

**Michael Baston** [00:52:21] If you can build good relationships, it will broaden your knowledge, it will put you in a place where you'll learn to ask the right questions, half of the job of being president is understanding the right questions to ask. Is that as much so much of you being such a great visionary? If you don't know what questions to ask, your vision is always going to be myopic.

**Michael Baston** [00:52:45] So really, it is understanding the relationships so that you learn. So that you can ask the right questions. The second thing is always outcomes. So what have you done? Because that's what people want to know now, what you're going to do. What have you done? And that is important because if you can't do little things well, what would ever make us think that you could do big things? Well, if you can't manage five dollars, why should I give you 50? And if you can manage 50? Why should I give you fifty thousand? If you can manage fifty thousand, how do you think I'm going to give you 15 million, 20 million, 60 million. Why would I do that? So what are your outcomes? And then lastly, improvements. How have you improved the lives of the people that you were blessed and favorite to work with? How if you improve the lives of students, have you improve the lives of your coworkers, those who work for you and those who work with you, how have you improve the lives of the people in the community? What improvements have you made? Did you find a dusty place and it's still dusty as you are on your way out? Or did you find a place that had promise and you did your best to make sure and a very collaborative way you made it better.

**Michael Baston** [00:54:08] I can say when my time is done that Rockland or wherever in life, whatever opportunities that that present it, whatever I've ever done, when I was at LaGuardia, I felt the same way. When I was at Berkeley College in New York, I felt the same way that my job was to build good relationships, to provide outcomes based on my efforts and understanding and hard work and things improved. So I don't know. I don't care whether I have ever been at. That has been my goal, to have good relationships, show the outcomes that you want to obtain and improve wherever you've been. And if you do that, you'll be president. You'll be wherever you want to be and do whatever you want to do, because those to me are what will give you influence.

**Michael Baston** [00:54:57] Title is not influence. Your ability to have relationships, outcomes, improvements--that's influence. Vernon Jordan had influence and no title. And he worked effectively with Democratic presidents for many, many years. I encourage folks to read the book Vernon Can Read. You know, take it, take a look. Here's a guy who who came from humble beginnings and ultimately became an adviser to presidents.

**Michael Baston** [00:55:31] You know, it's it's you can have people, Valerie Jarrett, who knows where Valerie Jarrett actually did before becoming a senior adviser to the president, but her influence, you know, her background, her most people don't know. So, you know, and and on and on and on and on, you know, it's like there are a lot of people that don't have a president, a lot of people that don't have big fancy titles. But they are extraordinarily influential. Nobody even knew Mackenzie Scott's name. Other than that, she had broke up with her husband, but now she got influence, four point one billion dollars handed out to many institutions like ours to help folks get ahead of life influence. Now, she probably will never want to be the president, no foundation or president of a college and nothing that's not her thing, but her influence is profound.

**AS** [00:56:31] Thank you for that. Again, it's so inspirational. We are brothers from another mother because you are so, so kind to read my guide. I put together a guide. I felt it was just so necessary to explain why colleges struggle to implement priorities and that provided some suggestions on what to do about it. And I start and edn with with kindness and I talk about relationships and student frameworks. And so thank you for reviewing it and giving me input on that. Really appreciate it.

**AS** [00:57:06] And this last piece about the ROI, I'm not a big fan of the MBA talk of synergy and synergistic, but you gave you gave "ROI" meaning and it starts with those those relationships. I have the privilege of working with so many faculty, for example, and in guided pathways work. And, you know, they're not presidents, they're not even VPs, but some of these faculty, what they're doing to improve the student experience and student outcomes, because they have the relationships, they got the street cred, and they love their their students and they don't always get along with the family. Right. But but they try their best and they move toward getting results because they're just so good with relationships. So you make such an incredible point. Such a meaningful point. So we're winding down here. I can't thank you enough for participating in my inaugural student success podcast. Are there any last words of wisdom that you would like to impart?

**Michael Baston** [00:58:18] Well, I want to thank you for always being on the forefront out here, trying to help people really improve the lives of students and institutions and communities, because that is so critical in these days and times.

**Michael Baston** [00:58:32] You know, I love working at our college Rockland and other colleges around the country. I have the opportunity to work with you know, I love working with faculty. Quite frankly, I am a faculty member. I have to teach at Rockland in the semesters where I'm not bumped because I'm an adjunct. And so I'm not I'm the president, but I'm not on the pecking order in my department. So if there's this most senior person, once that my teachers spot, they get it. So. So I have been bumped from teachers sometimes, which is fine because I want people to understand that I mark papers with no teacher's assistant. I have to fill out the grade book. I have to learn my tap and go through the blackboard and all. So so for my faculty, they understand that I understand. I ask questions, why are we filling out everything on these little green books? Why can't we do this electronically? And now it's for everybody now.

**Michael Baston** [00:59:31] But but the president went through it himself at this campus and sat in front, stood in front of 20 people every other night to help them understand introduction to business introduction paralegal studies, because I'm an attorney to make all of that. So I understand firsthand and I've been teaching since when I was at LaGuardia and even when I was at Berkeley, I was an adjunct there. So I want people to understand you don't just stand as a sage on the stage. You say you are the guy on the side, not just with the students, with the faculty and the staff, before I was a president or vice president, I was a dean. I was photocopying the orientation materials and putting the package together to get students ready for the first day of school. I do wrote the graduation scripts so that we could make sure that we stayed on time for graduation. So from my perspective, when you have that kind of experience, that's why you can have a different kind of love for your people.

**Michael Baston** [01:00:35] And I would just say to all of your listeners that always stay humble, always stay hopeful, always stay recognized, and your ability to be impactful, what a way to end.

**AS** [01:00:47] Thank you so much for participating. Love your brother.

**Michael Baston** [01:00:50] Love you, my brother.