



## Nancy Santos IDEP2024 statement

Thank you for that introduction.

Hello, it is a pleasure to be here with you today and share with you the work we do.

Project Access is a department of Roxbury Community College: a small urban commuting school recognized as a predominantly Black institution. We've worked hard to earn the trust of the community, and have just celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We work with students who are facing nonacademic challenges. About 60 to 80% of our students receive a government financial aid subsidy for students with low-incomes to help pay for their education. Our students are not the traditional students attending right after high school. They range in age from 19 up to 70 years old. Sometimes they've had things happen to them in life.

We help with everything from housing insecurity, food insecurity, obtaining health insurance, child care, legal services referrals, transportation, and a variety of areas. We know that sometimes life happens, and we want to be there for our students. We advocate for them, and we obtain resources to help to be able to finish their education.

We realize that being hungry that being hungry is not shameful, but letting people go hungry is.

Across the country, statistics show us that ~~on~~ food insecurity is high, but some institutions don't want to deal with it. We know that students can't study when they are hungry, and we know that it creates a domino effect in their lives.

When we first had the idea of opening a food pantry at Project Access, we surveyed the students. Over 60% of the students said they go without meals, skip meals, or worry that the food will not last for the entire month. It was alarming

how many people said that they change their eating habits because they didn't have enough money for food within the prior three weeks of the survey. It was an eye opener to see how many of our students are facing hunger.

We took the social stigma of hunger away by holding a contest so our students could name the pantry and thus the "Rox Box" was created. We use a point system on a card so students can "shop" for what they want. We currently serve over 500 students at the Rox Box.

Project Access is my heart. It's one of my favorite departments to work in because not only do I feel like I'm making a difference in the lives of my students, I can actually see the outcomes and the difference.

The work we do is possible because we have a need to advocate for people who don't have a voice, who lost their voice, or who feel like they just don't matter anymore. We want to empower them; to know they do matter. When you come through those doors, our motto at Project Access is we empower our students and enrich their lives, and you know that somebody is thinking about you.

To end Social and Institutional Maltreatment, we need to have a mindset and awareness of what's going around us. Go into neighborhoods, taking a day or two to sit and observe, and speak to people. There're so many issues that relate to poverty or relate to food insecurity.

Yes, Project Access is a three staff member office. We serve as an example of an institutional good, by supporting people, building them up, and ending the social maltreatment of stigma and shame surrounding food insecurity. If we, a small office in a small community college, can do this, then everyone can.

Thank you for your time.

