

FCCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting  
Thursday March 4th, 2021

Chairperson Massey, Board of Trustees, Chancellor Salgado, Provost Potter, Officers of the District, faculty, staff and all others streaming: Good afternoon!

It's my honor to speak before you all today as April is Community College Month! Many of the items I will address today speak to why community colleges are so important, how we are integral in meeting the needs of the communities we serve, and why now more than ever, we have to work hard to preserve and support the efforts and missions of community colleges. As I've said before, the origins of Community Colleges did not reflect our current mission of access to quality higher education, rather it was a way to sort out the haves from the have nots, the desired from the undesirable. And as we know, those who decided who fell into which category were uninterested in diversity, equity, and inclusion; rather, through education, they devised a system of oppression. We, particularly at the City Colleges of Chicago, work tirelessly to pull ourselves from the muck which is was our beginnings and forge a new path that exemplifies what community colleges should be and whom we should serve. It is a commitment we have and owe to our city and its constituents. I am proud to be faculty at a community college. I am even more proud to be faculty at the City Colleges of Chicago. The Sisters of the Order of St. Francis are well known for their commitment to education, so it is fitting to end this greeting with the words of St. Clair of Assisi, "What you hold may you always hold. What you do, may you always do and never abandon. But with swift pace, light step and unswerving feet, so that even your steps stir up no dust, go forward." With that, I wish us all happy Community College Month. Let us go forward together!

Today, I'd just like to briefly report on a few new items of interest, and to speak to the status of FC4's formal requests made last month.

As we look toward a return to life that resembles something closer to normal, faculty are largely pleased with the care in which we are widening access to our college's physical spaces. As more staff will return than faculty in the summer and fall, we are supportive of ensuring that their return is a safe one and that we remain committed to following the department of health guidelines, but that we also do so with a human touch and consider, as we approach a fourth wave of new strains of Covid, how we create policies and working conditions that display first and foremost, care for individuals. That has been the protocol thus far, and I'm confident that we can maintain that. On a related topic, we are very appreciative of our campuses being used as vaccination sites for our communities and the recent work to prioritize CCC faculty and aid us in getting vaccinated. Many of us have already taken advantage of those opportunities and we want to acknowledge the work of our union in setting up vaccination days for members. As we have heard from many other officials, we cannot stress enough, when it's your turn—and it is our turn--if you are able, get vaccinated.

As we have reflected on recent activity in the legislature, particularly the Developmental Education portion of Bill HB 2170 which passed in the special session and has since been signed into law, FC4 has decided that we have been on the defense when it comes to legislation for far

too long. We are seeing across the country that decisions relating to higher education are no longer conversations that exist locally, but they are debates taken up in state capitals in the legislature. We have written to Chancellor Salgado to see how and if we can work together to be a more vocal participant in legislative actions that we have a vested interest in. Currently, there are multiple bills in committee that impact the ways in which we serve our students, both positively and negatively. For example, there are a few bills concerning Dual Credit and lowering credentialing standards for the teachers that teach our classes in the high schools, There's one concerning MAP Grants, and many others. I'm pleased to report that Chancellor Salgado is supportive of thinking through how we can collaboratively set an agenda and work together to forward our mission. As one of the largest community college systems in the country, if we rallied behind legislation that helped us to serve our students and better our communities, the good we could do would be unparalleled. Between faculty, administrators, and board members, if we moved in lockstep with each other on issues we agreed upon, we could move mountains. We are currently missing an opportunity to do so. So FC4's political action committee, looks forward to having this conversation with our chancellor and we invite board members to this conversation as well. The collective knowledge within our ranks is a untapped resource brimming with possibility.

Briefly, one legislative item that will be heard in the Senate Higher Education Committee this Tuesday is SB 1832. This bill, if passed, would allow community colleges to offer a baccalaureate degree in Early Childhood Education. To be respectful of time, I have attached to the my report a fact sheet which details many reasons why this bill is so important, but I will highlight a crucial factor in why we support this bill. Since 2013, of 1,174 ECE AA/AAS in ECE graduates only 31% have transferred to 4-year colleges in Illinois, 16 of them to UIC and they don't even have an Early Childhood Education undergraduate program, which suggests that some unknown number of those students transfer to these colleges in majors other than Education. Most of these colleges over this eight-year period accepted no more than 18 students. NIU accepted 53 and Chicago State, 43, which averages roughly 6 and 5 students respectively each year, and again, that isn't necessarily in an early childhood education program. What does this tell us: Our students have very little access to a 4-year education which is often needed to earn a livable wage in the field, and our 4-year counterparts aren't serving this population. What would it mean for women, as the field is primarily populated by women, to earn a degree that could open the doors to better employment? What would it mean for our communities, for children, for our schools if we had more qualified practitioners? Community colleges are poised to do this work and this legislation would set us on the path to improving the lives of our citizen by expanding access.

Our many 4-year counterparts already signing witness slips in opposition to this bill, many assuming that if community colleges offered baccalaureate degrees that we would siphon off their students, but the numbers and a growing body of research make it clear that our students aren't transferring to 4-years in significant numbers, meaning often their educational attainment ends with an associates degree. We are urging the board of trustees and out administrators to not only consider supporting this bill as individuals, but to submit a witness slip in their official capacity as representative of the City Colleges of Chicago. We also urge our members to do the same. If my understanding of laws around lobbying are correct, there is nothing prohibiting us from stating a position on legislation and sending it out to our members for consideration. It

would be wonderful if a special announcement were made providing our faculty and staff with context and links to fill out witness slips, if they so desire. This is how we use our voice to further our mission.

In my report last month, we made a few requests: First, for an updated timeline for the completion of an MOU for in-person, credit-bearing course work at Cook County jail; Second, for a justification for what faculty perceive to be a conflict of interest on our Board.

I am pleased to report that Chancellor Salgado communicated to me that he is requesting that an MOU be completed in the first quarter of 2022. We believe that that is completely reasonable, and thank him for his continued support of this work. When we are having conversations about equity and inclusion, we have to keep incarcerated individuals and individuals who are reentering society after incarceration in mind. If we consider the disproportionate amount of black and brown people who are incarcerated, we can connect much of that to systemic racism in our criminal justice system, but we can also connect it to the systemic racism in our education system that had created racialized pockets of our city that are undereducated, and underprepared to obtain gainful employment which often leads to criminal activity, and having to live and raise children in poor, violent communities, thus perpetuating the cycle. For individuals reentering society after incarceration, having a plan and resources to create a different life are crucial in them not recidivating. We may be their last chance at turning their lives around, and subsequently, bettering their families and communities. When we abdicate our responsibility to serve this population, we turn our backs on our very mission. The request to complete the MOU, is a sign that we truly believe that every life matters and is worth investing in.

Second and finally, we requested a response from our board asking them to reconcile Trustee Swanson's position as our Board's Vice-Chair and Partnership for College Completion's Chairperson. I want to be clear that a tenet of how FC4 discusses issues and decides how we should act on them follows this simple rule: policy, procedure, and practice before people. What that means is we put personal issues aside and debate matters on how they align with our policies, with our mission, and with our values. If an issue aligns with these tenants or if it is apparent that it is more about people and personality clashes, it is not a matter worth exploring. So for us to bring the issue forward, already suggests that what has happened, in our opinion, does not align with who we are or who we wish to be as an institution.

I received correspondence from Chairperson Massey (it is attached to this report) in relation to our question, and for the most part it reiterated things I had acknowledged in last month's report. I acknowledged that our board members are volunteers and that there is no evidence of Trustee Swanson taking sides with either PCC or The City Colleges on the matter. I even acknowledged the need for dissenting voices and outside organizations bringing ideas forward. So, it was disappointing that the focus of Chairperson Massey's was on this sentence that was repeated twice, making this sentence two of his six sentence response: "The Board of Trustees is well aware of its legal and ethical obligations and always acts in accordance with such obligations."

In my report last month, I pointed out the fact that we don't have any specific policies that address the conflict of interest that we believe exists which is more about implicit pressure for our administrators to make certain decisions due to the existing power structure and the ability to

be a committed board member. As board members are volunteers and there is no evidence of compensation being offered in exchange for support of any kind, it is correct, nothing illegal has taken place. Ethics, however, are another story.

We hoped for an ethical justification for this situation and possibly the welcoming of a discussion of how we consider these types of concerns in the future. What we received did not address any of our concerns, and faculty have characterized the response as “terse,” “dismissive,” and “insulting.” Perhaps that was not the intent, but intention and perception are a world apart, and effective rhetoricians are conscious of both. What we really hoped for was a larger conversation about how the board views its role in furthering our mission. We presented a situation in which one of our board members is in a position in which the fundamental philosophies of two groups that they are a part of starkly contrast each other.

The Association of Community College Trustees says this of the role and responsibility of community-college board members:

Trustees exercise influence on behalf of their community college. Being an effective advocate means taking every opportunity to champion the cause of community colleges by educating policymakers and opinion leaders at all levels about the transformative power inherent in today's community college. Trustees exercise their legitimacy as leaders and advocates by exploiting opportunities to be seen as policy leaders within their communities.

If we put Trustee Swanson’s dual roles against this standard, we have to ask ourselves: Considering both of her positions, can she or does she exploit opportunities to advance our institution and does she advocate for our constituents in a way that aligns with our mission? I’m not convinced that we can without a doubt say that she can. The question isn’t about her or any other board member using their personal, uncompensated time, to serve on multiple boards as Chair Massey alluded to in his response. The question is do certain things hinder a board member’s ability to fully advocate for our institution and how do we deal with that? The response we received conveyed the message that it doesn’t matter, that the real concerns of faculty doesn’t matter, and more importantly--considering the wealth of data and research that we have provided the board and policymakers with over the last 5 years in an effort to educate you all about how detrimental the legislation that PCC has been lobbying for would be to students in need developmental education--the message we received conveyed that our most marginalized students don’t matter either.

The Association of Community College Trustees believes that “citizen governance is an appropriate and democratic means by which to achieve the educational and economic goals of the nation.” As our board is the only community college in the state of Illinois that has an appointed board of trustees, it leads us to believe that we can receive statement like we did because our board is not responsible to the citizens of Chicago, but to the mayor who appointed it, and thus feels no pull to be thoughtful in the concerns brought forth by faculty or the community unless they align with their agenda. Most concerns will only live as a name and topic listed in a board report. I would like to welcome the board to disabuse us of this very logical belief, but until then, FC4 would like to make the members our of institution aware of Illinois

General Assembly HB2500 which, if passed would Amend the Public Community College Act, providing for the election (rather than appointment) of the board of trustees of the City Colleges of Chicago beginning with the 2023 consolidated election.

FC4 stands in solidarity with our adjunct faculty and their fight for a fair and equitable contract, I have included the written comments from the three public speakers of today's meeting so their struggle can be documented in public record.

This concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,  
Keith Sprewer on behalf of the Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago