

CCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, August 5th, 2021

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

I'm glad to speak before you all today! I was unable to attend last month's meeting and thought that my report's content, while not urgent, deserved to be presented in a dignified way rather than printed in the report. So, I'll briefly give you a few of FC4's most recent updates and end by presenting last's months report.

As we approach the beginning of another semester, one in which many faculty and students have elected to return to our colleges campuses and as Covid infections are on the rise in our city, particularly after the frightening display of the throng of unmasked people at Lollapolloza this past weekend, our concerns about safety, including air quality, mask wearing, and social distancing, are real. Many of the safety protocols that were employed at the height of the pandemic, for the most part, kept those on college's campus safe. We believe that this is not the time to abandon those practices. While requiring proof of vaccination or weekly testing is positive, it may not be enough. A study detailing a COVID-19 outbreak that started July 3 in Provincetown, Mass., involving 469 cases found that three-quarters of cases occurred in fully vaccinated people. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC's director said, "High viral loads suggest an increased risk of transmission and raised concern that, unlike with other variants, vaccinated people infected with Delta can transmit the virus." This information is of grave concern and while vaccines continue to be highly effective against the virus in preventing hospitalization and death, I think I speak for faculty, staff and students when I say, I'm wholly uninterested in contracting even a mild case of Covid, and for some fully vaccinated individuals, what may be mild for one could be lethal for another, and this doesn't account for the unvaccinated and immunocompromised individuals in our college communities. The strict mask wearing mandates in group settings that we are employing is very much in line with CDC and Chicago Department of Public Health guidelines, but we have to be clear that those are baseline recommendations and we all know that other precautionary measures can be taken. One of those would be stepping away from this dogged resistance to lowering class sizes caps to allow for greater social distancing. For both safety and to prevent disruptions in the even that we are forced to reduce class sizes later, why not take the precaution now? Why not prioritize preventive care for people now? Why not act in a way that is humanizing now? The response of "at this time, the Health Department guidelines don't require us to do so" is not an acceptable response. There are many things that we aren't required to do, but we do them because they are the prudent thing to do, and I'm sure that the Health Department wouldn't suggest that herding 35 people into poorly ventilated spaces for 50 mins and upwards was what they had in mind when revising their covid guidelines. So while we are very clear that there hasn't been a social distancing mandate, if anyone is unable to see the trend of infections and where we are headed, let this be a clarion call: we are careening toward stricter mask wearing and social distancing mandates if not another shutdown. Let's err on the side of caution and use some of the HEERF fund to subsidize the cost of running classes at a lower enrollment cap. While some may find the following statement debatable, and in certain situations they may be correct, on the whole and compared to

many other institutions and other industries, I think our administrators have done a lot to keep us safe in such an unprecedented event, I don't think we should turn back now.

I'd like to thank AVC Hererro for presenting on Future Ready. I must take a brief moment to mention that faculty have some concerns about this--not the initiative, but 1) that the language used to promote it is somewhat misleading. While "at no cost to students" is accurate, students don't understand that if they are eligible for Federal financial aid, enrolling in Future Ready will begin their financial aid clock and could have implications for them if they choose to come back to school and enter a program in which the certificate does not stack; namely, them running out of funds before they can complete their program.

Also, we have seen an uptick in promotion of our CTE programs—which we fully support—however, we have not seen the same effort put into the advertising of our non-CTE program. We want to ensure that the citizens of this city know that they have options, and that we are a destination that can help to get them wherever they desire to be. While our CTE offerings are wonderful options, they are not the only option we offer. We have a diverse population of learners with diverse aspirations, and they need to know that we can serve them.

As we continue to work toward a more ideal version of shared governance, and that's not suggesting that we are in a bad place, but it's meant to say that we can always find ways to do it better, we have engaged in conversations with Provost Potter about communication of initiatives and the manner in which we implement them at the City Colleges. What can be improved is not a sense of ill intent from our leadership, it's that we always seem to be working on things at the last minute which forces rushed meetings and the exclusion of crucial constituencies until the last minute leaving them feeling as if their input wasn't valued or purposefully circumvented. This isn't a practice that is limited to faculty. I have had many conversations with staff at different levels, at different colleges and at district, and especially those who have ended their employment with the City Colleges. The through line is that the ways that ideas and projects are shared and implemented puts people in reactive positions, often with little communal input, and high expectations and responsibility for ideas that are sometimes incomplete, deeply flawed, and sometimes ethically questionable. It is often the case that the goal of the idea or project is a noble one, but had more parties been in conversation in the ideation stage, institutionally, we could avoid some of the haphazard nature of work that happens at the City Colleges, and we could avoid putting various parties in situations that create unnecessary adversarial relationships. Some have suggested that this high stakes, last minute approach is purposeful and prevents people from contributing substantively in service of a clandestine agenda. In FC4's conversations, particularly with Provost Potter, when we've gotten to the bottom of things, a good deal of it has been unintentional and benign, though no less destructive. Whether it is willful ignorance or innocent ignorance, neither is acceptable, particularly for an organization of our size and with such a long history. We are too big and have been around for too long to operate like a start-up. Many people have worked in this quiet chaos because they believe in the power of the City Colleges and they have invested a lot into ensuring it's wellbeing, but this shouldn't come at the cost of the individual's wellbeing. There's a human cost to this type of work environment. Amongst faculty it looks like burnout and the feeling that our professional, expert opinion and our work and presence is not valued. Amongst staff, the feelings

are the same, but without the same protections that bargained for employees have, when considering their health, both physical and mental, this environment results in instability among our college leadership. Looking at the constant movement in our leadership is akin to watching a game of musical chairs. And instability in leadership eventually leads to instability of the institution. This is a culture shift that we have to address, but it's not my charge to keep. Board members and leadership, the onus of this lies with you. Some of it is carry over from the toxicity of our last district leadership, and some of it is of your own creation. Either way, we have to think about how we treat each other, not just as employers and employees, not just as co-laborers, but as people. People with hopes, and talents, and aspirations and intrinsic human value. We have to move from the transactional nature of many of our interactions toward something that is human-centered and trauma-informed. I am optimistic that if we really value people, and prioritize people that we can get the results that we desire without the casualties. I have always gotten a people-first feeling from Chancellor Salgado and believe that to be a cornerstone of his philosophy of leadership, so I'm a bit saddened that that hasn't been fully realized in our environments. As for faculty moving into the new semester, FC4 plans to revisit our vision of shared governance and it will be a topic of discussion with at our Fall retreat. As we have had a lot of new college and district leadership and other hire in other integral roles. This isn't meant to serve as a chastisement, but as a call to recenter ourselves in the shared values that we both commit to prevent future strife.

Finally, as stated earlier, I'd like to end with last month's report which was brief, yet important. I've updated it with information I've received since last month.

Off the heels of June, which was LGBTQ Pride month, July is little known as Disability Awareness Month. This is quite possibly because it is not nationally recognized yet; however it is celebrated across our nation with parades and other events commemorating the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by President George H.W. Bush in 1990. This year marked the 31st anniversary of this momentous civil-rights act that prohibits discrimination against Americans with disabilities and increases access and opportunities in key areas like transportation, employment, public accommodations, communications, and services. I imagine that we don't celebrate this month more largely because we have so many other months that celebrate so many groups, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, this year, unprecedented attention was paid to Asian American and Pacific Islander History month, particularly in light of the violence we have seen enacted upon its members. And there are many others. We recognize that people who are disabled are Black, and women, and Hispanic and Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Indigenous, and LGBTQ. We consider that the contributions of people who are disabled to be categorized in one or more of their other identities, and we often think how they have contributed *despite* their disability. We add to them the label of "resilient." Disability Awareness Month doesn't just give us an opportunity isn't to highlight individuals with disabilities and to showcase their resilience, rather it should call us to ask ourselves what barriers has the abled world put up that cause individuals to have to be resilient? Are there ways that we could create a level of ease of these individuals that abled people enjoy without question? Studying to earn a degree, or completing challenging work at one's job requires resilience, coming to school or work and having the ability to enter the building should not require resilience, getting information that is given to

everyone shouldn't require resilience, and certainly being respected in a space where one rightfully belongs shouldn't require resilience, yet policies, and procedures, and practices exist that demand people with disabilities to exert inordinate amounts of time and energy, both physically and mentally, that they ought not have to.

So in commemoration of Disability Awareness Month, I want to highlight the ways the FC4 has been able to engage with the universal work of accessibility. This summer, Dr. Stephanie Krah, has started what I believe to be some of the most important work I've been able to engage in in my time at the city colleges, which is assembling individuals across the colleges from multiple constituencies to develop a district-wide Accessibility Plan to identify, assess, and recommend improvements to policies, practices, and district-wide infrastructures, which are inequitable and prohibit accessibility for some members of our community. The committee has met three times, and the work coming from it is both exciting and passed due. The commitment to serving all members of our community and the ability to be aware of our own practices and to listen to others with humility is what I have witnessed in this group. It is both beyond commendable, but at the same time, it should be the minimal expectation of all of us.

I became aware of this group because this summer I had a student in my class who is deaf. In an effort to serve her well, I called together everyone that I could think of who may touch this student's tenure with us. I called together our DAC director, Tutoring Coordinator, and Interpreters for a few meetings: one to think through the student's history and the available services, and one with the student. This has turned into an ongoing conversation about how we can better serve our students with hearing impairments. I'm not saying this to applaud myself for doing this work, as a matter of fact, I am deeply embarrassed that I haven't invested myself in a similar manner to aid other students who come with accommodations and this experience has changed the way that I will engage with students with disabilities forever, hopefully for the better. I am saying this to say that along the way, we have been able to pinpoint some very specific ways that we could have done better, positions that don't exist that should, trainings that need to occur for faculty and staff, reimagining of curriculum that needs to happen, coordination of services that could be smoother, funding that needs to be appropriated, so forth and so on. There are service and equity gaps that affect this student, and I'm certain that if we asked other students, faculty, and staff, they could, off the tops of their heads, rattle off changes that need to be made that we've never considered. During my work with and for this student, I was able to meet Nathan Blair who is currently the Manager for Specialized Student Services through our Wellness Centers and works extensively with the coordination of our sign language interpreters, but I am over the moon to see that he is listed in today's Board Packet as being up for promotion to the role of District Director of Student Accessibility Services. Seeing him in action and considering his passion and expertise in this area, it is without reservation that I support his promotion. As an institution that has committed itself to equity and inclusion, the positioning of qualified and principled people in these roles is crucial to the manifesting of this goal, and I could recommend no one finer or more well-suited to carry this work forward. To my understanding Director Blair—I like the ring of that—will take over the work of the Accessibility Plan Committee, and Faculty stand at the ready to serve.

Similarly, I'd like to highlight that work that Monica Freeland, District Director of Assessment and Accreditation and Educational Quality has been doing in the realm of faculty development. She has been working diligently to draft a framework for faculty development which includes seven larger faculty objectives that are informed by varying committee notes, conversations with internal stakeholders, and feedback from development sessions through AY2020-21. They will be shared widely later this month for further engagement and refining to include all stakeholders. The third objective will have its kick-off during Faculty Development Week, and it focuses on faculty demonstrating inclusivity in their instructional approaches and practices. In terms of instruction that would include development aimed at supporting faculty in understanding of accessibility and inclusivity pedagogy, and supporting faculty in the practice of accessibility and inclusivity by providing resources and tools to ensure their instructional design and practice include both, and in understanding trauma-informed and healing-centered pedagogy and provides tools and resources for faculty to practice trauma-informed and healing-centered instructional design. This is a great inroad for faculty to consider the impact we have on accessibility and ways we can make positive changes.

Finally, as I and others have said many times of the past year, two things that the pandemic has done: 1) Exacerbated some inequities while correcting others. On one hand we found that many students and faculty don't well in the remote modality, but we also found that we were able to service student who for many reasons were previously unable to attend class in our physical spaces but who desired more than a fully asynchronous experience. As we look forward, using a the lens of accessibility and equity, we recognize that to varying degrees, we have to make space for both modality if we want to ensure that we serve all of our community members. To support this work Provost Potter suggested that we begin researching the Hy-flex teaching modality in an effort to pilot it in the near future. For those unfamiliar with Hy-Flex it is a modality that allow a high level of flexible for the student to attend class. There is no hard and fast definition, but in many cases, students are able to move between synchronous, remote-live, and asynchronous modalities which allows them greater access to education that fits their lives. Again, this may not be the model that we adopt, but flexibility is the hallmark of the modality. Many our students are parents, caregivers and workers. Many live in parts of the city that don't allow them travel time to access classes at a college that isn't in their relative area. We have students who face microaggressions and sometimes violence commuting to our colleges. We also have students who have mobility issues. For all of these students, the ability to take a class remotely could be the difference between them being able to complete a degree or not. So, last month when I asked the board if I could teleconference into the meeting and found out that attending in person was the only option, particularly after we had been holding board meetings via zoom for an entire year, it felt like a regressive move that wasn't in alignment with all of the accessibility and equity work that institutionally we are doing, particularly the work I have highlighted today. If we can ask everyone in the institution to make accommodation that will increase accessibility, it seems to me that that mentality must extend all the way up to our board and our board meetings. I want to acknowledge that there have been incremental changes to our board meeting that have greatly improve accessibility and transparency; Namely, moving the meeting time from 9am to 2:30pm though some would argue could be held even later to accommodate working individuals and many K-12 and college boards have done so. Also, streaming the meeting on YouTube has been an incredible change. More people have been

able to join the meeting than ever. This is evidenced by the amount of correspondence I receive from individuals who streamed and message me concerning happening of the meetings and information presented. This has been positive. While virtual meetings were a necessity of our circumstances, finding ways to continue to allow participants to engage virtually isn't a practice that should be jettisoned.

In participating in public comment, my colleagues, students, staff, and our community members, employees and citizens are fulfilling a fiduciary duty by voicing concerns and praise at board meetings. It is one way that they act in the best interest of our institutions. Everyone should have the opportunity to address the board, in real time, with their voices, and allowing them to do so remotely is not only one way that we increase access, but it is also a way that we address questions of equity: Who can afford to take off from work or childcare to join a 2pm meeting? Who can travel downtown to a building with no parking, in a room situation on an upper-level floor, particularly when we have campuses that would better suit the needs of those with disabilities? Who can afford to pay, what is for some more than an entire hour's worth of work, for parking, again when we have six other campuses with free, accessible parking? And when we say that individuals who cannot come in person may write to the board, we are making middle and upper-class assumptions about individuals' comfort, ability, and feelings of personal agency in expressing themselves in the written form. This often disadvantages people who come from cultures that prefer the oral tradition. I am pleased to report that when I asked Bonnie Phillips, Advisor to the Board about the board's plans to allow participants to join virtually, her reply was that the Board was appreciative of this feedback and interface with IT to determine the possibility of this. If we are able to create teaching experiences in which an instructor and some students are in class and others are able to join virtually, I'm confident that our IT department will be able to create a solution to this issue. Also, in Advisor Phillips' response she noted that the board plans to reinstitute the practice of hosting Board meetings at the various colleges to increase access to board meetings by having them in different areas of the city. That was welcome and wonderful news and we look forward to it. Advisor Phillips said that she will provide us with updates to the tech issue, so we'd like to thank her, the board and our IT staff, and our logistics staff at the colleges for their commitment to accessibility and equity.

FC4 fully supports these types of actions and will continue to engage with the board and admin to come closer to the goals of real equity, diversity in all areas, and creating inclusive spaces.

If there are no questions or comments from the board, this concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Sprewer on behalf of the Faculty Council of the City Colleges of Chicago