

CCCC President's Address CCC Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, February 3rd, 2022

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

Here we are a few days into another Black History month. While we are not nearly close to the promised land that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of, for some time we have been able to celebrate the incremental achievements of specific Black people in the Diaspora and the position of black people in the world, in particular in the US; however, these past few Black history months have shown us that, to some degree, our optimism had blinded us to the growing anti-black sentiment that surrounded us, and that we had possibly romanticized moments when we should have been focused on the progress of an overall movement. As history is social, and the value and efficacy of historical actions are sometimes debatable, it's hard to calculate with any accuracy what has definitively been achieved. However, progress becomes most clear in our laws; it is a space where progress is codified. For Black people in America, there are three major moments in which our value to this country has been codified in law. All three in the Supreme Court. The first, *Dred Scott v. Sandford* in which Scott, an enslaved Black man argued that when he was taken to Illinois—again, a free state—that he was automatically freed. The court issued against Scott, and in an opinion, Chief Justice Roger Taney stated that people of African descent “are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word citizen in the constitution, and therefore claim none of the right and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States.” The second moment: *Plessy v. Ferguson* in which the court used the concept “equal but separate”—which is the exact wording of the court—to maintain segregation. The court added that *Plessy's* claim that enforced separation of the races inherently suggested inferiority of Blacks was false, famously stating that “If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction on itself.” Anyone could look around and unarguably see that the condition of Blacks public spaces was in fact not equal to that of whites. Finally, the third: *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. Many of us think of the landmark ruling which ended segregation in schools as a triumphant moment both for Blacks and for our

country, but many of us are unaware of Brown vs. Board of Education II in which the court, after having decided the original Brown case, heard arguments in the subsequent session to consider how states were to de-segregate schools, none of this was outlined in Brown I. In Brown II, the court ordered the states to integrate their schools “with all deliberate speed,” meaning “take as long as you want.” This allowed all-white schools who had not followed the ruling of Brown I to remain segregated.

This is the codified history of Black people in America, one in which the highest court in the land has time and time again spat in our faces, and legally enshrined the idea that African-Americans are second class citizens, if citizens at all.

Again, while there have been gains, during the past few years we have witnessed numerous incidents of anti-blackness, of both the individual citizen and the state. This is what makes the work of City Colleges of Chicago so important. When we see things like the attacks on voting rights which, in the states proposing these restrictions, would most affect black people, we have to remember that, as I’ve said before, if nothing else, one of the primary functions of education is to inculcate citizens to a democratic society and arm them with the tools to fully participate in it. That’s what we do, and I’m so proud to be part of an institution that keeps this in mind. This is why the equity work we have been engaged in is so crucial in such a time as this. Education is often considered to be the great equalizer; I’m not so sure of that, but I know that educated individuals are statistically healthier and live longer lives. I know that they have better chances of generational upward mobility. I know that they have a lesser chance of being incarcerated. In short, I know that they have better lives, and we are a part of bettering the lives of so many people. We do this despite what politicians, and judges, and others who profit on the marginalizing of people, Black people in particular, would have us to do. What a court has to say about any of our constituents is of no consequence. It’s our job to educate citizens in a way that frees them. Education liberates! It is our job to empower them to navigate, and change, or destroy systems that wish them harm, and to arm them with the skills needed to build new systems that benefit us all. As an organization tasked with creating the opportunity for better lives, we are only as good as the least among us, the least privileged. And having an

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eye toward justice in the philosophical sense obliges us to take action--to make decisions--as if WE are the least of these. It is my hope that through programming held this month across the district that we lift up the truth about our history, both the good and the bad, so that each of us, regardless of race, will be able to fully participate in our democracy and will side with those who need help most. Our work in the cannabis space is just one of the ways, among many, that we redress historical inequities and create real change and racial equity.

That was a bit lengthy, so I'll be brief about the following items and welcome requests of board members to follow up on any issues in more detail at a later time.

As we all know, COVID is still raging on, and is at the forefront of our minds. When the semester began, we resumed the meetings between FC4's COVID response committee and our district partners. This has continued to be a positive relationship, resulting in policies and policy changes that aim to keep us safe and to preserved the integrity of our academic offerings during this unprecedented time. I will only highlight A few of the issues that faculty are most concerned about with the caveat that we are in continued conversations which have not gotten to any place in which we have reached a final space of disagreement.

Faculty are very concerned about conducting an in-person graduation at this time. Believe it or not, scientist only discovered the original Omicron variant two months and a few day days ago. It seems like we've been struggling with it forever considering it's voracity; however, it's only been two months. That hasn't even been not long enough to understand it, and there has been the discovery of a variant of Omicron which has been reported to be no less severe than the original. Considering this and we have plans to hold what could become a super spreader event in three months. One of the reasons given for the decision was that students really want to have a graduation. While we understand the value of a ceremony to mark the completion of a remarkable achievement, we also have to be clear that public health decisions aren't made based on what people want. Had that been the case, we would have been literally parading down the streets maskless a long time ago. This disease has been so unpredictable, and we don't have signs yet that we are nearing the endemic stage of it, so it seems counter intuitive to

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any concepts of public health as to why we are planning on doing this. I understand that the decision was made last year prior to the wildfire spread of Omicron; however, knowing what we now know, there is still time to right the ship. The only detail about safety protocols for the event we have been given to date is the requirement to wear masks and that we would have them on hand to pass out. Provost Potter will be inviting the planners of the event to share the fuller plan with us soon.

On a related note, it was brought to our attention that our Librarians where being prohibited from staffing the Library Chat remotely. This creates situations in which Library faculty are coming in to the building and staying after hours to man the chat which would be outside of their contractual obligations, and it is unstaffed on Sundays as our buildings are closed. This has created a very serious problem: a crucial service is not being offered to student, often when they need it most: late in the evening and on Sunday, a peak time in which students work on projects. I don't know the ends and outs of the policy which prevents this, but Provost Potter assured us that he would speak with the "authors of the policy" who remain unknown to us, to find a solution. Our Librarians are faculty. While they are not assigned classes, their work as teachers—as faculty—within their spaces, feels like it isn't being honored. There were talks of creating a position for a person to solely man the chat, which doesn't seem like the best option when we have faculty who could schedule their time both in the building and remotely to staff this important, student-facing work. Again, as Faculty, there is already a precedent for us being able to fulfill some of our teaching load online. This seems like the equivalent way for our Library Faculty to teach their loads.

Thankfully, throughout the pandemic, none of us have lost a job or missed a check. We have had the ability to work remotely, particularly when infection and mortality rates were at their highest. Unlike faculty, many of our professionals and administrators have been in our physical spaces since the beginning, and to some degree putting themselves at risk. While we fully understand the need for in-person services, we also should recognize a few things in this moment and moving forward. 1) A lot of the work that our professionals are doing could be done remotely, and we could have less people on campus, thus lessening risk. Many student

services, even when students come on campus, is being done remotely vi zoom with students in one space and the employee elsewhere. So, though the telework policy allowing employees two days of telework a week with their supervisor's approval is wonderful and has aided in our ability to be flexible and lessen risk, it could be expanded. There is really no need for some individuals to be on campus so frequently. Looking forward, we have to really consider the nature of knowledge work, work that isn't tied to a physical space. To some extent, much of our student service work has proven throughout the pandemic that it could be done and done well remotely. Employers are getting wise to how our homelives are shifting and options with less in-person work are available. Luckily, we haven't seen the type of mass resignation as other sectors, but that doesn't mean that we are immune to it. The world is shifting away from the factory model of work. The constraints of where and when one works, in many cases, has become arbitrary and is out of step with our current lives and, in some cases, makes elitist assumptions about worker's lives. The sentiment that I've gotten from many of our professionals is that they feel like they have been brought back so that supervisors could watch them. This is an unwarranted distrust of workers considering the high-level of services they were able to provide during the beginning of the pandemic. And it didn't begin with the pandemic, it began when employees had to start swiping in and out. Faculty don't do this because—and I'm making assumptions—our work is respected in a different way, and the value of our time calculated differently. So I'm suggesting that we have to reconsider what the actual rhythm of work looks like versus how we have traditionally imagined it and create something that better suits our realities. But more than that, we have to find ways—even in things like scheduling—that shows that we respect our employees and their work.

This brings me to the last outstanding issue which is the incredible number of leadership and other critical position vacancies at some of our colleges and at district office. While the pandemic has been rough on all of us, it has been especially difficult for people in positions of leadership. A few board meeting ago, I discussed this issue of how we treat each other and that I was uninterested in having conversations about caring communities if that didn't also extend to our leadership. At that time, I said that the environment that has been created for our college leadership, if not evaluated and changed would lead to resignations and instability at

our colleges. I didn't imagine that within months we would be at that point, but here we are. Something is happening that has caused key individuals both in our college leadership and at the district office to leave. This isn't debatable; this is fact. People with institutional knowledge, people who have been known to work well with their colleagues, faculty and staff, people who are good at what they do have left us, and a simple google search will show you that they didn't leave for better jobs. Most have been lateral moves; they are doing the same thing elsewhere, where they feel valued, and where they aren't thrown into unnecessarily chaotic situations. They have taken their talents elsewhere, and if I'm honest, I'm happy for them. I saw what was happening. We have had faculty in our meetings literally cry over the loss of good leadership. To protect the anonymity of the individuals who have left, again both leadership and staff, the through line is that they felt that their ideas either weren't respected or they were co-opted by district and they weren't given credit and sometime the ability to work on the idea that they came up with; they felt that prioritization of projects and initiatives was lacking and that everything came with a sort of immediacy that made it difficult to create a tenable working situation; they felt that communication skills from senior leadership needed development both in how information is communicated, including how many times directives had to be walked back or clarified, and the tone in which they had been spoken. And the most common trait among them is that they are much happier and the quality of their lives has improved since they left. This is a problem, a problem I don't have an answer to, but Executive leadership, you have an obligation to evaluate what is happening with your teams, what energy you bring to those spaces, and how various factors contribute to this type of mass dissatisfaction. And a real introspective evaluation might uncover that you are a major contributor to this, but it also creates an opportunity to change, and a move toward change that I would hope would be met with grace. Certainly, I think as faculty, our relationships with our executive leadership are perpetually moving in that direction, and I believe, that we try to meet each other with grace. So, it can be done. Board members, you to have some obligation in acting in the best interest of our institutions to investigate and provide support and resources to help our leadership make these sorts of environmental changes. It is my hope that this matter is taken seriously and not responsibility is not abdicated. As with all things, I don't believe that any of this is

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insurmountable. I believe there is often a desire to do better, even if we don't always know the way, and on occasion, I've seen acts of humility on which my hope for better is built.

I thank you for your time, please have a reflective, meaningful, and engaged Black history month, and this concludes my report.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Addendum: the following letter was sent to leadership and the board

December 22, 2021

Chairperson Massey, Chancellor Salgado, Provost Potter:

Please forgive me for sending a message so close to our winter break; however, COVID isn't on vacation and we are facing beginning a semester on the heels of a break over which our community members will have been in confined, poorly ventilated spaces with family and friends who may be carriers of an extremely contagious variant of COVID which is rapidly becoming the dominant strain worldwide. My goal in writing isn't to criticize our efforts to date, but to follow up on a promise made by our executive leadership team to "keep an eye on things" and revisit/revise policy as necessary. I've included this message to our board members only because this would be our only update for January and there is no January Board meeting. If they would like to have any input, February would be too late. I've included the faculty members of FC4's COVID Response committee for the sake of transparency and some weren't on our call last week, and Dr. Krah and David Anthony who, along with Provost Potter, have been diligently working on this and have been thoughtful and receptive partners in this effort.

While we have, to this point, talked about this in hypotheticals, I think we are undeniably at a point at which we need to reconsider policy. To date, faculty have asked to strengthen our policies concerning who can enter our spaces and under what conditions. The refrain we have been met with has been that we don't want to create procedures that are out of step with CDC, State and local guidance. The CDC is very clear that their guidance is meant to be supplemental to local guidance; additionally, the state, in its notice of emergency amendments (<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:89ccea7e-c701-4a64->

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[bb76-a1f0f8baa7b8](#)) , provided clarity on Section 690.1380 of the executive order, Physical Examination, Testing and Collection of Laboratory Specimens, by stating that “nothing in that Section limits the ability of schools, employers, or other institutions to conduct or require physical examinations and tests. Further, the rule amends Section 690.1385, Vaccinations, Medications, or Other Treatments, to clarify that nothing in that Section limits the ability of schools, employers, or other institutions to require vaccinations.” This suggests that requiring more stringent prevention and motoring policies is not out of step with guidance, but is both allowable and at our discretion.

To this end, there are a few issues at hand that we believe require immediate attention, and we imagine that our district team is already actively considering them:

First, many higher ed institutions have already decided to hold the first few weeks of school remotely. This allows for community members who may contract COVID or who are exposed over the break to isolate without 1) disrupting learning, and 2) inadvertently transmitting COVID within our campus communities. This is a consideration that is highly preferable, **but needs to be communicated to community members quickly so they may ready themselves for some amount of remote learning and telework.**

Second, as we have learned in our conversations with district representatives in this area, we have a significant number of community members who are unvaccinated, and of those who are vaccinated, we have an unknown number who have received boosters. Studies are showing that the previous definitions of “Fully Vaccinated” are not effective against preventing illness and spread of the Omicron variant. **This suggests that we should revise eligibility to come on campus to individuals having three doses of vaccination (Pfizer/Moderna combinations) or two if the first vaccination was Johnson & Johnson.**

Third, we are seeing numerous breakthrough cases of COVID infection among fully vaccinated and boosted individuals with varying severity of symptoms. **This suggests that we should consider revising our weekly testing policy to include every community member, regardless of vaccination status.** While it may seem cumbersome, weekly testing is the minimum that could be done considering that most people are on campus multiple times a week and the time between testing leaves a window of days in which a community member may be unknowingly positive have a high enough viral load to transmit. This is especially true as studies are showing the Omicron variant is replicating in the lung tissue at twice the speed of Delta, which is replicating at twice the speed of COVID-19. While indoor masking is highly effective in preventing transmission, this doesn't take into account human error. As someone who taught in-person this past semester, there is an egregious amount of improper mask wearing cutting across all community members—not just students. This is not limited to wearing masks in ways in which they do not cover the nose and mouth, but this also includes, more often, individuals whose masks are too big and leave gaps around the mouth and nose allowing for aerosols to both enter and exit. Requiring weekly testing of all community members doesn't solve this

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problem, but may reduce the amount of COVID positive individuals on campus before they have the opportunity to become close contacts with others.

The CDC suggests that prevention strategies and policies be “based on the school population, families and students served, as well as their communities.” A few of the pertinent factors for decision making they highlight include:

- Level of community transmission of COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccination coverage in the community and among students, teachers, and staff.
- Use of a frequent SARS-CoV-2 screening testing program for students, teachers, and staff who are not fully vaccinated.
- COVID-19 outbreaks or increasing trends in the school or surrounding community.
- social and behavioral factors that may affect risk of transmission and the feasibility of different prevention strategies.

Many of these are alluded to in our three policy concerns; however, there are unknown numbers and decision points. In our last meeting with Provost Potter, Dr. Krah, and David Anthony, we asked Dr. Krah for a “By-the-numbers” review of the factors listed above to help us consider at what thresholds and intersections of these policies should policy revision happen. We haven’t gotten that yet because we weren’t expecting to have that conversation until early in the Spring semester; however, the Omicron variant is raging on so swiftly that responses to our policy concerns is much more urgent and need to be communicated to community members quickly.

Before ending, I must mention one specific issue which highlights the need to address some of these issues and to increase our transparency around them. Over the past week, at Truman and I suspect at other colleges, as well, we have begun to receive multiple emails alerting us of multiple cases of COVID positivity on campus. To clarify, I don’t mean multiple emails about singular individuals, but a single email saying that two and three individuals were found to be positive. I emailed VP Conner and asked if the three individuals were, by definition, close contacts to one another. My interest wasn’t in the identities of those individuals—I didn’t ask for any identifying information—but as a member of our Faculty COVID Response committee, I’m considering the factors as defined by the CDC to determine if we need to have policy conversations. The committee met with the Chancellor earlier this month and he said that, at the time, we weren't looking to change polices because "there has been no spread," and was confident that "what we have been doing has worked." Both the Chancellor and Provost said we would continue to monitor the situation.

The CDC defines A COVID-19 outbreak as:

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a situation that is consistent with either of two sets of criteria:

During (and because of) a case investigation and contact tracing, two or more contacts are identified as having active COVID-19, regardless of their assigned priority.

OR

Two or more patients with COVID-19 are discovered to be linked, and the linkage is established outside of a case investigation and contact tracing (e.g., two patients who received a diagnosis of COVID-19 are found to work in the same office, and only one or neither of the them was listed as a contact to the other).

If there are multiple individuals within a given a college community who are positive and were close contacts either by happenstance or by work proximity, this constitutes an outbreak. I don't use this term to incite panic, but as a people charged with monitoring the situation, a definitional incident of a potential outbreak is a point of decision making. VP Connor said that due to privacy issues, she was unable to confirm my request—though no personal identifying information was requested—and referred us to the reporting COVID cases and contact tracing information that is on the website; however, nothing on the website quantifies cases or analyzes them to look for trends. This is what we are asking for and some sense of which levers trigger what responses and at what point. All of this has been nebulous to us. This hinders our ability to respond quickly to changing data because what we are looking for and the catalyst for change is a constant unknown. It feels like we are waiting for things to get “bad enough” in the general public to do something, and at that point, it's generally too late as our demographics don't directly reflect the general population and the specific risk factors of our communities aren't being taken into account, which is a health equity issue. And as educators, if we don't know anything else about decision making, we know that local context matters.

Again, this isn't a criticism of what has worked, but multiple possibly links cases is a clarion call that what has worked may no longer be enough and we have an opportunity to make adjustments.

The situation we find ourselves in today isn't the same as it was in March of 2020. Clear markers that we are approaching red zones would give us the opportunity to do differential analyses of our options and make the most ethical decisions for our community members.

We look forward to hearing from you soon about any changes that may be made to policy for the spring semester and while we are on break, I will still check an be responsive to email to aid in any way that we can to provide feedback or to disseminate information.

Respectfully,

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Keith Sprewer,
President, FC4