



A FALL SEMESTER LIKE NO OTHER

Dear Colleagues,

The upcoming fall semester will be unlike any that we have ever experienced at Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges. Instead of the bustle of activity as students find their way around the campuses, most students will be staying home and learning on their computers. Instead of catching up with colleagues and friends after the summer break, most employees will also be working remotely and connecting over Zoom.

Few could have predicted when we shut down the campuses in March that most of us would still be working from home as the fall semester begins. Although online teaching and working definitely has its challenges, at least we are now more prepared and comfortable with using the technology we need to perform our jobs. While we may be more used to meeting together on Zoom, I know many of us are looking forward to the time when we can all see each other in person again.

Our challenges do not compare to the difficulties many of our students are facing. Our students are struggling with basic needs, childcare and family concerns, and technology challenges. We know many of our students only have their phones to access classes. In fact, withdrawals increased by 50% this spring compared to last spring. It is clear that our students need us more than ever this year. We are committed to ensuring that our students have what they need to succeed and sustain the momentum to complete their educational goals.

Our community also needs us. With the state facing major economic issues, the community will be turning to our colleges to train students for jobs that will help to fuel California's economic recovery.

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking ahead, as we continue to tackle the challenges before us – including the pandemic, budget issues, enrollment decline – we must remain focused on our vision for this district: transforming the lives of our students by offering them the education and support they need.

Following is a brief update on a few key areas that will be our focus this next academic year.

REOPENING OUR CAMPUSES

We had hoped to slowly begin bringing more employees back to work at the campuses over the summer and early fall, but we had to delay those plans as the public health situation destabilized again and government orders were issued that limited opening up our offices.

Two key triggers will factor into our decision to have employees return to the campuses. 1) San Diego County must be removed from the state's watch list for COVID-19 cases for the required amount of time. 2) Compliance with the [California Department of Public Health Guidelines for Higher Education](#) to resume in-person instruction, which was issued last week.



Our campus facilities are ready for the return of students and employees. At both campuses, plexiglass shields and signage have been installed to promote social distancing and the District's plan for repopulating our campuses aligns with the state guidelines for higher education.

We are continuing to closely monitor the public health situation in the county and state so we can take the best actions possible to protect the health of our students and employees. We will keep you informed of any developments.

We are beginning to plan for spring. Due to the ongoing instability with the health crisis, we are planning for two eventualities: in person in some form, or largely online, as we are doing this fall. The presidents will be working with their teams at the campuses to plan the spring schedule of classes.

THE BUDGET

The California budget continues to be a subject of massive uncertainty. The state went from a \$5.6 billion surplus in January to a \$54.3 billion deficit in May because of the economic fallout from the pandemic. The District's Governing Board approved a tentative budget last month that was largely a placeholder budget. We are expecting another revised state budget later this month, and our final revenue for 2020-2021 will not be known until February of next year, further adding to the instability of our budget. It is critical that we continue to be steadfast with our state and local advocacy to ensure additional revenue for community colleges.

DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO ANTI-RACISM

Following the wrongful deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and many others, the Governing Board passed a [resolution](#) in June denouncing violence against Black Americans and making a commitment to anti-racism. The resolution affirmed the board's commitment to: removing systemic institutional and structural barriers for Black students; promoting an inclusive and anti-racist environment; integrating anti-racist curriculum, instruction and advising practices; increasing the diversity of Black faculty, staff and administrators; and eliminating the opportunity gaps suffered by students of color.

I am committed to ensuring that the words in that resolution are followed by bold action. College and districtwide efforts are underway, including joining the University of Southern California's California Community College Equity Leadership Alliance offered through USC's Race and Equity Center, and convening a districtwide Task Force to address diversity in our hiring practices, committees, and processes. We will also be reporting to the Governing Board each month on components of equity work, including diversity in hiring and student success. In July, board members heard a report on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected student outcomes through an equity lens.

ENROLLMENT

Strong enrollment continues to be a top priority for our District as we carefully plan to transition out of *Hold Harmless* funding in 2024-2025. The significance of the Hold Harmless provision is that the district is being funded at our 2017-2018 enrollment level even with an enrollment decline of about 17% since then. Similarly, community colleges in our region are generally seeing declining enrollment for fall as students grapple with uncertainty. Therefore, there will be an intentional focus on developing an enrollment management plan to build enrollment.

COMMUNICATION

Communication with our employees is more important than ever now. When we began working remotely last spring, we sent out daily Remote Reports to update employees on developments at the District and help us stay connected while we worked apart from each other. With the start of the fall semester, we will be bringing back weekly editions of the Remote Report, with a specific focus on updates to various areas of interest in the District to continue to keep our employees informed.

The past six months have been challenging for all of us. Yet through it all, you have pulled together to find creative ways to support our students and our community. It is through our greatest challenges that we find opportunity to emerge stronger than ever.

I hope you have a wonderful fall semester, no matter where you are working. I appreciate your dedication to our students and your flexibility as we adjust to an ever-changing situation. Thank you for your caring, compassion, and support.

Sincerely,

Lynn

Lynn Ceresino Neault, Ed.D.

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