



Looking Back on 2020

December 17, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

With all that has happened in 2020, a year filled with natural and manmade disasters, many of us are longing for the end of this year with a renewed sense of hope for 2021. It certainly was not what I expected when I started as your chancellor in January. It felt as if we were just getting a handle on one crisis when a new one surfaced that once again tested our strength as individuals and as a community.

The pandemic hits

In March, the pandemic forced us to shut down our campuses. Within days, our colleges had to shift to remote learning and support for students, and our employees had to adjust to working from home—many juggling childcare, homeschooling and caring for family members.

And yet... Our faculty, classified professionals and administrators stepped up and quickly transitioned to remote learning and working. We found ways to help each other, our students, and the community. Our service to the community ranged from loaning Grossmont College's ventilators to the state and local hospitals to be used by COVID-19 patients, to repurposing old nursing uniforms to make face coverings, to two Cuyamaca College students who used their 3D printers to create ear protectors for mask-wearing essential workers. We also held drive-by food distributions, awarded laptops to needy students, hosted a COVID-19 testing site, and opened our campuses to serve as community polling places.

Protests against racism

On Memorial Day weekend, our community and millions around the world were horrified watching a video on television and social media of George Floyd being murdered by a Minneapolis police officer. Floyd's death was yet another in a long line of Black people who have been the victims of racist attacks and it ignited outrage and protests around the world.

And yet... The collective outrage about systemic racism in our country and campuses prompted serious and heartfelt discussions throughout our District about race and equity. Our Governing Board called for dismantling racism in our organization, denouncing violence against Black Americans, and made a commitment to diversity, racial equity and inclusion—and our colleges catapulted into action.

Virtual graduations

In June, instead of joyous graduates celebrating commencement with their friends and families on the Grand Lawn at Cuyamaca College or the quad at Grossmont College, Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges held virtual commencements with speeches and the conferring of degrees and certificates held online.

And yet... More than 2,700 graduates received more than 5,700 degrees and certificates, each one reaching a milestone in their education. Their futures are brighter, and they can be better citizens because of the knowledge they gained at Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges.

The pandemic continued

When it became apparent that the pandemic would not be ending soon, we realized that our colleges would have to remain mostly online for the fall semester. Many students struggled with online learning or faced food insecurity because of job losses resulting from the pandemic.

And yet... Our colleges found innovative ways to help our students, including emergency grants and laptops, and online counseling and advising sessions. Drive-through food and laptop/hot spot distributions continued throughout the semester, and we quickly mobilized to provide outdoor wireless access on campus for students.

Looking ahead with hope

This year has definitely been a challenge, but it's also been a remarkable experience. It has taught me about the strength of the human spirit and the power of perseverance. It has taught me the importance of gratitude and that in the end, hope will get us through just about anything. Thank you for all you have done this past year to create the conditions for our students to succeed, even in extraordinary times.

As our winter break approaches, have a restful and joyful holiday season. We can all look forward to 2021 with a sense of renewed hope and gratitude for a better year for our community, our District, and the world.

Happy holidays and happy New Year!

Lynn

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