



A Year of Rebuilding

January 25, 2021

Welcome back to a new semester and a new year! I hope you had a restful and relaxing break.

It has certainly been a momentous and tumultuous time in our nation's history. The inauguration of Joe Biden as the nation's 46th President served as a powerful statement that our democracy has prevailed. Dr. Jill Biden, the only employed First Lady in history and a community college professor, will bring strong support for community colleges to the White House. We can also celebrate the inauguration of Vice President Kamala Harris, the first African American, South Asian American, and woman to serve in the nation's second highest office.

As we prepare to start the spring semester, COVID-19 continues its relentless surge across the country and in our community. We are looking forward to widespread distribution of the vaccine that will stem the tide of this pandemic and let us safely return to campus. To support our community, Cuyamaca College is in negotiations to set up a county vaccination site on campus. Once approved, the site will serve the community over the next few months as access to the vaccine increases. Once educators are eligible for the vaccine, all District employees may receive their vaccine at Cuyamaca College if desired.

This has also been an incredibly busy and eventful time for our District. The Governing Board members and I are hopeful for the future and are committed to the health and safety of our students and employees as we move forward.

This year, our primary focus will be on **rebuilding** from the effects of the pandemic and the economic recession including:

- Returning to campus in a systematic and safe way.
- Dismantling racism and closing equity gaps.
- Continuing to ensure the fiscal stability of the District.
- Ensuring an intentional focus on enrollment management to build our enrollment back to our funded level.
- Providing stronger support from District Services to the colleges.
- Reconnecting with our community, our students and each other.

Returning to Campus

For the spring semester, on-campus classes will continue to be held for only a small number of critical courses, including those in the Nursing and Allied Health programs and certain lab and CTE classes that cannot easily be taught online. Given the state of the surge in COVID cases, the presidents are working with their leadership teams to confirm the scheduling of on-campus classes this spring to ensure the safety of students and employees. For athletics, no sports will be held in early spring; we are hoping that some sports will be able to play late in the spring if it is safe.

Employees will continue to work remotely except for essential employees who have been identified by their supervisor.

We are beginning to think ahead about how summer and fall 2021 classes will be held, but the current situation with the pandemic is too unsettled to make a final decision. We will be following the public health situation closely in the months ahead and working with our constituent leaders to chart a safe course for returning to campus.

Dismantling Racism

Last summer, our Governing Board made a commitment to anti-racism at our District. Since then, we have made noteworthy strides toward addressing issues of racism throughout the District. Both colleges are active with the University of California Race and Equity Center and deeply committed to taking bold steps to create a culture of anti-racism and addressing equity gaps for our students.

One significant component of the Board's commitment to dismantling racism calls for increasing the diversity of our faculty, staff and administrators. A districtwide Task Force has been convened to address this effort. I am pleased that our District was awarded a small grant from the state to examine our hiring policies, practices, and processes, along with onboarding and retention of employees through an equity lens – working in consort with the districtwide Task Force.

Budget Issues

Governor Gavin Newsom released his proposed \$227.2 billion 2021-2022 state budget this month, marking a cautious start to economic recovery after 2020's recession brought on by the pandemic. As I said in my January 11, 2021, message, Newsom's budget has some glimmers of good news for community colleges.

I am gratified that the proposed one-time funding includes \$250 million for emergency financial grants for students and \$100 million to address students' basic needs for food and housing insecurities over three years. Any assistance that can be provided to our students most in need, particularly those most impacted by the economic situation, is critical for their success.

Newsom's budget proposal also took significant steps to address larger fiscal issues. The proposed budget includes a 1.5% COLA tied to actionable plans to close equity gaps and calls for paying back about \$1.1 billion of the \$1.5 billion in deferrals included in the 2020-2021 budget, which means the District will not need to borrow as much money as initially anticipated, reducing our expenses.

An estimated \$1.26 billion in additional federal stimulus funding is also expected for California community colleges. Our District is expected to receive about \$23 million in stimulus funding. We anticipate that similar to the CARES act funding, the funds must be spent on costs related to the pandemic, student support related to COVID-19 needs, and financial assistance to students impacted by the pandemic.

While one-time funding will go a long way to rebuild and support our students, it does not address all of our budget challenges. Simply stated, our base revenue is not increasing commensurate with significantly rising costs – particularly salaries, benefits, and pension obligations. We will continue to address our budget challenges as we engage in the process of building the 2021-2022 budget in the months ahead, with broad input from constituent groups.

Enrollment

Enrollment at our colleges is down about 9% this spring compared to last year, reflecting regional and statewide trends. The pandemic has forced many potential students to take a gap year to find work, while others have faced challenges with online classes. We currently have numerous college, District and regional marketing efforts underway to promote our colleges and urge students to return. Some of the key audiences we are focusing on include:

- Students who have applied but not enrolled.
- University students who could also take online classes at our colleges.
- Adult education students through new provisions for dual enrollment.
- Our career education programs.
- Retention of our current students.

Our deeper concern is that our enrollment this year is projected to be 23% less than 2017-2018, the level at which our District is being funded under *Hold Harmless* which is slated to end in 2024-2025. Therefore, this year, we will have an intentional focus on developing a comprehensive plan to build back enrollment including marketing, onboarding, student retention, infrastructure and scheduling.

Support from District Services

Through the state Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI), a team of our colleagues from around the state virtually visited the District last fall to address best practices for providing support for the colleges. They heard from many employees and came up with a list of recommendations for ways that District Services can more effectively serve the colleges.

Some of the key components of the District's plan include:

- Creating systematic processes for prioritizing requests for technology.
- Purchasing a curriculum management system.
- Developing a plan for moving to paperless business processes.
- Undergoing a comprehensive assessment of the structure of Information Technology to ensure that appropriate resources are in place to support our systems.
- Creating an inventory of all software currently being used.
- Training for IT personnel.
- Developing a culture of professional and leadership development.

The next step is to submit a budget for approximately \$200,000 in funding from the state to implement our plan.

Reconnecting with our Community

Our District plays a vital role in the East County community, educating our students and training the future workforce. When we return to the campuses, we look forward to getting back out in the community and making a deeper connection with business leaders and elected officials to advocate for community colleges.

A key point we will be promoting is a recent [Economic Impact Report](#) by Emsi, an economic modeling company, which found that our District has a cumulative **\$1.1 billion annual economic impact** on the San Diego region.

The economic impact is wide-ranging – from the \$237.5 million resulting from our District's payroll and spending to the \$810.2 million impact from our colleges' many alumni, who have better jobs and are spending money in our communities.

The study also found that our colleges provide a solid return on investment for our students, taxpayers and society.

- For every \$1 a student spends for their education at Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges, they will have a return of \$6.90 in higher future earnings.
- Taxpayers will see a return of \$1.40 for every \$1 in public money invested in the District.
- Society gains \$10.20 in added income and social savings for every \$1 invested in the District.

We will be sharing this information broadly with the media, our public officials, and the East County community to remind them of the vital role that our District plays in the economic recovery of our region and state.

We would not have such a major impact on our students and community without the efforts of all our committed employees. I want to thank you for your tireless dedication to our work, your concern for our students, and your flexibility as we navigate these challenging and uncertain times.

I look forward to the year ahead as we find new and innovative ways to serve our students and plan for a bright future.

Have a good semester.

Lynn

Lynn Neault, Ed.D.

Chancellor, Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District