



Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges

Service Employee International Union (SEIU) Local 1973 – “Stronger Together!”

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8/13/2020 Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Listening Session

Senator Haskell, Representative Turco, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Maureen Chalmers, and I serve as the President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (4Cs). In spring 2020, we represented over 4,700 full and part-time faculty and staff at the state's 12 community colleges and the University of Hartford. I appreciate the opportunity to speak directly with the committee and share the concerns that I have heard from my members as we look to start the fall semester on August 26.

I appreciate your leadership, our Governor's, and those of our public health officials that have been guiding us through this pandemic as a role model for other states. I want Connecticut to continue to thrive as a role model of prioritizing safety and health of its citizens.

Our union officials have been touring the community college campuses the last few weeks to get a sense of the safety precautions that have been put in place. For the most part, there is appropriate hand sanitation, signage, and plexiglass barriers. A few campuses had just begun their transformation and will be revisited before classes begin. I appreciate the administration's efforts to space out classes so there would not be students waiting in hallways for classrooms to empty, creating a crowd.

There are a few areas that I feel need improvement. CSCU is requiring everyone to wear a mask while on campus, but faculty and staff are deeply concerned that they may have to confront a student about wearing a mask. I am sure we have all seen videos on the news of customers becoming hostile trying to enter a store without a mask. While our members are all educators and handle situations with grace, in this pandemic, no one knows what to expect anymore. Our members want clear information from each college about their policy, who to contact if a student becomes hostile, and how it will be handled. Additionally, greater communication is desired on our campuses about criteria for shutdown and move to remote learning.

For the community colleges, of greatest concern is a total lack of testing for COVID. Unlike at the CSUs, where residential students are required to show

proof of a negative COVID test before coming to campus and will be tested periodically throughout the semester, there will be no testing at the community colleges. The Community Colleges serve both urban and rural geographic areas. Some of our students rely on public transit to get to school, work, and home. Many students work in addition to attending college, often in jobs that have not been traumatically affected during the pandemic. Our students may not only be at an increased risk of contracting COVID, but based on our demographics, our students are more likely to suffer complications of the disease.

At a recent BOR meeting, it was asked how the administration will know if there is an outbreak at a college if they are not doing any testing. The Commissioner of Public Health, an ex-officio member of the Board, explained that the local departments of public health are able to assess the levels of COVID in the area.

I don't doubt the Commissioner, but the colleges are not even planning to take temperatures as students, faculty and staff enter the buildings. I understand that she believes it will slow down entering and cause a crowd, but it does not have to. For example, I recently signed and interpreted a local town's meeting about the pending back to school plans. The town has purchased thermometer scanner gateways, each of which can accommodate 70 people per minute while maintaining social distancing. Being able to assess temperatures on campus may indicate an outbreak sooner than the local department of public health.

In conclusion I would like to endorse The BOR Faculty Advisory Committee's unanimous resolution to extending COVID testing beyond just residential students, establishing point of entry monitoring that includes temperature checks, respect faculty preference for mode of course delivery and staff preference for telework, contact tracing, and addressing the concern of the buildings' ventilations systems. (The full resolution is attached).

Thank you for your consideration.

The Faculty Advisory Committee unanimously approved (with 2 abstentions) on Friday, Aug. 7th at its special meeting (with 2 abstentions) the following resolution on reopening CSCU campuses:

Whereas we value the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, employees and the general public, the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents for Higher Education (FAC) recommends the following supplementary measures to the existing reopening procedures:

- (1) extending virus testing beyond residential students to all students, faculty and staff and establishing a consistent schedule of testing throughout the semester. (See the Courant's July 30th article on testing plans at Yale and Wesleyan, and the Yale-Harvard study it cites for contrast.)
- (2) establishing point of entry monitoring at academic buildings for face masks (use and quality), temperature reading, and hand sanitizing; accommodations for those with conditions that exempt them from mask-wearing must not place others at risk.
- (3) respecting faculty preferences for mode of course delivery and other duties, and staff preferences for telecommuting; Special consideration must be afforded to those over 65, given the specific nature of our college populations. Presence on campus should continue to be at faculty/staff discretion as conditions change throughout the semester.
- (4) specific details about procedures for contact tracing, criteria for shutdown and move to remote learning, and conditions for reopening must be made clear. Method of communication about the details of any such shutdown or reopening must be clarified.
- (5) Reports on the adequacy of ventilation systems must be provided for each building that will be used on each campus and deficiencies addressed to ensure equal access to a safe working environment for students, as well as for faculty and staff.

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