

## **AFA report to Board of Trustees, 4/13/21, Sean Martin, AFA President**

President Battenfeld, Trustees, President Chong, Colleagues and other members of the community,

Today, my report on behalf of AFA will be limited to one topic, namely, the district's plans for reopening on-site instruction and services in Fall 2021.

It has been widely reported across the state and nation that teachers' unions, along with the negotiations process, have been an obstacle to a return to in-person instruction. We perceive many of these reports as simply the latest effort to scapegoat labor while distorting the realities of the negotiations process. And, though we are not aware of any specific reporting regarding SRJC or the AFA, there is a growing rumor in our community, or as some have described it, "the word on the street" is, that negotiations with AFA are "holding up the fall scheduling process."

Today, I wish to put those rumors to rest by clearly asserting for the record that AFA is in no way holding up the process to prepare for a more expansive offering of in-person instruction and services. AFA has, for some time, been preparing the ground for increased on-site instruction and services. We are convinced that doing so will better serve the interests of students, our community and faculty alike and do not agree with the decision to continue offering mostly remote instruction and services in Fall 2021.

In preparation for negotiations on the provisions for increased on-site offerings in fall, AFA has conducted listening sessions along with numerous other interactions with our unit members. We have carefully catalogued faculty members' concerns so that we may better represent their diverse interests at the table. In addition, AFA recently conducted a survey of the faculty, inquiring as to their preferences for returning to in-person instruction and services in the Fall 2021 semester. We received a robust response with 440 replies. Roughly half of respondents replied unequivocally that they would prefer to return to campus in the fall. A quarter of respondents replied in the negative. Those who responded with uncertainty cited a number of conditions that would impact their level of comfort with in-person instruction and services including: the state of the pandemic; safety

conditions on campus; how many students and employees are vaccinated; family circumstances; along with masking and distancing requirements.

Faculty, as reflected in both our listening sessions and survey, have been overwhelmingly focused on students' needs. Among the most common concern we've received pertains to an entire generation of students being deprived of the robust and transformative education they both desire and deserve.

We recognize uncertainty remains and that the stakes are high. We agree with President Chong that the safety of our students, employees and community members are the top priority. Thus, we recognize that a return to in-person instruction and services implies additional resources be devoted to, and effective protocols adopted for that purpose. We recognize that some promising developments have come from the broad experiment with remote instruction and services. Further, we fully support providing options for those who, due to the pandemic, are either unable or unwilling to return to in-person activities, to continue in a remote medium.

We aren't calling for a return to "normal." This report is not a complete repudiation of the district's stated intent to engage in a measured return to campus. But, we are convinced there is an opportunity to develop a plan that is both responsive to the needs of effective development of the instructional schedule and also capable of responding to conditions as they are leading up to the fall semester. We can pull back from in-person instruction and services as necessary. We've done it before. The opposite is not possible. Thus, if we fail to prepare for a more robust return to on-site instruction and services, we are preemptively excluding creative and effective strategies that might better serve our students and community. We sincerely hope the district remains openminded on these questions and wish for our members, as well as the entire community, to know that AFA is ready to partner with our district colleagues on such a solution.