

AFA Report to the Board of Trustees, 4/12/22, AFA President, Sean Martin

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

As we meet here today, Department Chairs and Supervising Administrators are busy finalizing the second proof of the fall schedule of classes. Faculty members across the district feel a mixed sense of excitement and trepidation as we further expand in-person instruction and services in the wake of the pandemic. Throughout the scheduling process, departments have relied on the stability and safety provided by the Vaccine mandate. If trends from previous pandemics are prescient, we should expect seasonal outbreaks of the virus to continue. Most expert assessments anticipate new strains of the virus to emerge in the next few years, but they also expect infections, serious illness and hospitalizations to be reduced due in large part to the effectiveness of vaccines.

AFA recognizes and supports measured adjustments to masking, distancing, and other protocols as evidence and guidance from health officials allow. But it is AFA's view that the Vaccine mandate has been and will continue to be a critical element of this transition to normalcy. The vaccine mandate provides a foundation on which the relaxation of other protocols is made possible. Thus, AFA wishes to assert our strong support for the indefinite continuation of the vaccine mandate.

Next, forgive me for recounting here many of the points previously made by the Department Chair of our Math program. Like our Math Colleagues, AFA urges our Trustees and Administration to join us in opposing passage of AB1705. As you know, AB705 (passed into law in 2017) was promoted as a bill that would liberate students from an

antiquated and unfair placement system that forced them into remedial math and English pathways and unreasonably delayed student achievement. AFA agrees with this element of AB705, namely that the prior placement methods needed revision. The selling point of the bill was that it empowered students with the choice to self-select into transfer level courses while retaining pre-transfer options that some students would surely need. But AB705 also granted the Board of Governors the authority to develop Title V regulations to facilitate the implementation of the bill. Colleges across the state recently received a memo from the Chancellor's office detailing the impact of these ill-conceived regulations which totally disregarded faculty input and essentially preclude SRJC from offering any pre-transfer courses. Though the memo doesn't explicitly ban such courses, the requirements for offering them are such that districts are caught in the paradoxical dilemma where the data required to justify offering them presupposes that the classes are already being offered. That is, these regulations effectively prohibit offering courses that many of our most vulnerable students need to pursue their dreams of a college education.

AB1705 seeks to establish these Title V regulations as law which would have the ironic impact of depriving students of *any* choice in their Math and English placement. Students are now thrown into a condition of sink or swim while dedicated faculty are scrambling to help them catch up, often for years of lost preparation.

We have heard numerous accounts from students and faculty members as to the significant harm this causes our students. An array of studies show that our student body is increasingly ill prepared to engage in post-secondary education. Average skills in reading, writing, and mathematics are well below what is necessary to effectively participate in college-level courses. This has only been exacerbated by the

conditions of the pandemic where many students entering our system have now endured years of online instruction of varying quality.

And though our students along with Math and English instructors are most immediately impacted by these regulatory impositions, ultimately all students and faculty have had their work lives dramatically altered, as basic competence in Math and English are fundamental to nearly every subject we offer.

The faculty at SRJC is deeply committed to our mission and our students. Our first inclination is to do whatever it takes to support them. Our view is that genuine equity demands we provide whatever is needed to ensure students at SRJC receive an education that is comparable to whatever they would receive at any of the elite transfer institutions we serve. But AB1705 stands to jeopardize that effort as the personal attention and workload implied by such an effort is simply unsustainable. This hurts all students as the pace and depth of instruction is necessarily compromised in the process. It is simply not possible for faculty and students to compensate for years of lost educational opportunity while also sustaining current class sizes and without a dramatic increase in academic support programs. Please, speak out now in opposition to AB1705

As you've become used to hearing me say, union work is equity work and faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.

Thank you for your attention.