

## **AFA report to the Board of Trustees, 9/14/21, Sean Martin, AFA President**

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

Typically, I would take this opportunity to update the Board on the various activities of AFA since the previous meeting. We have a lot going on.

However, in today's report I will focus on those topics pertaining to safe working conditions in the context of the COVID pandemic, and specifically to Resolution 21-21 on the Agenda for today's meeting.

I'll begin by noting that AFA continues to support the district's effort to expand access to in-person instruction and services in the Spring 2022 semester. We know that many faculty members are eager to return to campus. Those of us who are teaching on campus this semester can attest to the gratitude our students express for this opportunity. And we are confident there are many others eager to continue their studies, but who have found the online experience does not meet their learning needs.

However, we can only support such efforts if we are certain the district is doing everything it can to ensure our members, as well as staff and students, are safe. Recent events have given us cause for concern regarding, not the motives, but the capacity of District leaders to establish safe working conditions absent a full vaccine mandate.

We believe swift implementation of a vaccine mandate would dramatically reduce these concerns, and so we applaud the plan to implement a full mandate for Spring 2022. However, we remain concerned that the proposal in the resolution for the remainder of the current semester is insufficient. In particular the proposed plan for weekly testing of non-vaccinated persons is insufficient given our continuing experience with the District's failure to implement existing safety protocols.

Since the beginning of the current semester, AFA has provided members numerous opportunities to share their experiences and concerns regarding the implementation of the SRJC Plan for a Safe Return to Campus. The bulk of feedback we've received conveys the totally inadequate implementation of protocols presented in that document. These protocols were an essential premise of AFA's agreement with the district to increase in-person instruction and services in the present semester. Among other things, we were promised that monitors would be present at each site to inspect and enforce masking protocols: As the document reads, ["Upon arrival, each mask will be assessed for appropriateness. If the mask is found to not be appropriate \(neck gaiters, ill-fitting, dirty, etc.\) students will be asked to remove their personal mask and don an appropriate mask provided by SRJC."](#) (p. 20, *SRJC Plan for a Safe Return to*

*Campus*) To our knowledge, this kind of monitoring has not occurred, or if it has, it has not occurred in any consistent manner.

This is but one concern faculty have brought to our attention. Others, related to the confusing and contradictory district communications around implementation of the protocols and adoption of a mandate abound. Faculty have exhausted countless hours responding to the District's disordered messaging, seeking answers to questions that no one seems equipped to provide, and improvising solutions to issues for which leadership has provided little guidance. As an example, our Department Chairs have been working furiously, in conditions of intolerable uncertainty, to prepare a schedule of classes for the Spring semester. Numerous departments and programs have asserted they are unwilling to schedule classes and services in-person given these conditions. As a result, students and faculty are losing an opportunity to return to in-person instruction that will undoubtedly hamper our efforts to improve our steadily declining enrollment.

In short, the impression of the faculty is that District Leaders have failed to promote a clear, coherent, and effective strategy to protect our community. That is, the faculty presently have little confidence in the District's ability to ensure safe conditions, short of a robust vaccination mandate. We beseech you to provide clarity and guidance today so that we can begin to restore services to the community.

Thus, we respectfully suggest the Board entertain an amendment to Resolution 21-21 that establishes implementation of a vaccine mandate in the current semester that does not allow for persons to opt for testing in lieu of vaccination (while allowing for legally required exemptions). Barring that, we'd encourage the Board to amend the Resolution to allow for more frequent testing, including rapid testing for each day a non-vaccinated person is on campus.

We are sensitive to the fact that students and faculty signed up for classes this semester before such a mandate was in place. However, this concern should be weighed against the real possibility that members of our community may suffer serious illness, hospitalization, or death should they contract the virus as a result of their (or someone with whom they associate) participating in district activities. Numerous Colleges in our system have adopted mandatory vaccines after weekly testing has proven insufficient. More to the point, if the current conditions warrant adopting a vaccine mandate for Spring 2022, what reason would be sufficient to delay imposing the vaccine.

In addition, we support the immediate implementation of a robust educational campaign aimed at addressing concerns regarding the equity, safety and efficacy of vaccines. We are a college after all, we have an amazing array of experts and resources at our disposal and we can do far better on this front. We also support allowing sufficient time for persons to be vaccinated as so

many other districts have done. Finally, we support providing free and convenient access to vaccines.

Thank you for your attention.