

January 9, 2012

Governor Jerry Brown
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

I have been an instructor at City College of San Francisco since 1996. As a lifelong resident of this state, I voted for you both in the last election and in the 1970s. I am writing to you regarding the Student Success Task Force recommendations, and am deeply disturbed by the impact some of the recommendations will have on community colleges throughout California.

There is no question that we must work toward more “efficiency” in public education. But, at least as regards community colleges, such work must be done at a local level, within given communities. All citizens pay taxes and otherwise support these institutions, and, in turn, the institutions must remain accessible to everyone who needs classes and services.

At CCSF, along with the SSTF target population of full-time transfer students, we serve “downsized” and older workers needing to learn new skills, veterans, homeless students, immigrants from every country learning English at every level, high school students, and on and on. There are approximately 100,000 students in our system during any given year. Students enroll in a broad range of classes, from EMT training to Broadcasting to Yoga, and everyone, including the larger society, benefits from this arrangement. For many students, CCSF is certainly the key to future survival, let alone success.

California as a whole is also uniquely diverse, with over 40 million people. There is no possible way that centralization of governance by the Chancellor’s office, and its resultant autonomy, can appropriately address the needs of the hundreds of different communities throughout the state. Concentrating this kind of power in one office politicizes the hierarchy of public education to a dangerous degree.

Another significant concern is that of the Lumina Foundation role in the development of the SSTF recommendations. This is part of a nationwide plan to “streamline” public education, and in the process make untold billions for corporations pedaling achievement tests, online courses and high-interest student loans to an increasingly less-literate and less-employable public.

There have been a number of articles in the New York Times recently showing the poor outcomes of online-based education programs in different states, even though such programs are a growing trend due to this massive privatization effort. And it is

a scandal that there are millions of former students (many unemployed) who face lives of poverty due to loans with sky-high interest that they will never be able to repay. It is obvious that a one-size-fits-all approach to education doesn't work.

There will be an unprecedented negative response by interested citizens (i.e. the electorate), once the SSTF measures are in force. There will also be lay-offs of thousands of instructors and staff throughout the state, with most having nowhere to go in the public sector, due to lack of funding for programs and a shrinking safety net. The private sector is essentially disengaged, except where profits are concerned. The larger populace – potential students – will be turned away and further “dumbed down.” As Howard Dean has said, no civilization can survive if the gulf between haves and have-nots is too great. These are the stakes in this situation.

I admire your leadership and am happy that you have returned to lead our state through this difficult period. But the Student Success Task Force recommendations will hinder rather than help you achieve your goals. I can't imagine that you would want to be remembered for presiding over the removal of public education as an option for millions of adults, both young and older, now and in the future.

Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully,

Lenny Carlson
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