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CFT files new complaint against ACCJC

*Department of Education asked to pull plug,
aid in finding new accreditor*

San Francisco—The California Federation of Teachers filed a substantive new [complaint](#) against the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) today, arguing that the accreditor of California’s community colleges has failed so completely to fulfill its duties that the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) should immediately “de-list” it—deny its renewal as an accreditor. The CFT was joined in the complaint by the faculty union at City College of San Francisco, AFT Local 2121, and its parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers, as well as the California Community College Independents.

A previous complaint filed by CFT in 2013 resulted in a finding by the DOE that the ACCJC was in violation of numerous accreditation standards. It opened the gates to scrutiny by elected officials and government agencies seeking to fix the rogue accreditor; but so far the complex and sometimes murky oversight of accreditors has worked to the advantage of ACCJC.

“For years, the ACCJC has pushed forward with self-serving, illegal accreditation practices that unjustifiably sullied the names of colleges and universities throughout California like our own City College of San Francisco, while allowing bad actors like Corinthian Colleges to defraud and even bankrupt thousands of students,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten, whose 1.6 million members includes more than two hundred thousand professionals in higher education. “Even after they’ve been found at fault, the ACCJC is still in business, with the potential of devastating the college’s functioning and with it the ability of faculty to deliver a high-quality education to our students. Enough is enough. It is time to de-list this failing commission and return hope to the community and every student CCSF serves.”

The complaint notes that the ACCJC no longer enjoys “wide acceptance” among the California community colleges it oversees, a crucial standard for continued recognition by the DOE for regional accreditors. The DOE had already informed the ACCJC two years ago that it was not in compliance with this standard among several others, but the ACCJC had appealed the DOE finding, and delayed its day of reckoning.

“It is past time that we move on to a fair, competent accreditor for the colleges that serve more than two million students,” said CFT president Joshua Pechthalt. “The DOE should pay close attention to the long list of abuses of power and violations of accreditation norms committed by this agency, and help us find one that can do the job properly.”

The problem was noted last year in the State Community College Chancellor’s Accreditation [Task Force report](#), released August 2015. The report cited a multitude of failures by the ACCJC and recommended that the Community College Board of Governors (BOG) seek a new accreditor. In turn, the BOG, in accepting the task force report, appointed community college leaders to two working groups, to reform the existing accreditor’s opaque, inconsistent and sometimes illegal practices, and at the same time explore a path to a new accreditor.

The CFT complaint brings into the record a mass of new evidence that ACCJC, far from complying with the DOE’s directive to fix its problems, has only grown less capable of carrying out its important role of guaranteeing the delivery of quality education by the institutions it oversees. The accreditor also, says the complaint, is even less widely accepted now than it was before the ACCJC’s appeal. In addition, it is floundering financially, in large part due to the continuous legal battles it is waging on taxpayer dollars.

The complaint zeroes in on another problem created by the ACCJC. In responding to a wave of criticism of its unfair and unlawful attempt to disaccredit City College of San Francisco in 2013 the ACCJC came up with a new policy, which it called “restoration status”, to give CCSF more time, two years, to prove it deserved accreditation. This policy, notes the complaint, does not align with accreditation norms.

“Restoration Status wasn’t designed to help City College,” charged Tim Killikelly, president of AFT Local 2121. “It was designed to make it appear that ACCJC was reasonable and responsive, so that it could survive all the scrutiny and actions that were coalescing against it from the courts and government agencies. But it is a policy that leaves all decision-making in the hands of ACCJC, and provides no due process or appeal procedures for City College. City College of San Francisco is still in great peril from the decisions of this law-breaking agency.”

The complaint notes that the DOE never fully vetted or approved of restoration status; and yet CCSF will live or die by this questionable policy this fall. The complaint argues that restoration status itself was devised illegally, and should be rejected by the DOE.

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The CFT represents over 25,000 faculty in thirty community college districts, and 120,000 educational employees at every level of the education system, from Head Start to UC. AFT Local 2121 represents 1,500 faculty members at CCSF. The American Federation of Teachers has 1.6 million members. More info: www.cft.org.