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Chancellor's task force calls for new accreditor to oversee state's community colleges

Rogue agency ACCJC handed a terminal setback by report

Today the California Community College Chancellor's office released its long-awaited task force report on accreditation and the practices of the Accrediting Commission for Community Junior Colleges (ACCJC). Validating the view of the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) that this rogue commission needs reform or replacement, the task force heavily criticized the way the commission does business, capped with a recommendation that California find a new accreditor.

"The ACCJC has lost its way," said Joshua Pechthalt, CFT president. "We need a commission with the best interests of students, faculty and public higher education at the center of its work. The ACCJC has other priorities. It forces colleges to waste faculty and staff time and taxpayer money on bureaucratic minutia irrelevant to the classroom. It makes reckless and ill-informed decisions behind closed doors that harm the lives of thousands of Californians. And in the process, it is unconcerned if it is breaking the law. This report sharply underscores that accreditation is too important to be left in the hands of ACCJC."

The report, compiled by a blue-ribbon panel of California community college experts, including college presidents, administrators, elected trustees, and faculty, found that:

- The ACCJC's level of sanctions imposed on colleges was "inordinately high" compared with other regional accreditors
- The "California Community College system and its member institutions have lost confidence in the ACCJC"
- The colleges and the system need to transition to another accreditor.

Background

Two years ago, the CFT filed a complaint with the US Department of Education

regarding ACCJC's failure to comply with multiple accreditor standards. The department issued a letter detailing the ACCJC's lack of compliance with fifteen accreditation standards required for continued recognition as an accreditor. This opened the door to increasing scrutiny of the agency:

- The San Francisco City Attorney filed a suit against ACCJC that resulted earlier this year in a state Superior Court ruling that the agency broke four laws in its ill-considered decision to shutter City College of San Francisco.
- A report issued by California's Joint Legislative Audit Committee in June of last year harshly criticized the agency for its CCSF decision, for its absurd levels of secrecy, for its disproportionate rate of sanctions compared to other accrediting agencies, and uneven treatment of the colleges it oversees.
- Earlier this year, the State Community College Board of Governors opened the door to a new accreditor, removing language from Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations that had given the ACCJC sole authority over accreditation of the state's community colleges.
- Legislators, too, have come to recognize the level of problems generated by the agency. A bill sponsored by Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-SF), AB 1397, to make the ACCJC more transparent and accountable is now on the state senate floor, the last hurdle before it moves to the governor for a signature.

"The members of the task force recognize that the ACCJC has ignored or dismissed similar reports in the past, and expect a similar reaction this time," said Joanne Waddell, faculty union president at the Los Angeles Community College District, and a task force member. "The difference now is that more people are aware of the problematic nature of the agency, and the specific recommendation that the agency be replaced as accreditor in California underscores the urgency of the matter. We hope this report helps legislators and policymakers to take appropriate steps."

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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. More info: www.cft.org