



604 Oakesdale Avenue SW  
Suite 103  
Renton, WA 98057  
T: 206/242-4777  
F: 206/242-3131  
<http://wa.aft.org>

An affiliate of the  
American Federation  
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

March 20, 2020

To: Wayne Martin and all SBCTC Board of Trustees  
Kathi Hiyane-Brown, Whatcom Community College, and all College Presidents  
Carl Zapora, Edmonds Community College, and all College Boards of Trustees

SUBJECT: Mitigating harm to employees resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Presidents and Board of Trustees:

We are writing to you to urge the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the colleges to take a proactive and creative approach to ensure that workers in the community and technical colleges (CTCs) escape with little or no economic harm as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The scale of this crisis is vast, and it will take a significant investment of time, resources, energy, and good will to provide students with the best possible education under these circumstances. There is much that can be done to achieve that goal, but our collective success will depend upon an inclusive approach to problem solving, embracing creative solutions, and accepting the fact that notions of normalcy will have to be suspended. We hope that college leadership will work with union leadership to bargain solutions that produce constructive outcomes for all.

There are two groups of CTC employees who are at greatest risk of suffering economically during this crisis: classified staff, for whom working at home is not an option, and adjunct/part-time faculty. There are many strategies that can be implemented to avoid that harm. For example, assuming lower enrollment during spring quarter, an inclusive process at each college can identify projects that have been put on hold and these projects can be assigned to those who otherwise would become unemployed. An example of a project on hold could be fully integrating principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion which requires a substantial time commitment that adjunct faculty aren't typically paid to do. That work could replace a teaching assignment. Professional development is often set aside (and sometimes not even available) for classified staff and faculty; in these circumstances it could become part of a workload. The temporary increase in online courses, which is unfamiliar territory for some faculty and not ideal for some students would be more effective with intensified support services, such as mentoring, tutoring, etc., which can increase the quality of the learning and teaching experience while providing work. Guided pathways requires a significant amount of time and can be assigned to those who otherwise won't have work or to full-time faculty, thus freeing courses for adjuncts to teach. Finally, alternative work assignments for classified staff can be identified. We urge these strategies and other creative approaches be a priority as they are superior to relying on unemployment for most people.

We recognize that as enrollment declines, revenue does as well. The guided pathways funding can help to close that gap and, given the scale of this crisis, it is certainly an appropriate time to use reserve

funds. Furthermore, it is clear that Governor Inslee is invested in supporting workers during this crisis and advocating for special funding should be prioritized.

Although we want to see all CTC workers maintain the level of employment they would have without the COVID-19 crisis, we realize it is possible that some will need to apply for unemployment. We urge the colleges to refrain from challenging unemployment claims at this time. This is a stressful time for all of us, but that stress is substantially greater for those facing economic, housing, and food insecurity; this is a time for getting to “yes” when it comes to meeting faculty and staff needs.

We appreciate the work you are doing to keep our CTCs functioning at as high a level as possible and we encourage all to remember that employees’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions as we move through and beyond this crisis.

Sincerely,

Karen Strickland, President  
AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

Jaeney Hoene, Community and Technical  
Colleges Vice President  
AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

KS/JH/cr  
opeiu8/afl-cio

cc: Jan Yoshiwara, Executive Director, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges  
Carli Schiffner, Deputy Executive Director of Education, State Board for Community and  
Technical Colleges