Dear SMCCCD Faculty,

By now you have read the email sent on August 23rd from the AFT president regarding fallout from an incident that occurred on Skyline College campus in Spring – if you have not, please search for that email and read it before reading this one. I, too, learned the details of this incident last night through that same email.

I would like to thank the group of Skyline College faculty and staff who spoke to this issue at the Board of Trustees meeting last night. Your words, your stories, and your concerns were powerfully stated and made great impact. I also wish to thank the board for truly hearing out all who chose to speak. A list of recommendations was presented to the board for addressing this and other incidents of racial insensitivity, and some of them are pedagogical recommendations.

As AFT indicated in their email, we are educators who owe a responsibility to our students and community to broaden awareness of critical issues affecting us, and the U.S. history of racism and insensitivity is a part of that. This responsibility extends to our redress of wrongs. Simply removing an individual from our midst may solve the problem at the moment, but it does not address the systemic presence of the issue, nor does it guarantee that the problem will be eliminated in future. Educators cannot deny opportunities for people to learn from mistakes. Where we see insensitivity occurring, we need an approach that applies education, makes amends for harm, and fosters healthy community-building beyond the injury. The District Academic Senate supports this approach and encourages the district to do the same.

All three colleges have taken steps to provide forums, seminars, summits, workshops, and trainings focused on broadening awareness, but it is clear that we need to do more; the pedagogical recommendations made last night indicate that we are seeking a deeper approach to this issue. Last night, I reached out to the interim chair of the District Curriculum Committee, asking that we begin discussions of how to review our curriculum for critical consciousness surrounding historical issues of race, culture, and society in our fields of study. I will be working with the local senates to disseminate a call to our local curriculum committees to discuss the same.

In matters regarding the transformational impact of curriculum on teaching and learning, your senate is your first port of call. Your District Academic Senate president attends the Board of Trustees meetings and is the faculty voice in teaching and learning. Please use this very critical conduit to the Board of Trustees. Your senate is the amplifier of these needs and is bound by legal statute to act on behalf of our students, but it is only as powerful as you choose to make it. Let’s please join together to build a robust educational environment rooted in social justice for our students and an equitable, supportive place to do the work of providing education.

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