California Federation of Teachers

AFT, AFL-CIO

A Union of Professionals

November 22, 2017

To: Governor Jerry Brown
Chancellor Eloy Oakley
Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges

Re: **CFT Rejection of Fully Online College Proposal**

We are writing in response to your request for feedback regarding your proposed options for a fully online college. We soundly reject all three options and this new initiative in general for the reasons stated below.

The underlying assumption for the proposal—that CA needs a new, fully online college—is flawed. We see this initiative as duplicative of what the community college system already provides to our community college students. Through the State Chancellor's Office Online Education Initiative (OEI), students from anywhere in California can currently take classes at any CA community college. This current program is already 100% online, including counseling and tutorial services.

The new initiative will hurt students. The students this initiative is purported to help are typically the demographic of students who perform *worst* in online courses. Funding a "new" initiative based on helping a student demographic which is least likely to succeed makes no sense from either a pedagogical or policy viewpoint, and runs counter to the important student equity work currently underway.

In addition, it appears this initiative is going in the direction of "correspondence courses" from decades ago: use formulaic lesson plans created by private instructional designers and then "test" the students as they progress to grant access to the next module. Teaching, not testing, must remain the central mission of our community college system.

It also appears that this new "online college" would fall outside of accreditation, and perhaps even outside of current collective bargaining statutes. What credibility would such a college or degree/certificate have? Again, it seems as though this proposal is more of a mechanism to enrich private investors, or at best wishful thinking that quality education can be done online on the cheap, rather than about actually meaningfully educating our students.

The process that led to this problematic proposal lacked stakeholder participation and transparency. The workgroup which was formed to develop the options for carrying out this proposal lacked representation from a broad cross-section of stakeholders. All participants were handpicked by the Chancellor rather than selected by the various stakeholder organizations as has been customary. Furthermore, based on our discussions with some members of this workgroup, we understand that the workgroup's recommendations were not even brought forward, but were replaced by the recommendations of the out-of-state consultants who are driving this project.

For the above reasons, we soundly reject the Governor's proposal for a fully online college. It is noteworthy that both the UC and CSU systems have also independently reached this same conclusion.

If the Governor is truly interested in increasing the success rate of our community college students, then he should include additional funding in his next budget for community colleges earmarked to allow the system to hire more full-time faculty and classified staff, as there is ample documented evidence that doing so would increase both the retention and success rates of our students.

Sincerely,

Jim Mahler, President
Community College Council of the California Federation of Teachers