

Peralta Community College District  
Board of Trustees Listening Session  
Berkeley City College  
November 13, 2008

Present: Trustees Gulassa, González Yuen, Withrow, and Student Trustee Thompson, President Inclan, Tom Smith, Bonita Schaffner, Vladeta Jukich, Ramona Butler, Sylvia Espinosa, Johnny Dong, Javier Lopez, Helene Lecar, Lee Marrs, Joe Doyle, Mary Villa, Dona Boatright, Shirley Fogarino, Laurie Brion, Jenny Lowood, Stephanie Sanders-Badt, Joseph Bielanski, Joan Berezin, Chuck Wallenberg, Brenda Johnson, Terry Tricomi, Debra Weintraub, Jennie Braman, Noel Cantu, Micko Walden, Anthony Jones, Ashley De LaTorre, Gabriela Pisano, Dolores Jackson, Brenda Jemison, Deborah Hubert, Juanita Adams, Milva Borrero, David Hunt, Shirley Slaughter, Silvio Corrgia, Eileen Pippins, Purevsuren Basanjar, and Stephanie McGarran.

General Issues of interests: Financial Aid; IT enrollment and website; Faculty/staffing levels; Paper applications and portals of access; Communications with the community, and internal communications with the District, and the District as a service center; Decision-making procedures on hiring and payment; Regent and no-bid contracts.

Speaker Dunlop appreciates the excellent facility at BCC. Computer classes teach how to implement new softwares, but our Financial Aid, website, and Passport systems were poorly implemented. There are rumors that people have hired their relatives, and that incorrect software was purchased on these projects. We need stronger conflict of interest policies, to ensure quality staff are higher.

Speaker Lecar is concerned about who's paying for Regent and if it is from Measure A. While the District has responded to those most immediate in need, she wants to know why it's taken so long. Where is the Inspector General on this issue to communicate with the IT committee and the public?

Speaker Doyle feels this is a serious issue that is generating enormous problems for the students, and she wants to know if the District can set-up some emergency relief.

Speaker Witt wants to know why she doesn't have her check, as she had timely submitted all of her documents.

President Inclan gave an update that 310 checks have been disbursed. Last week, a centralized approach was started so that all of the files could be reviewed systematically and consistently.

Speaker Johnson comments that students should receive a communication if their files have missing information. She submits names to Regent for checks, and for some reason the names aren't listed on the check dispersion list later, and further verification is needed. Every day the college is dispersing more and more checks. Sometimes there are missing documents, and the college doesn't know this until the file is reviewed.

Speaker Smith reports that most of the problems with Regents have been worked out. All four colleges weren't consistently entering numbers into the system when they were received. Thus, there is a back-log to verify files and disperse checks. The process is consolidated at Merritt, with expert help. COA is 88.4% complete. They are working overtime to get the checks out, and additional resources can be pulled in here to assist, if needed. There have never been any glitches in distributing Financial Aid at Peralta in the past. About 3000 student applications have to be verified.

Speaker Smith explained that the Safe system was used in the past, that won't be supported six months from now. We are made up of four colleges, and we can't process students as if we were in one district. Regent has a national system for one college. By splitting Peralta into four colleges, we receive more than \$5M to give to students. Regent has had problems getting us our needed software. There has also been resistance from staff to input data a new way. There has been a dramatic improvement in the dispersal of checks. If the student has already been verified in the system, the only check that will be given in the spring will be easier. Many students haven't submitted the needed documents. 5,000 e-mails, and now letters, have been sent asking students to submit needed documents.

Speaker Nassberg wants answers for the students who have filled out their papers correctly. He's concerned that some checks are paid out at different percentages. He would volunteer to help during this time. Students are also expecting loans and work study, that can't be secured until the grant process is complete. He asks for staff to use consistent language with the students, and to use student ambassadors and student volunteers to communicate these terms and issues.

Speaker Pisano feels that we have lost potential students from the Passport system, and that now we're losing students due to the Financial Aid delays. She's concerned this will be repeated in the Spring. She wants us to help facilitate registration with paper options. She's concerned about the negative publicity this has caused on campus. The faculty have volunteered to assist as much as possible with paperwork and loans.

Speaker Hunt is a student ambassador and he hears the cries of the students. He feels the District continues to make promises that they won't fulfill. He feels students can't focus on their studies with all of the other financial concerns over their heads. He's concerned that the District didn't have a back-up plan.

Speaker Kincaid feels that the Board has accepted the unacceptable. He shares that the students have been experiencing this pain for three months. He feels he can't trust what the District will provide in the future. His grades have been impacted by this situation.

Speaker Berezin feels that the students need an answer right now, and that the college is at the breaking point. She feels they don't have enough faculty and staff, with a smaller budget than the other colleges. People have to be held accountable, and if this problem is not fixed quickly, then those in charge should think about resigning.

Speaker Smith reported that we are changing the way we are processing the information. BCC is in a unique situation. The other colleges are all, also, getting the job done. We are working diligently to solve the problems.

Speaker Poon shared that Financial Aid is a very paper-intensive driven office. Federal regulations require the college to oversee the program, and the student to present the documents. Communications break down if that the technology hasn't caught-up with the paper flow backlog. This process was complicated with Passport and Regent software compatibility issues. Financial Aid has numerous screens to input information. Regent can't yet create the necessary colleges reports. College should have the capacity for students to go online to see what the data the office has on file. In an understaffed office, staff has to find the file and check what documents are needed. Checking on files loses time to process three other student files. 9,000 files need to be processed.

A parent asked why checks haven't been manually issued to students, as reported in the news.

Speaker Johnson reported that the Chancellor wants help for students most in need first. The initial check went out at 65%, and now the checks are being cut at 100% of the allocated amount. A weekly update for students is being dispersed. When the information comes back from Regent, there is often no explanation as to why no check was dispersed, and that puts the staff in a difficult situation.

Speaker Poon shared the timeline of this process at BCC. Students usually apply for Financial Aid in March on their application. This set of students was examined in August. There was one specialist and one clerk until then, and their duties did not include this task. 5600 student names were received in August for BCC as potential students. After students enrolled, 3600 were identified to be eligible for Financial Aid. Some are concurrently enrolled, and the government identified that 100% needed to be verified. There was one specialist and part-time clerk. Two part-timers were then hired to assist. As a district, as many students as possible were trying to get processed. Evans consulting was hired to assist Regent.

Speaker Smith reported a 25% increase in student enrollment at BCC, but an inadequate budget for staff. He has been working hard to build-up our enrollment district-wide to boost up our numbers with the state. Monies will be given to the colleges based upon FTES. He hopes for parity sooner than five years.

President Inlan shared that they don't have the staff to be entrepreneurial. She went to a fundraising event, and was told that BCC doesn't have the necessary infrastructure. The college is at a crisis and standstill with limited human capacity to adequately serve the students.

Speaker Wallenberg appreciates the Board looking for fair funding to the four colleges. He feels this can't happen just with new revenues. He asks the Board to deal with this inequity with the current budget. He suggests that vacant positions be transferred to BCC

or Laney. He feels it's the responsibility of the Board to do this. He suggests this process by the Spring to answer the accreditation team's fair-funding allocation questions.

A student speaker feels that the Chancellor should be here, and wants to know how to contact him. She feels she has lost her will to help others. She doesn't want to lose her home, and she wants to provide a better future for her children. She tried to commit suicide, partly due to this situation.

Speaker Cantu feels that the purchased systems are not being vetted well to the faculty. He wants the Board to be more accountable, and wants change to start at the District.

Speaker Fogarino wants to know who did the beta testing on the Regent system, and why the paper option was taken away with Passport. She reports that all of the other Bay 10 colleges provide this. She wants the decisions to stop being made from the top down, without surveying the community and target audiences, and wants greater involvement in the decision-making process.

Speaker Green wanted to have a choice of knowing ahead of time if her check would be here or not by a certain date. She wants to know when she will be paid so that she can have a choice of whether to stay here or not. She doesn't like to be told week after week that her check will be ready soon. She knows that faculty here care about her, and the only reason she's registering is due to the teachers.

A student speaker shared that she has bills for childcare that haven't been paid, which are supposed to be paid from her Financial Aid disbursement. She has gotten the run around from EOPS. She has received a check, but it wasn't enough. There is supposed to be an agreement between EOPS and her childcare provider. She has gotten calls that her check will be there, but when she arrives the check isn't here. She feels nothing but stress inside of the school, instead of it being a learning environment. She feels that some continuing students won't return.

Trustee Gulassa and the Board hear the pain and suffering of the students. They are putting as much pressure as they can to demand answers, and are as frustrated about the situation as the students are.

A student speaker asked if there was the possibility of this occurring again in the spring.

Speaker Mickey from Evans consulting is evaluating who is enrolled, who is in good standing, and is doing everything they need to do to get those students most in needed considered first. He is trying to unclog the system by December 19<sup>th</sup>. Every day there is new lists of checks that are being dispersed. They are working diligently on the problem, and everything seems to be in place to resolve the situation and to prevent future delays.

Speaker Lowood feels that this is a disaster that has been waiting to happen due to BCC being seriously understaffed. They are constantly on the edge, and that it won't take much to tip the balance into crisis.

Speaker Justice feels the student didn't get an answer to his question.

Tom Smith will personally check the individual names that are provided to him. Anyone that is here is asked to give Tom their names to try to push their names through the system as fast as possible for emergency cases.

Speaker Nassberg feels offended by calling students "needy". He wants the information and timetable provided to students for them to be able to plan their academic careers.

A student speaker asked for a future fee waiver for the next semester due to the delays, because she can't afford both tuition and books.

The Trustees' made closing statements: Trustee González Yuen feels we're in the middle of a serious crisis. Our first priority is to get the checks out as soon as possible. Second, procedures need to be established so that we are not constantly in crisis. He wants to find out what went wrong, and to investigate any systemic problems. Trustee Withrow feels that there is no simple answer to anything that has been presented, and that all of the comments are valid. This Board relates to the problems in the colleges. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) need to be established at the District. The two halves have to work together at the District and the colleges. Staff communicating different information is a problem. A system is not going to work unless there are SOPs at all of the four colleges, consistent from staff person to staff person. From the Board's perspective, they are not doing their job until the colleges work as a single unit. Student Trustee Thompson is appalled that the system has failed as it has. She wants to encourage students not to let this set-back determine their future. During her illness and absence, she didn't receive any communications from students. She looks at the Peralta community as a family. She asks students to participate when student participation is requested. She asks students to stay strong through the end until solutions are found. Trustee Gulassa recognizes this serious problem, and that the District and colleges are diligently working on a solution. Sacramento is also suggesting an increase in tuition from \$20 to \$30/unit. Those in serious situations may also wish to contact the Peralta Foundation for a possible loan.

Respectfully submitted,

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