**Testimony Before the**

**Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges**

**Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

**by**

**Brice W. Harris, Chancellor**

**California Community Colleges**

**Regarding**

**City College of San Francisco**

**Wednesday, June 4, 2014**

**Sacramento, California**

Good afternoon. I am Brice Harris, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges and I want to begin by thanking you for allowing me a brief amount of time on your agenda today to discuss the subject of the accreditation status of City College of San Francisco.

By way of background, I would remind the Commission that in July of last year, shortly after this Commission took action to terminate the accreditation of CCSF effective at the end of July of this year, the Board of Governors elevated its Special Trustee, Robert Agrella, and exercised a state takeover of City College. As you can imagine, the recommendation I made to the Board of Governors and the action they subsequently took was not done lightly. Further, it is clear that there would have been no reason for the Board and me to exercise this extreme authority if we had not believed there was a pathway forward to restoration of accreditation for the college.

Since that time, the college has made miraculous progress. I believe that the college now substantially meets the standards for accreditation and the eligibility requirements. No, the work is not done, because, as the Commission knows, cycles for planning and evaluation must be completed and the institution must ultimately be returned to the locally elected Board of Trustees. However, these activities are well underway and in the next twelve to twenty-four months will be completed.

In my brief time with you today I would like to make four points and two requests:

* **First, the progress made by the college is substantial and demonstrable.** In anticipation of this conversation I sent each of you an email with an attachment detailing the progress made by the college related to both the eligibility requirements and standards for accreditation. The report includes the evidence in support of that progress and supports my claim that the college is in substantial compliance.
* **Second, the college has earned an opportunity to complete its restoration and prove it can again be trusted by this Commission.** All of us associated with this project are painfully aware of the breach of trust leading up to the action the Commission took in July of last year. Let us remember that the people who caused those problems are gone – replaced by competent professionals on whose word you can depend.
* **Third, no rules or regulations should deny an education to thousands of students once it is clear that the college is making dramatic improvement and is clearly listening to the Commission.** This Commission, along with the leadership of the college and the State Chancellor’s office, has suffered criticism from outside groups and even from some groups affiliated with the college. However, the vast majority of the college faculty and staff have worked together to make substantial progress in the past ten months. To penalize CCSF for the actions of a small minority would be grossly unfair, and frankly if every California community college with challenges related to organized labor loses its accreditation there will be no one left to educate the students of this state.
* **And finally, there is excellent teaching and learning going on within the college daily.** In my email to you on Monday I also included a snapshot of the progress of CCSF on the student success scorecard – a tool that the Commission actually recommends on its website for members of the public seeking information on college performance. There are some who have suggested that this tool only measures a small percentage of the students of CCSF, but in fact it actually measures 91% of all the colleges’ offerings and 67% of all students enrolled. The only students not included in the scorecard are the single course takers not included in any of the colleges. That report shows that CCSF exceeds the state average on most key indicators of student success.

Because of the reasons just stated my request is simple. I respectfully request that this Commission take action to rescind the termination of accreditation of City College of San Francisco, send a team to verify the progress the college has made and allow the college more time to complete its restoration. We would expect the college to remain on sanction during this time, and although I feel strongly that they have made adequate progress for you to consider moving them to probation, even remaining on Show Cause is preferable to the imminent threat of loss of accreditation. I also expect the Commission to limit the time of extension. Although again I believe that the college has earned a full two additional years, even requiring the college to have completed its restoration in time for consideration at your meeting in eighteen months would be acceptable.

I also request that you take some positive action at this Commission meeting that will provide the college and the community some assurance that there is a pathway away from accreditation loss. The college enrollment is suffering tremendously from this cloud of closure and to postpone action will place everyone involved near the edge of the July 31st cliff. Although current litigation bars further action until the case is heard, the July 31st deadline is real and failure to successfully resolve this matter before that time will have severe negative repercussions for students and the college.

Finally, there have been suggestions that there are other solutions that include the college losing accreditation and then beginning the accreditation process as a new candidate. Please understand that this is not an option. The State of California, the Legislature, the Governor and the Board of Governors have made it clear that they are not supportive of funding an unaccredited college. More importantly the students of the college do not deserve to have their work called into question when seeking employment or transferring to other institutions.

From the beginning of this process all of us associated with the college have had but one end in mind – saving a great public institution so that it can continue to meet the needs of the students of San Francisco. As I have said to you previously, the students of San Francisco, many of whom are tremendously disadvantaged in an affluent community they feel has left them behind, do not have another educational option. They cannot travel to college, they cannot afford other local options, and in many cases the programs they need are not otherwise available.

City College of San Francisco has earned another chance. Do not terminate the accreditation of a college where good teaching and learning is happening because of rules and regulations that can be changed. Do not put this decision off. Do not deny these students an education which, for many of them, is their only chance at a better life.