



TO: ALL STAFF

From: Fred Williams, Interim Chancellor

Date: May 29, 2015

At Cypress College's commencement this year I gave a short speech. To be honest, I wasn't looking forward to it. But once I understood that no one was really looking to me to illuminate the secrets of the universe in three minutes or less, I relaxed and thought about what makes a night like that so special. What I realized was that it's always the students that make graduation so fun, memorable, and inspirational. I've attended commencement ceremonies for over 20 years, and I couldn't tell you what any of the chancellors said or even who the guest speakers were for most of them. But every year there are student stories that stand out—fathers and daughters graduating together, the non-English speaker that matriculated with straight A's, and people who overcame all kinds of challenges to finally don their regalia and proudly walk across our stage. If only we could bottle and sell the sheer happiness and relief in the air on those nights. NOCCCD would never have money issues again!

This year, as Interim Chancellor, I was privileged to sit on the stage at Cypress, and I saw something that really inspired me. I'm sure that most of you know Dr. Jolena Grande as a Cypress College Professor of Mortuary Science, and one of the designers of the college's new B.A. degree. I've come to know Jolena during her tenure as President of the Cypress College Academic Senate, and have always liked her positivity and energy. On Friday night, I sat and watched as she handed out diplomas, and was absolutely blown away by her connection with the students. She smiled, she cheered—she had a kind word for everyone who came across her path. When her Mortuary Science students crossed the stage, she gave each one of them a big hug, and they all looked incredibly pleased to be congratulated by such an obviously beloved teacher. Watching these interactions I thought: This is what it's all about. When these students look back on their time in college, what they're going to remember most are the personal interactions. I truly believe that each and every faculty and staff member has an effect on our students. It's those relationships that will have the greatest impact on their success. So I just want to take a moment and say: thank you, all of you, for helping our students reach their goals.

The more contact I have with students, the more I am convinced that they must be the touchstone for all of the District's decisions. For instance, I attended Fullerton College's Men and Women of Distinction event this month, and again, I left astounded by what these students have already accomplished. These 30 students were the College's top scholars, chosen for their outstanding academic achievement and leadership. They were rewarded with permanent membership in Fullerton College's honor societies, and will receive a scholarship from the Schlinger Foundation and the Associated Students. It was a great night and I was very proud of Fullerton College and its students, but I couldn't help but wonder if we should be doing more? I don't just want these 30 students to get a scholarship—we have hundreds of graduating students! How can we support them as they transition to the next phase of their lives? I don't know if the answer is beefing up the District Foundation or concentrating efforts and resources on alumni relations, but I think we should be asking those questions across our institutions.

Beginning with the fall semester, NOCCCD will be launching a District-wide campaign called “Students First.” This concept came out of last year’s Chancellor’s Staff retreat during which, with the help of consultant Paul Butler, we drilled down on the motivation points that best described the District’s “desired state.” As Paul described it, our “desired state” should answer the questions: What is our ambition? What do we want to be famous for? What’s our picture of future success? At the end of the day, Chancellor’s Staff unanimously decided that, for us, NOCCCD’s desired state was: “Students First.” The idea that, no matter what, we’re going to put “Students First” seems so simple, but it’s extremely vital. You’ll hear much more about this campaign in the fall, but I wanted to introduce the concept as this academic year comes to an end. How can we all get better at putting “Students First?” How can we make this the basis of all of our decisions? I can’t wait to find out the answers with you.

Have a wonderful summer!

Cypress College Minds. Motivated.
School of Continuing Education Change. Cultivated.
Fullerton College Excellence. Elevated.
NOCCCD Greatness. Achieved.