



Office of the President

June 1, 2020

Dear Chargers:

As we begin our summer, I want to again thank each of you for the exceptional service you have provided to our students this past semester. I have missed you. I have missed the ways we celebrate together, and I miss the random opportunities to stop and learn of one another's lives. I miss the many ways we collectively remind ourselves why we do the often-hard work of educating others. This desire to connect has been especially acute the past few weeks as we celebrated our students' accomplishments remotely, serving as a reminder of all we have lost this semester. Although it is possible to deliver education remotely, like a package onto someone's desk, the things that make us a community, make learning an engaged and meaningful learning experience, and helps our students flourish, are the ways we connect and engage with one another.

As I began this letter to you, I had intended to update you on our budget situation and progress in providing safeguards for slowly bringing employees back to campus. But the tragic events unfolding across our nation demand a response, so please allow me to affirm our commitment to our work in support of equity on the Cypress College campus. Recent events remind us, yet again, there is no escaping just how far we have to go to eradicate the awful stain of racism within our communities and institutions. 400 years after the first slaves came to our shores, 160 years after their descendants were "freed", 60 years after the civil rights movement, we still live in a country where too many of our citizens cannot go about their daily lives without the fear that a trip to the store, a jog down the street, or a drive into a new neighborhood could result in violence or death. Each death, each act of bigoted violence, each moment someone is silenced or told they don't belong, diminishes each of us. It is a pain that cannot be ignored.

As members of an institution of higher learning, we must continue our resolve to take racism seriously on the Cypress College campus and stand up to the institutional norms that cripple each of us, no matter who we are. The miseducation that we knowingly, or unknowingly, perpetuate, resides in the stereotypes we carelessly accept, the symbols we have learned to absorb, and assumptions we believe as truth because we don't take the time to live with, and understand, one another.

The responsibility of living within a democracy is both a gift and a chore. As we watch any sense of unity in this country tested daily by our hyper-politicized views, I am especially

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concerned by any rhetoric in our own community that seeks to pit us against one another. It is hard to work together in times of safety and security; to do so in times of crisis takes character and commitment. At the heart of all education must be a sense of moral and social justice, a respect for the feelings and opinions that are different than our own, a willingness to listen and learn, for we all play a role in keeping our community healthy; without one other, we cannot be what, and who, we need to be.

I know that the broader national situation includes concerns about the impacts of COVID-19 and the repercussions it has for the economy and our own state budget. Collectively these are tremendous stressors in our lives. You want to know what this will mean for you at Cypress College, so I want to reassure you that no permanent employees will be losing their jobs or asked to take furloughs. As Dr. Marshall said, we do have healthy reserves and these will be put to good use in time of crisis. And it is my commitment that even as we have difficult decisions ahead, you as employees will know your welfare and safety come first.

I am grateful for the leadership that exists here at Cypress College and NOCCCD, and our ability to respond to these concerns. Our shared governance committees and academic senate have agreed to be available over the summer and we will be working together to ensure any decisions about critical matters — such as the college's budget and our work to prepare for the safe re-opening of the college — is communicated openly and collaboratively.

As we work through these challenges, we also want our traditionally disadvantaged students to know they will find support here, and we will collectively embrace an equity-mindedness that reflects our shared humanity. We will not sit back while others are hurt or persecuted; we will ensure that all our students, but especially those who feel disenfranchised in our culture at large, will know they have a home here on our campus. This has always been important at Cypress College but right now *nothing* is more important. Cypress College must be that place that instills the capacity for empathy, resilience, and collaboration.

Please remind students that Telemental Health Counseling is available by calling (714) 484-7361 and they can find more information by clicking on the following link: <https://www.cypresscollege.edu/services/health-center/>. Likewise, all employees can find support through our confidential Employee Assistance Program at [www.guidanceresources.com](http://www.guidanceresources.com). More information can be found on the "Employee" tab of MyGateway.

These are uncertain times but I am reminded that each generation has faced their own defining point; I hope this will be ours. I hope we will finally say "enough", and stand together for change. Willing or not, change is upon us and we must choose a world where justice is offered to all. To quote the Greek poet, Aeschylus *"In our sleep, pain, which cannot be forgotten, falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the grace of the gods"*.

Let's not waste this pain or this moment, but vow we will be that place that others come to learn and find wisdom. I want you to know that you each matter, that every role at our college is essential, and that we will come through this together.

Wishing you peace, love and safety,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JoAnna Schilling", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**JoAnna Schilling, Ph.D.**  
President, Cypress College