February 27, 2015

To All Chief Executive Officers of ACCJC Member Institutions

Dear Colleagues:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information pertaining to the City College of San Francisco (CCSF). At its January 2015 meeting, the Commission granted Restoration Status to CCSF. Under the new policy language approved by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) in June 2014, CCSF will have two years to come into full compliance with Commission standards. The College will be reviewed in Fall 2016 and considered for reaffirmation of accreditation in January 2017.

The rhetoric from individuals and groups outside CCSF has not gone unnoticed by ACCJC. ACCJC has attempted to provide accurate information to the public regarding actual conditions at CCSF. However, the media did not always publish the information we provided. Over the past year, ongoing litigation obligated ACCJC to be cautious in its response to criticism, misinformation, and limited reporting that circulated in this region. ACCJC energies were necessarily focused on its defense against lawsuits. Nonetheless, the comments we made and that were circulated or picked up by the media were intended to encourage CCSF to focus on returning to a position of meeting and sustaining the same quality standards as our other member colleges. All colleges are responsible for meeting the Standards in order to be accredited. Many colleges have had to come into compliance with the Standards after peer review has found the need for correction, and they have done so.

Over the past year, the ACCJC received a number of demands and requests regarding its action on CCSF. There was a demand by some for ACCJC to grant the College reaffirmation of accreditation because it is “too important to fail.” Others asked ACCJC to find a way to provide the college more time to meet the Standards. Since 2012, College representatives have indicated it would take four to five years to achieve full compliance with the Standards. Through considerable effort by ACCJC and with cooperation from the USDE, the Commission created a new accreditation status called Restoration Status as a way of offering CCSF more time and a path to reaffirm accreditation. After the decision to terminate accreditation had been made, but before the decision would have been implemented, the Commission approved Restoration Status for CCSF. By the time of its next review, the college will have had four years to reach compliance since the Commission gave Show Cause notice to the College.
Responsibility now rests with CCSF to complete the required work to meet the Standards. However, the College does not have to, and we would suggest should not have to, take this journey alone. As educators, Chief Executive Officers and skilled accreditation evaluators, we encourage each of you to look at the Standards the College needs to address and offer your expertise, individually and through our professional organizations, to assist the College in understanding and implementing the changes necessary to achieve compliance with our Standards. Every institution has to determine its own approaches, policies, and practices to meeting the Standards, given the mission, culture, and needs within its communities. As peers, each of you can offer approaches and strategies you have developed that result in policies and practices that meet our accreditation Standards. As an organization of peers that focuses exclusively on community and associate degree-granting institutions, the opportunity to share and assist is the true value of ACCJC membership.

ACCJC is the peer review accreditor for community college and associate degree granting institutions in the West and Pacific. Our 132 member institutions serve close to 2.5 million students a year. We, the Commissioners of the ACCJC, the academic staff of the ACCJC, and our peer evaluation teams, are all educators. Educating students and assuring the quality of that education is our life’s work. Serving our member institutions’ students over many years has taught us that we need demanding standards for quality. Living up to such standards is the best way for colleges to ensure student learning and achievement. The fact remains that accreditation processes, as “harsh” as they are sometimes characterized, are responsible for our member institutions taking necessary actions to resolve problems and improve and sustain quality.

Over the course of the past two years, there have been unprecedented political attacks on the Commission as an entity, the staff members of the Commission, and the Commissioners. Those efforts seemed carefully orchestrated to destroy the reputation of individuals and the Commission as a whole. At times it seemed that few could avoid the urge to defend CCSF by attacking ACCJC. ACCJC’s only motivation was and is to maintain the quality and integrity of our peer review process and to encourage CCSF to come into compliance with standards of quality. The State Chancellor, the Special Trustee, and various consultants have all tried to support the changes and improvements necessary to meet the standards of quality. All third parties involved in this case, the San Francisco City Attorney, a San Francisco Superior Court judge, the College, and the State Chancellor, have acknowledged that at no time, at least since the 2012 comprehensive evaluation of CCSF, has the college met the Standards necessary for accreditation. It is our sincere hope that through the Restoration process CCSF succeeds in achieving reaffirmation of accreditation for its students and for the community it serves.

Signed by the ACCJC Executive Committee:

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Commission Chair

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