

August 6, 2020

To:  Chancellor Pan, Board of Trustees, and Task Force Co-Chairs

From:  AFT Seattle Local 1789 Executive Board

Re:  Budget cutting priorities

Cc:  Cody Hiatt, AFT-SPS, Johnny Dwyer, WFSE 304

The AFT Seattle Executive Board wishes to share our concerns with you regarding the Strategic Budget Reduction Task Force and the subsequent decisions that are being implemented across the Seattle Colleges District. We have met with our labor partners in AFT SPS and WFSE 304 and have common interests regarding major financial decisions. We all had representatives on the Strategic Budget Task Force, and our representatives came away with the same doubts about the process and results.

Major concerns about the task force include:

1. An unrealistic timeline for considering budget cutting options and making recommendations weakened the relevancy of the work.
2. The complete lack of financial data showing the estimated cost savings from each of the budget cutting options makes the recommendations meaningless.
3. The approach to the task force work was very structured, leaving little time for open discussion and debate. We received a predetermined list of options to consider for budget cuts and had little opportunity to revise the list.
4. Recommendations to protect the most vulnerable employees with the lowest salaries did not receive a prominent place in the task force report that was released to the district.

It was only a matter of days from the presentation of the task force report to the Chancellor’s Executive Cabinet and the announcement by you, Chancellor Pan, of the Phase One cuts. July furlough days were instituted, and even though they didn’t affect the faculty, we saw that classified staff were included in the mandatory furlough days. We fear that our co-workers who can least afford it are harmed by wage loss and loss of hours in which to complete their work.

Meetings of the task force have been suspended for the time being. While we understand that is in part due to the lack of information from the legislature about possible changes to allocations or relief for the colleges, there are important conversations that could be happening within the task force. We asked a number of times for financial data that is essential for making wise decisions, yet did not receive them.  We need to also hold discussions about the impacts of the Phase One decisions, and be given a chance to weigh in on Phase Two plans before you move ahead on them. If the task force is truly a shared governance body, these are the kinds of things that would make it legitimate. If it  doesn’t actually matter what the members of the task force think, we do not see the purpose of continuing to participate. .

The Task Force agreed on priorities that would guide the kinds of budget cutting decisions to be considered by the CEC. Our number one priority is Students and Student Learning. We also commit to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. We commit to protecting our strengths and long-term viability.  We stated that we will invest in teaching and learning, as well as critical supports. It is difficult to see that these commitments are being carried out in the decisions already being made at both the district level and the colleges. We have additional concerns that the colleges are moving ahead with their financial decisions regardless of the commitments made in the task force report.  For example, Seattle Central has a list of five or six programs under consideration for reduction or closure. These are programs that are unique and valuable, and cuts to administrative salaries and position should occur before instructional programs are targeted. We must honor our promises to students and to protect our strengths.

Whether you reconvene the Task Force or continue with Phase Two decisions in the CEC, we offer an alternative path forward.

1. **Put Students First**: No student representatives are included on this Task Force. Labor Partners would like to have Student government representatives on this Task Force, and if needed adjustments can be made to the current group make-up, which is nine administrators and seven non-administrators. In addition, make sure that every decision focuses on the needs of students.
2. **Lead with Race:** Listen to BIPOC employees, and give more weight to their voices on the task force and in decision-making. Make sure that every decision focuses on building an anti-racist institution that effectively prioritizes and serves BIPOC students.
3. **Show your Math**: The Task Force deliverable should not begin and end with words alone. What is the target budget reduction number we are trying to reach? What is the estimated dollar value of each proposed savings area? What has been the financial impact of ASI? Are we seeing the results that justified the restructuring that took place?  Without answers to these essential questions, we cannot feel confident that you are making the best decisions.
4. **Be transparent and democratic**: Slow down and make sure at each step that everyone in the colleges has the opportunity to learn and process what the task force is doing

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AFT Seattle cares deeply about the health and well-being not only of our own members, but of the community at large. The community depends on us to be accessible, supportive, stable, and relevant. We must protect the core of our mission, which is instruction. At the same time, we stand in solidarity with our colleagues who offer direct student support and maintenance of healthy, welcoming facilities. We need to see administrators sacrificing to protect our core mission. We look forward to learning from you how this will be accomplished, and we hope that we are invited to fully participate.

**AFT Seattle Executive Board:** Annette Stofer, Natalie Simmons, Katy Dichter, John Toutonghi, David Krull, Chuck McKeever, Tish Lopez, Libby Schoene, Sean Cargill, Holly Gilman, Davene Eyres, Elizabeth Goulet, Tracy Furutani, Chris Conley, and Erin Gibbons