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Let's not be distracted...

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To my dear colleagues,

If we stand back a bit, we can all learn from the contentious discussions we have recently witnessed on our "all campus" email. People have plead with me to "please stop them," imploring the Superintendent-President to somehow moderate the discussion so "they" are more "respectful." Sorry to disappoint you, but no, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to censor or police this all campus email. The power of respect lies in each of us to exercise – It is not for me to exercise over you.

As a side bar, until I read some of the ongoing email threads this evening, I was jubilant to have just completed this week my 100th classroom visit at SBCC! This is a huge personal milestone. Of course, I'm not done, and I have many outstanding class invitations to fulfill. However, SBCC faculty and my colleague CEOs I have told about this across the state have indicated this is unheard of. For me it is, at least in my 30 years in education and a dozen years as a college president. One thing I can tell you from the experience is that it really puts things into perspective. I cannot even begin to tell you what I have learned in these classrooms visits and the instructional talent and learning that I have witnessed. It has been just unbelievable on so many levels, and I am humbled by the privilege and opportunity. Someday I will try to describe to you my experience.

Back to the way we have been treating each other, I am not pleased with it. However, just like any other "venue" on campus, the all campus email is a community area, where free speech exists. The entire campus, including and maybe most importantly our all campus email system, is a free speech area. As educators, we must respect and defend this free speech. We will not always like what we see; I certainly don't. But I am not the arbiter. Like you, I am a part of this community. Just like any venue on campus, free speech can be used and abused and folks can find themselves in related conflicts. We are adults and must be responsible for our actions and speech. Words, process, logic, and facts do matter, and people will react. To this message, I expect people will react. The college cannot expend public resources, defending the endless things that I or the other citizens of this college can and will say under the flag of free speech. It is our right to say what we will within the limits of reasonableness as defined by the ethos of our community.

However, the college will defend with all its energy and resources what is said in the course and scope of what we do in the classrooms. What is said in the classrooms on campus within the context of our classes and curricula must always be cherished and protected. As educators, this is our freedom. We stand together for our students on this, and they count on us. There is no question that what I have been witness to in the 100 classrooms I have seen must always be protected. I will always stand by and defend this to my last breath.

In sharing these thoughts with you, I hope you will consider a pause and reset. Please, let's keep all the good we are doing in the classrooms at the fore. You don't need the stress, and we need your positive energy. The rest is an unproductive distraction.

In solidarity,



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