

Colleagues—

Many faculty members across the nation have, for years, expressed deep concern about numerous trends in higher education, including education reform, acceleration, an increasingly top-down style of running colleges and universities, and a de-professionalization of the faculty, which undermines quality education, scholarship, free inquiry, and local innovation. ***This de-professionalization has largely been effected by undermining unions.*** Now, finally, a university president is expressing the same concerns. In his op-ed piece in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* “[Three More Bad Ideas to Reform Higher Education](#),” Sam Minner, President of New Mexico Highland University, says the following:

“Unions of various types have played a major role in building an American middle class, bringing all members of organizations together to talk and plan, which often leads to improved performance. In the education sector, an organization’s performance is largely predicted by the commitment, the passion and the efforts of those who matter most in the organization. In the case of higher education, **those individuals are faculty and staff members.** Unions are not the only way to bring people together to make things better, but they have been effective in achieving that goal in the past and do so today. **Bust unions in higher education? That’s a bad idea.**” [Emphasis added.]

The [NM Highlands U web site](#) notes that the Brookings Institution ranked Highlands “19<sup>th</sup> among 342 four-year public teaching colleges nationwide” in social mobility. Minner says that, in addition to employment and social mobility, the benefits of a college education include “a life of deep purpose and meaning,” better health, and higher voting rates.

A bit more on unions. In his book *Lit Up: One Reporter, Three Schools, and Twenty-Four Books That Can Change Lives*, David Denby writes, “I went looking for good public-school teachers. It was only after I found a few that I realized they were all members of teacher unions” (xxiv).

And in case you missed it, in her public comment at the February Board of Trustees meeting, SRJC faculty member Felicia Darling eloquently articulated the role of unions in preserving the middle class, preventing the widening gap between rich and poor, and protecting the most vulnerable in our society, including women and minorities:

“There is a trend sweeping the nation to silence unions and it started at the University of Wisconsin. It is no coincidence that the income gap in the state of Wisconsin is wider today than it was during the Great Depression of 1929. Researchers have analyzed 100 years of data since 1918 from all of our 50 states. The result: Weakening unions causes a concentration of wealth in the top 10% of the US population. Yes, suppressing unions increases income inequality—especially for women and minorities. If we continue to silence the voices of our faculty by excluding AFA reports from being a regular Board Agenda item, we are participating in a movement that ultimately crushes economic opportunities for our poor, DACA, and undocumented students. We cannot follow in the footsteps of the University of Wisconsin.”

(Read her full statement to the Board [here](#).)

Over the last few years, AFA has dealt with a District negotiations team that is increasingly resistant and hostile not just to negotiating fair compensation for the faculty but to contractual agreements that will protect the faculty's legal rights and responsibilities regarding our roles in academic and professional matters. We invite anyone who doubts this to review the details of the District's package proposal from November 2017. That proposal has two main threads: **crippling the faculty and the union monetarily**, and **stripping the faculty of its primary role** in defining quality education at the College. *The AFA negotiations team has repeatedly asserted at the table that the District's resistance and hostility amount to union busting*, which the District team denies.

The District has also, despite AFA's objections, made a unilateral decision to purge from AFA's membership roster those faculty members, both contract and adjunct, who retire but continue working for the College, as well as adjunct faculty members who go more than three semesters without an assignment, even though they are still part of their department's adjunct pool. This member purging is implemented by the human resources and payroll departments and results in AFA having to track down each of these faculty members and help them to re-join. Whether the District's tactics are deliberate, we cannot know. But, in embracing and enacting **anti-union, anti-faculty strategies** and philosophies that are powerful forces on the national and state stages, the District is at least an unwitting partner in national anti-worker trends. And we see this as bad for education.