

# Q+A

## Virtual Town Hall with Chancellor Garcia ▪ 4/1/2020

[Q1. What has been the most challenging part of transitioning to work from home for the system office?](#)

[Q2. What has been the most challenging part of transitioning to remote/online courses for the colleges?](#)

[Q3. When will we transition back to working in the office, when the stay at home order has been lifted? Any idea when CCCS will return to “regular” on-campus operations?](#)

[Q4. Have any decisions been made for SU20 course format? What about Fall?](#)

[Q5. Hiring question from CCCOnline: Is there a plan in place to quickly hire CCCOnline instructors from home colleges and get them trained?](#)

[Q6. Does the State of Colorado or the System have a mental health plan for staff and faculty as part of the pandemic response?](#)

[Q7. What is the system doing to support the colleges, to support the students?](#)

[Q8. Have any decisions been made regarding our benefit costs for the next enrollment period?](#)

[Q9. How did the state and community colleges persevere through past economic downturns, and what changes are being discussed to weather this storm in the months to come?](#)

[Q10. What funding will the community colleges receive from the CARES Act?](#)

[Q11. What discussions have there been at the State level regarding the impact of funding for Higher Ed next fiscal year?](#)

[Q12. Have any decisions been made regarding wage raises in July?](#)

[Q13. Have any decisions been made regarding our benefit costs for the next enrollment period?](#)

[Q14. What impact do you think this impending economic downturn will have on enrollment this summer and this fall?](#)

[Q15. What ways are the colleges supporting their high-needs students? \(Providing meals, housing, etc.\)](#)

[Q16. Are our hiring process impacted? Are current and/or upcoming open positions moving to virtual interviews, hiring, and onboarding? Or are they on hold?](#)

[Q17. Has any consideration been given to allowing staff to carry over vacation time that will be capped \(lost\) that they are unable to take prior to 6/30 because we are critical to ensuring business is supported?](#)

[Q18. How does executive staff stay connected?](#)

**Q1. What has been the most challenging part of transitioning to work from home for the system office?**

**A1.** The biggest challenge was in how quickly it occurred. Many supervisors and employees did not have an opportunity to develop a good structure or plan for what full time remote work would look like and how teams would stay connected. Additionally, not all employees were prepared with the necessary resources (tools, systems, software, etc.) to make the transition when they did. I believe work teams are still trying to figure out their groove and identify a strategy for the new normal.

From the IT perspective, we didn't have adequate preparation for all system staff to start working remotely. Some didn't have laptops or printers/scanners or had less than desirable internet connectivity. Documentation had to be updated on the fly for Citrix, especially, but also VPN. Many staff were not configured for Soft Phones and that had to be done quickly. Definitely several items to note for our Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity plans. [Note – on March 27, IT held two virtual town halls sessions for system office staff to review WebEx and other useful online tools to ease working remotely].

**Q2. What has been the most challenging part of transitioning to remote/online courses for the colleges?**

**A2.** The most challenging part has been having faculty put courses into a remote format when they've never done that before. Some institutions have robust support (IT, instructional design, etc) for faculty to do this work, but many do not. Furthermore, these faculty have never taught in a remote format, so that will be challenging. Lastly, there are students who are now in a remote format who have never taken a course at a distance and/or who do not have the technology in their homes to be able to do so successfully.

**Q3. When will we transition back to working in the office, when the stay at home order has been lifted? Any idea when CCCS will return to “regular” on-campus operations?**

**A3.** We do not know that right now as this is an ever-evolving situation. We will adhere to applicable Governor or City and County of Denver orders. With the exception of critical or essential staff, we will continue to work remotely under the current stay at home orders that impacts our office. As orders are lifted or revised, that information will be shared with employees along with expectations of what that will mean for returning to work.

We do recognize that the transition to return to working in the office may not happen as quickly as the transition to remote work. And many may have additional circumstances to deal with around child care, depending on how quickly day care and schools open back up. We will want to get back to “normal” operations as quickly as possible so we can best support our students and employees across the system but we are in a little bit of a wait and see right now.

**Q4. Have any decisions been made for SU20 course format? What about Fall?**

**A4.** Some colleges are taking the approach that most (if not all) summer courses will be delivered remotely. However, some colleges are still listing their courses as on-campus or hybrid and will move those courses to remote/online depending on the current state of affairs come mid-May or June. Fall is another question, but students are registering for fall semester already at some colleges. Most colleges will be listing their fall classes as they normally would and will make delivery mode changes as we get closer to the start of fall semester. However, students will want to know what type of class they will be taking when they register, so it is important to set expectations up front rather than enroll a bunch of students for an on-campus course only to change the format later.

**Q5. Hiring question from CCCOnline: Is there a plan in place to quickly hire CCCOnline instructors from home colleges and get them trained?**

**A5.** Hiring Instructors from within CCCS does allow for some streamlining of onboarding processes and HR will work with hiring managers where possible on this. But this doesn't mean we will want to rush a selection process and forego the opportunity to hire great Instructors we may not already know who are currently interested in employment. Even within hiring from within the system, there are some aspects of the onboarding process that cannot be skipped because of various laws and regulations. For example completing an I-9. I recommend if you are planning to hire new Instructors that you reach out to HR as soon as possible to discuss your needs and work together on a strategy for the selection and onboarding of new Instructors.

**Q6. Does the State of Colorado or the System have a mental health plan for staff and faculty as part of the pandemic response?**

**A6.** Yes! CCCS employees have access to free and confidential resources through the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program (CSEAP). CSEAP has a team of trained professionals that employees can connect with by video or phone for teletherapy sessions.

CSEAP will be providing recurring webinars on Managing Stress and Anxiety During Uncertain Times. Details for these webinars can be found on their website (<https://www.colorado.gov/c-seap>). HR also sent information about this webinar via email.

There is also the Colorado Crisis Services Line (1-844-493-TALK) for those who want to talk to a trained professional.

Finally, I would like to encourage supervisors to stay connected with their employees and for employees to check in with colleagues. We are not trained professionals and I don't encourage providing individual counseling. But, if someone doesn't seem right, remind them of these resources and options.

**Q7. What is the system doing to support the colleges, to support the students?**

**A7.** Each System office department/functional area has leaned in to provide critical support to our colleges. Here are two examples:

Central HR is having daily calls with the HR Directors across the system to review personnel processing matters. For example, ensuring we are all aware of and adhering to emergency rules around COVID, federal law changes, how local and state orders impact work functions/leave/etc. We are also working through personnel matters as they come up related to COVID to ensure we are being fair and consistent in our interpretation and application of employee benefits and pay.

To support faculty navigate the transition to remote or online instruction, Academic Affairs and CCCOnline staff created a digital toolkit and have made technical assistance resources available.

**Q8. Have any decisions been made regarding our benefit costs for the next enrollment period?**

**A8.** We do know that insurance premiums are increasing. In order to mitigate costs, we have made some changes to our APT/Faculty benefit plan designs including adding \$250 deductibles to plans that previously did not have deductibles. The State also had to make some changes to the plan designs for Classified benefits. Just as with salary increases, with the details of the State budget being uncertain, we do not know what CCCS will be able to contribute toward the premiums for APT/Faculty employees.

Open enrollment for Classified employees begins in less than a couple weeks and our benefit specialists will be sharing detailed information with employees about those plans in the coming days. The open enrollment period for APT/Faculty was delayed to May to allow us more time to work through budget processes. We will need to have our final rate information identified by the end of April.

**Q9. How did the state and community colleges persevere through past economic down-turns, and what changes are being discussed to weather this storm in the months to come?**

**A9.** To weather past downturns, CCCS has used a combination of tuition rate increases, federal stimulus funds, use of reserves, and strategic belt tightening—coupled with the counter cyclical nature of our enrollment, where recessions have typically meant increases in students at our campuses. The difference, in the short term, is where we could typically count on increased enrollment and tuition revenues to help counterbalance state appropriation reductions, the uncertainty regarding the trajectory of COVID-19 virus and the required social distancing measures makes gauging student enrollment difficult in the near term. However, CCCS does have a robust on-line capacity at CCC-Online and at the colleges, which helps to mitigate this uncertainty.

**Q10. What funding will the community colleges receive from the CARES Act?**

**A10.** There are a number of avenues from which our state may receive funding through the CARES act, which the Governor's office and the General Assembly staff are working to sort through.

The largest portion of this for higher education is through direct grants to institutions that total \$14 billion nationally. Initial estimates place CCCS's portion at around \$37 million, of which half can be spent on institutional operations and half on student related needs.

**Q11. What discussions have there been at the State level regarding the impact of funding for Higher Ed next fiscal year?**

**A11.** All higher education institutions were requested to provide the JBC with the impacts on tuition rates and operations of three scenarios: flat state appropriations; a 10% reduction and a 20% reduction.

The March state revenue forecast showed an \$800 million revenue drop from the December forecast—and since that forecast, local and state closure of businesses and stay at home orders have been put into place, likely through the end of April. As a result, this forecast likely underestimates the economic impact of these decisions and so that is probably a best case scenario at this point.

**Q12. Have any decisions been made regarding wage raises in July?**

**A12.** No decisions have been made by the General Assembly on salaries for FY-21.

We are fortunate to be able to provide as much stability for our workforce as we have thus far and to have the ability to allow our employees to work remotely during these stay at home orders rather than having employees use all of their leave or even letting people go. While we hope there will be something in the budget to allow for salary increases, I think we need to be prepared for the possibility that there will be no wage increases in July.

**Q13. Have any decisions been made regarding our benefit costs for the next enrollment period?**

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**Q14. What impact do you think this impending economic downturn will have on enrollment this summer and this fall?**

**A14.** The COVID-19 situation, and likely economic downturn, will be unlike other recessions in the short term. Typically, community colleges see increased enrollment during economic downturn. However, the people currently losing their jobs or seeing their hours cut are likely not thinking, “I should go to college.” They are trying to pay bills, try to feed their families, and trying to stay in their homes. To complicate matters, many of our students are likely in this situation so they may decide to take a semester or two off from college because of personal reasons and/or because they don’t like remote learning. These two factors will likely lead to decreased enrollment for at least a couple semesters.

If the economic downturn is longer, we will likely see enrollment increase similar to past recessions, but if the downturn is shorter, we will likely just see a return to Fall 2019/Spring 2020 numbers after a few semesters.

**Q15. What ways are the colleges supporting their high-needs students? (Providing meals, housing, etc.)**

**A15.** Each college is taking its own approach to support students based on community needs and other community services. Many of our college foundations have student emergency fund that make micro-grants to students while others have started such funds during this time. Examples would include the ACC Foundation which has purchased 100 \$40 gift cards to be given to students to purchase meals, the CCA Foundation has purchased 75 desktop computers to loan to students, and the MCC Foundation has made additional funds available to the financial aid to support students.

Additionally, many colleges are figuring out ways to extend their on-campus food pantries to students. CCD converted their food pantry to a mobile food pantry; MCC and PCC are working to create curbside pickups; and RRCC has partnered with the Food Bank of the Rockies to support their students.

**Q16. Are our hiring process impacted? Are current and/or upcoming open positions moving to virtual interviews, hiring, and onboarding? Or are they on hold?**

**A16.** HR is working with hiring managers on a case by case basis. How things proceed is dependent upon the specific positions, as well as if that position could realistically start working while we are not on site. Positions that are not suited for remote work will likely have a hold in the hiring process. But those are discussions that are being had with the hiring managers on a case by case basis.

The selection processes are continuing virtually but what is most important in a decision to proceed with a new hire will be the ability of the hiring department to appropriately onboard a remote employee, including ensuring they have the appropriate tools and resources needed to start working remotely.

**Q17. Has any consideration been given to allowing staff to carry over vacation time that will be capped (lost) that they are unable to take prior to 6/30 because we are critical to ensuring business is supported?**

**A17.** The HR Directors have had some preliminary discussions about this but a final recommendation has not been made yet.

**Q18. How does executive staff stay connected?**

**A18.** Executive staff hold regular WebEx video meetings for leadership meetings, staff check-ins, meetings with college functional groups, and president meetings. Outside of the office, we hear some exec staff are utilizing Netflix Party to connect with friends, Zoom meetings to engage family and friends for birthday parties and game nights.