



**Board of Trustees Regular Meeting
Tuesday, March 26, 2024 – 5:00 p.m.**

Performing Arts Center

MINUTES

1. General Institutional Functions

1.1 Mr. Gewecke called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

1.2 Mr. Santillo read the Public Statement: Adequate notice of this meeting specifying the time and location was transmitted via fax, posted to the Sussex County Community College Website, and on the main entry doors to the Administration Building, on March 21, 2024, pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-8.

1.3 Roll Call / Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Gewecke-Chair, Mrs. Smith-Vice Chair, Mr. Santillo-Secretary, Dr. Carrick, Dr. Crowley, Mrs. Frank, Mr. Hofmann, Dr. Silverthorne, Mr. Yardley, Dr. Connolly-President and Ex-Officio member, and Mrs. Fullem-Recording Secretary.

Also present: Dr. Okay-Senior Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Dr. Homer-Vice President of Student Success and Institutional Effectiveness, Dr. Gallo-Associate Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Mr. Gandhi-Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Fruge-Dean of Technical Operations, Mr. Kula-Executive Director of the Foundation, Mrs. Unrath-Chief Budget Officer, and Mrs. Meseha-Comptroller Consultant.

1.4 Mr. Gewecke welcomed the guests.

All members of the public who provide public comment shall first identify themselves. Public comments may be submitted to the Board of Trustees Secretary via email or written letter if received at least (8) hours prior to the meeting. Written public comments shall be read at the meeting with the same time restrictions as all public comments at the meeting. Duplicative comments may be summarized at the discretion of the Board of Trustees Chair.

1.5 Courtesy of the Floor on Agenda Items Only (Public Session-5 Minutes per Speaker).
No one spoke.

ACTION

1.6 Approval/Acceptance of Minutes

Mrs. Smith moved to approve/accept all minutes noted below. Mr. Santillo seconded the motion. Mr. Yardley abstained from the vote. The motion carried.

- 1.6.1 Minutes from the February 27, 2024 Board Workshop. (Resolution No. GI03262024-1)
- 1.6.2 Minutes from the February 27, 2024 Regular Board Meeting. (Resolution No. GI03262024-2)
- 1.6.3 Minutes from the February 27, 2024 Executive Session. (Resolution No. GI03262024-3)
- 1.6.4 Acknowledgment of Receipt of Committee Meeting Minutes. (Resolution No. GI03262024-4)
 - Personnel and Curriculum Committee – March 19, 2024.
 - Audit and Policy Committee – March 19, 2024.
 - Finance and Facilities Committee – March 19, 2024.

Consent Agenda – ACTION/RC

The President recommends items 2.1 - 2.5 for Board approval, as brought forth after discussion and review by Board Committees:

Mrs. Smith moved to approve all items on the Consent Agenda. Dr. Carrick seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: Dr. Carrick, Dr. Crowley, Mrs. Frank, Mr. Hofmann, Mr. Santillo, Dr. Silverthorne, Mrs. Smith, Mr. Yardley, and Mr. Gewecke voted yes. The motion carried unanimously.

- 2.1 Approval of Personnel Items
 - 2.1.1 Personnel Actions: February 14, 2024 – March 13, 2024. (Resolution No. P03262024-1)
 - 2.1.2 2024-2025 Administrative Calendar. (Resolution No. P03262024-2)
- 2.2 Approval of Curriculum Items – None this month.
- 2.3 Approval of Policy Items
 - 2.3.1 Policy No. 200.17 Access to Personal Files Policy. There are no changes. (Resolution No. AP03262024-1)
 - 2.3.2 Policy No. 200.20 Alcohol and Drug Free Workplace Policy. There are no changes. (Resolution No. AP03262024-2)
- 2.4 Approval of Finance Items
 - 2.4.1 Increase to FY24 Book Company, LLC. DBA Ecampus.com Blanket Purchase Order for Online Student Material. Current PO:\$300,000 Increase by \$ 100,000 = Total \$400,000. OPEX funded. (Resolution No. BFF03262024-1)
 - 2.4.2 Increase to Prudential Retirement FY24 Blanket Purchase Order for DCRP-The Defined Contribution Retirement Program. Current PO:\$300,000 Increase by \$100,000 = Total \$400,000. OPEX funded. (Resolution No. BFF03262024-2)

- 2.4.3 WIFI Warranty and Licensing with CDW, for January 21,2024-March 14, 2029 in the Amount of \$62,678. OPEX funded. (Resolution No. BFF03262024-3)
- 2.4.4 Microsoft Licensing Renewal with Dell, for 1 Year, in the Amount of \$25,149.29 . Opex funded. (Resolution No. BFF03262024-4)
- 2.4.5 Renewal for Hosted Software Licensing with Open Systems Integrators, Inc., Extended to October 31, 2024, for \$21,541. OPEX funded. (Resolution No. BFF03262024-5)
- 2.4.6 BPO Increase - Wholesale Inventory for School Store, Performance Food Group Inc., DBA Vistar/Performance, Current PO: \$7,000 Increase by \$13,000 = Total: \$20,000. OPEX funded. (Resolution No. BFF03262024-6)

2.5 Approval of Facilities Items – None this month.

3. Finance – ACTION/RC

ACTION/RC 3.1 Receipt and Review of Financial Statements – February 29, 2024 , Eight Months YTD, FYE June 30,2024. (Resolution No. GI03262024-5)

Mr. Gandhi presented the financial statement including: February YTD FY24 - Credit Hours Dashboard, Income Statement, Balance Sheet – Assets, Balance Sheet – Liabilities, and Three-Year Comparison.

Financial Status Discussion

- Overall Financial Status - Current and Year End
- Audit impact
- Update on ERC
- Liquid Assets - Investment strategy

Income Statement Discussion

- Impact of increased student revenue contribution to the Fund Balance
- Impact of Cares Support contribution to the Fund Balance
- One-time expenses in FY24 ... what will be carried over into FY25

Balance Sheet Discussion

- Liquid Assets - how are they invested and expectations
- Student Account Receivables
- Other Current Assets
- Fixed Assets - Current and what is planned
- Current Liabilities
- Deferred Liabilities

Mr. Yardley asked what is the percentage of surplus the college supposed to have. Mr. Gandhi indicated that a regular benchmark is 3-6 months, and we now have 12. Some of the things that have changed over the years and has helped our reserve iss during Covid when we received the federal CARES Act money. We were able to keep our balanced budget. By keeping our expenses within budget, the CARES Act money that came in helped fund some of the expenses resulting in a higher reserve. During that time many institutions were going into negative balances due to low enrollment, we were able to remain positive.

Dr. Crowley moved to acknowledge receipt and review of Financial Statements – February 29, 2024 , Eight Months YTD, FYE June 30,2024. Mr. Santillo seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: Dr. Carrick, Dr. Crowley, Mrs. Frank, Mr. Hofmann, Mr. Santillo, Dr. Silverthorne, Mrs. Smith, Mr. Yardley, and Mr. Gewecke voted yes. The motion carried unanimously.

- ACTION/RC 3.2** Report on Financial Statements – June 30, 2023 and 2022 (Annual Audit) (Report on Financial Statements and Schedules of Expenditures of Federal Awards and State Financial Assistance in Accordance with Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards – Uniform Guidance – and New Jersey OBM Circular 15-08) (Resolution No. BFF03262024-7)

John Farina, director on the college audit, from PKF O'Connor Davies, presented highlights from the audit. The college received a clean, unmodified opinion, which is the highest possible audit report. There was one finding and the college has already taken corrective actions. Trustee Yardley asked about the finding, which was that a bid report was not reviewed in a timely manner. It has been resolved.

Mr. Santillo moved to acknowledge receipt of the final annual audit report as indicated above. Mrs. Frank seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: Dr. Carrick, Dr. Crowley, Mrs. Frank, Mr. Hofmann, Mr. Santillo, Dr. Silverthorne, Mrs. Smith, Mr. Yardley, and Mr. Gewecke voted yes. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Presentations

- 4.1 David Hespe - Porzio, Bromberg & Newman regarding the Institutional Health and Culture Assessment of the College. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes.

5. Reports

- 5.1 The Correspondence File was received, reviewed, and filed.

6. Courtesy of the Floor on General Matters (Public Session-5 Minutes per Speaker.)

- Gerard James addressed the Board. He said, "I am a student who is deeply concerned about the recent changes at our school that undermine (inaudible) what we have here. I urge you to listen to my interview with Dr. Connolly that is on the school webstie and on YouTube which reveal some of the issues I want to discuss. First, it is kind of not an important issue, but the reinstallation of the glass wall that is set up outside of the president's office after it was removed to increase student access but also after a fight of seven years to get it taken down. This sends a troubling message of isolation and unavailability. This action contradicts the stated goals of open communication between administration and the student body. I have had the most prevalent is that a firearm was brought on campus. The presence of a weapon, even if it was temporary, is deeply disturbing and raises serious questions about the safety and security of our (inaudible) environment. (Inaudible) break up a peaceful protest, which may be administration overreacting and denying students' rights. There is a growing perception out against issues carries personal consequences. I have been told multiple times on different occasions that individuals who voiced concerns at recent board meetings were subject

to retaliation including, but not limited to, getting targeted with false rumors spread by people in positions of authority. This includes myself. This is an intrusion on free speech. It is disturbing, and I was even told that I was trauma dumping or fostering a very hostile student environment, which leads me to this point. There has been a recent restructure of the Campus Life office, which yes, it's positive, but it did include the previous head of Campus Life that I was told from credible individuals, that Mr. Jason Rodriguez had received a pay increase and a benefit time change in order to bring back information to Dr. Connolly. This raises questions about transparency and fairness. The decision to pit students against each other, as threats, is a divisive tactic that undermines the sense of community that we all have been fostering. Finally, the lack of transparency and accountability is exemplified by the delay in rescheduling an open door meeting that has yet to be rescheduled. Here we are a month later and we have heard (inaudible) trust, and I have heard that from a multitude of students. It's hard to feel heard and supported when basic communications are neglected again – something I have heard from other students. I am not speaking at all about (inaudible) or my favorite professor's departure, as some may assume. I am just deeply concerned about the (inaudible) our school is getting and the impact it will have on our current and future students. I urge the board to please take these concerns seriously and at the minimum start addressing the issues at hand. I ask a hard question and ask you to demonstrate a communicative (inaudible) and student-level. If you are truly impartial as you say you are, then you recognize the need for change and work diligently to restore trust and to improve the campus climate. I call on you the commission to an inclusive assessment of value and include students not just faculty, and get the whole picture of the current state of affairs. We are at a pivotal moment for our school. The actions that you will take should be able to shape the future of our community for years to come. I urge you to act with integrity, transparency, and with the communication that makes our institution special. Not just to the faculty but also to the students. Thank you for your attention.

- Maureen Murphy Smolka addressed the board. She said, "I want to share my perspective on Sussex County Community College and Dr. Connolly by virtue of the fact that I have worked here as first an adjunct professor and then a full-time professor and as a Chairperson for the last 35 years. I have been through all of the presidents with the exception of the very first president. I want to point out what my experience has been working with Dr. Connolly and working with this institution. I remember when I was on the search committee for Dr. Connolly. He was the only candidate who really talked about having some kind of a vision for this particular college. He also inherited a very dire situation at Sussex County Community College. The fact that he stayed with us to work through it I think is admirable. As a result of the dire financial situation that we were in when Dr. Connolly took office all of us have had to wear multiple hats. That includes not just faculty and staff, but all of the administrators. The hard work that all of us have put in over these last six years has led us to this position where we are much stronger. In the past when people retired or resigned there wasn't money to rehire, and now we are in the position to where we are presently searching for four or five full-time, tenure-track professor positions and a coordinator position. My experience with Dr. Connolly was that you could always agree or disagree about certain things, but I always felt comfortable going to him and letting him know what I didn't agree with. Even when we didn't come to a consensus on some things, we respectfully disagreed. One of the things that I'd been working on for over ten years was the development of a writing center. We were continually told there was no money for it. When I was told it was not going to happen I said I was going to keep bringing it up until it did happen. So I went to Dr. Connolly and I explained the value of a writing center, its impact on enrollment and retention and he agreed with me and said, 'Ok, get an ad hoc committee together, do some research, get a proposal to me and the faculty senate, and if it works, it works.'" That was the first time we were able to investigate the possibility of a writing center here. It is almost six years now that we have a writing center here at the college. Initially there

was only a part-time coordinator for the writing center, again because of funding. As the writing center improved and increased the number of students who were aided by it, and the research showed that the students who were aided by it were able to do better, we presented it to the Academic Council, and the money was found in order to hire a full-time coordinator. Changes are being made. They are slow but steady. They have impacted all of us. It is our love for the institution and our dedication to the students that has enabled us to wear all these hats and deal with the fact that we don't make that much money. But coming into a community college to become very wealthy. All of the salaries are there, and coming in, you know what the salary is going to be. In terms of salaries most are negotiated by the unions. We have unions for the staff, professional staff, adjuncts, and full-time faculty. Salaries are based on those negotiations that are conducted among the individual unions negotiation committees and the administration's negotiation committees. Dr. Connolly is not involved in it until negotiations are completed. They are then presented to Dr. Connolly and then they are sent to the Board. So, salaries and how much money you make are not flexible. The president is not in a position to say you can make this much and you can make this much. Do we need higher salaries? Yes, we definitely do, but so does everybody who works at a community college. So, our administrators work just as hard as the faculty and staff, and while their salaries are higher, they're not as high as administrators at other community colleges and other institutions. So a perspective on the ranges of salaries needs to be taken into consideration.

- James Gaddy addressed the Board. He said, "Good evening. My name is James Gaddy. I am still the Chief Operating Officer here at the College but I'm currently on leave. I'm here today because for the past few months the board has failed to take action regarding the abusive behavior of Jon Connolly. On December 19th I was invited to meet with the board to discuss accusations made in an anonymous letter to the college. The board's intentions were clear. Was I a risk to the college based on the treatment that I received from Dr. Connolly. I assured them that I was not a risk. That I had no intention to take action against the college. However, at the end of that conversation Jane Brown asked the very pointed question. She asked me, 'Is this a very toxic work environment?' My answer was yes and I explained that I could not go further because one of the folks who participated in this kind of gossip was sitting outside the room. I asked if they could reschedule time with me so that I could go into more detail. Unfortunately, I was never contacted back by the Board.

'The Board failed to investigate my positive reinforcement that it was in fact a toxic work environment. Fast-forward to February 9, 2024. That was the day after Jason Boehm sent a letter to the Board. I grew concerned that day because I remembered Dr. Connolly making comments to me a few months earlier about having a gun in his office. It kept ringing in my ears that Dr. Connolly had a gun in his office. After colleagues had described his behavior that morning I became concerned for his own safety. With that I reached out to Board members who allowed me, the head of HR and the head of security to search Dr. Connolly's office. I was really moved by that. It was something I never wanted to do, however, it was shocking to me that on Monday morning when I returned to the office folks came to me and told me that Dr. Connolly had gone around and told them that I had fabricated the story about him having a gun in his office. This was me on the receiving end of Dr. Connolly's retaliation. And so there's no question, (Mr. Gaddy played a recording that is inaudible on the recording and was inaudible to the people at the Board tables). To show that I did not fabricate the story, I have on recording, Dr. Connolly did in fact admit to having a gun in his office. Furthermore, I informed the Board of that. I informed them of the retaliatory behavior. I was asked to send the recording of that conversation and I did so and never heard back from the Board. Let me catch my place here. On Monday of the next week I was informed that Dr. Connolly had said that I fabricated the story. Fast-forward to February 27, 2024, at this

meeting, we heard from staff and students who talked about the hostile work environment. I chose as a leader not to speak that day because I was sitting in the front row representing the administration. However, the following evening I did make public comments at the County Commissioner meeting. The next day my nightmare began. Jon could not even look at me and he shared with a co-worker that he did not know how to behave around me and did not know what to say to me or what to do. And so, after signing an online petition on March 5th, I received a call from an exasperated and angry Jon Connolly at 9:00 at night, stating that I was being put on administrative leave. Since that time I have heard little from the college. Having been again a victim of Dr. Connolly's anger, I informed the Board of concerns I had about my employment and treatment at Dr. Connolly's hands. When I spoke about financial dishonesty at this college, and I understand that there are parameters about how much reserves we should have, but I was acting on the fact that Dr. Connolly said that we have to keep this a secret from the commissioners. I was acting on the fact that Dr. Connolly said that the funds were put away were erroneously chalked up to projects that we were not doing. I am so happy to see the transparency and this staff actually knows now that this college is not broke. That is what we have been hearing all along and continue to see cuts due to budgets and staffing issues. However, the number is not twenty thousand (\$20,000 is what was stated and recorded). The numbers are even higher when you take into account Chapter 12 and other grants and such that we have that contribute, it is more than \$25 million.

'So the second thing I want to talk to the Board about was being a victim of sexual harassment at Dr. Connolly's hands. Dr. Connolly went into great detail with me, his subordinate, about his sex life, about the mental capacity of what he was thinking during such encounters, and it made me completely uncomfortable. He directed one of our Deans to stop giving classes to Cat Graney because he feared that she would become the president of the adjunct union. I was called a faggot on more than one occasion. Dr. Connolly was informed of that at of all places a diversity retreat, and he did nothing about it. He did nothing about the fact that people said they would not work with me because of my sexual orientation other than to say, 'She's religious'. That is unacceptable. Being called a faggot has no place in this world. The spying, the eavesdropping, and even now I hear reports from people who are telling me that Melissa DeJoseph is going around saying she has evidence on me. I was put on administrative leave for a very specific reason, that allegations that I bring up, inappropriate behavior, inappropriate business dealings with friends, testing the asbestos in the mansion himself while we have students in there working with airborne asbestos. All of these things are a liability for his college. The gun, it compromises our financial aid. It compromises student health. These things are wrong. Dr. Connolly has done a lot of great things for this college. I commend him for many of those things. However, it is a toxic work environment, it is a hostile work environment, and I for one would really just like to get back to doing my job for the students.'

- Raquel Robyo addressed the Board. I spoke at the last board meeting about the questionable leadership by President Connolly. I want to reiterate my point. Before I asked the Board to help me do my job as a student ambassador and SGA officer. This time I ask for more tangible action to put President Connolly under (inaudible) at minimum. Since I talked to you my attitude has changed. It is not that I find leadership lacking. I find it toxic, abusive, and dangerous. I have here that it has been reported that the unrest, disorganization, and bitter attitude of both faculty and staff on campus is a direct consequence of the environment he fosters with pettiness and malice. I genuinely fear the aftermath of me speaking in front of you all. I fear for the security of my position in SGA, the stability of the student ambassadors, and for the diversity that lies ahead. I am also scared for my executive meeting with him that lies ahead with the SGA on April 3rd. It is well documented that Connolly has been known to personally threaten and lash

out at those who speak against him. It was made clear by the brave voice of Mrs. Sharpe and Professor Boehm, and now James Gaddy. Speaking of Professor Boehm, I wonder about the position that he used to fill in this institution. I haven't heard even a ghost of a whisper of filling his role as Student Success Advisor, professor, or athletic advisor. He was pushed out due to the denial of a \$13k raise necessary to support his family, highlighted in a letter to the Board, which led to three other Whistleblower letters. However, it will now cost the school to fill all of those positions if they are to be filled at all. Instead of the difference being put into an unused account of over one million dollars, which is a financial report that has to be put in as a request, as opposed to it being posted on the school's website like other institutions. I find it odd that his raise was denied, but a forty-thousand raise was approved for Jason Rodriguez, my former faculty advisor, who threatened a co-worker against speaking at a previous board meeting, like (inaudible) Professor Connolly, with the enrollment status of her son, and two sexual harassment cases. I promise this is not a threat, but a reality of the coming consequences if this continues to be left unaddressed. This will not stop. You will keep hearing from us. You will see me and others at the County Commissioners meeting tomorrow. I love this school. I love working for it and making it better. I love working for the students. I do not feel I can do that under Connolly. Thank you."

- Holly James addressed the Board. She said, "I am going to go back to the interview that Dr. Connolly did with my husband Gerard James who spoke previously. I'm going to address the door. It took all of four months to put it back up. Seven and a quarter years to take it down, but only four months to put it back up. Not only that but I'd like to know if financial statements will finally make it to the public's eye on the website like all of the other colleges in the area or are we going to keep that a secret? There hasn't been one since 2020. Aside from that I do not just have my husband here. I have my nephew who just turned 18, who attended the fire academy. Now finding out for sure I recall several co-workers that you have work at Thorlabs, which funded that whole building in the program (inaudible). Knowing that there was a gun on the premises terrifies me. You have veterans here. You have people that matter here and you're bringing a gun and acting erratically. You're threatening people on a regular basis and people are afraid to speak up about you. But you have a gun on campus. You mandated armed security officers. Why do you need a gun? Not only that, but if a student brought a gun to campus would they be expelled immediately. I believe they would. So why is Dr. Connolly still here? We heard this lovely lady, I'm sorry I don't remember her name. She spoke about the writing center. I was here a month ago when I watched Olivia, who was the head of the writing center, tell the Board that she couldn't afford to live and it was a toxic environment. I feel like those two things don't go hand-in-hand.

"I'm going to take a moment to talk about all of your academics and how you have more people coming in and, I'm just going to put it out there. I know I have watched my husband who is going to school here, and he has had more than one class that was not offered and he didn't know what he was going to do. I feel like you are offering things that/ you don't actually have and you're putting things out there to make it appear that (inaudible) that it's not transparent. That's not honest. Dr. Connolly you go on how you have to lead this like a business and that the students are going to want to do all the fun things, but there's just no money. You all heard him. You all heard them all. There's over twenty million dollars. Not only that, but you also say that you lead with love. Not dealing with it when people are called derogatory terms, is that love? Do you love the people who you are pushing out because they don't agree with you or is this you weaponizing your power, like you stated in your interview?"

- Taghred Mahomoud addressed the Board. She said, "Good evening. (Inaudible) I am forty two years old. I've been here two years. I came in here as a student and I took it as I was a student. One year, two semesters, and I started to see cracks. All the little cracks

that weren't noticed by the many young minds that walk through these halls. For instance, these are just a few things that I brought up to Dr. Connolly, which he just ignored, blatantly ignored. Every semester we have to complete surveys. Every single student gets a survey to just critique the professor and the work that they do. I asked Dr. Connolly if we could have access to these surveys instead of going according to outside sources. Of course the request was denied. He said a lot of students would see it and someone might have been having a bad day and had a bad experience with that professor and bad mouth them. Then why are we doing it? Why are we doing it if you are going to restrict the students from having access? Another point that I brought up to Dr. Connolly was students needing more full-time faculty. This is something that he worked on. I have to admit, he worked on it. Four extra full-time faculty appointed (inaudible) and the other person was himself. This is unacceptable when other departments lack full-time faculty, but he's here full-time. Not that anyone wants to see him everyday, but we see him everyday. What we need is full-time faculty in every department. He rejected it and appointed himself. All these issues I came up with a year ago, before any of this happened. But I was made to feel that everything I was speaking up about was because one of my professors, who was not my professor, was being (inaudible). After hearing everything that's been going on, after hearing that recording, as a parent of kids who went here, that go here, and two of my children both go here, and a lot of my friends in this community, Sussex community, in Fredon Township and Hampton, Stillwater, Sandyston, all who care about the school definitely need to hear about it. And he is failing us. Him still being here, you are all failing us. Him still being here is on your hands and you're going to have a lot of backlash. Thank you for your time."

7. **Other Business**

Discussion / Reports / Announcements:

7.1 Report of the Nominating Committee.

Mr. Hofmann noted that the Board needs to replace the Treasurer. He motioned to nominate Dr. Crowley. There were no nominations from the floor. Mrs. Smith seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

7.2 Trustee Activity Update.

Mrs. Smith spoke about supporting the arts. She talked about the Teen Arts Festival and the upcoming college production of Arsenic and Old Lace.

7.3 A copy of the President's Report is on file in the office of the president.

7.4 Chair's Comments.

Mr. Gewecke addressed the public and faced repeated interruptions from community members in attendance. He firmly asked for the same level of respect the Board had shown to them when it was his turn to speak. His statement:

"As a matter of statute and also in a spirit of transparency you have seen presentations by our CFO, Independent Auditors, and board consultants. In the light of those reports I would like to address some recent accusations raised against the board. Accusations against the Board have been mostly veiled but are nevertheless plainly implied.

“First – That alleged misconduct by the president and other Sr. Administrative staff have been ignored by the Board. It is a matter of fact that we have been open, honest, and responsive to complaints by a relatively few members of the staff and faculty. The board has, in the recent past, conducted an inquiry into alleged misconduct by the president, to the point of giving undue credence to wholly anonymous accusations. That inquiry yielded no direct evidence of misconduct. Nevertheless, with an eye toward the long-term well-being, satisfaction, and support of the campus community, the Board has commissioned a comprehensive Institutional Health and Culture study by an independent third-party consultant.

“After the commissioning of this study, members of the college community staged protests on campus as well as made public comments accusing the College President of misconduct and called for his resignation. Other members of the college community made additional accusations against the President at a meeting of the county commissioners. We note that none of the accusations made against the president were made through the established process of grievance contained in college policies or in the collective bargaining agreements under which employees of the college work. The Board nonetheless broadened and expedited the work being done by its consultant. After the public disclosure of negative comments toward the President, the board received numerous letters in support of Dr. Connolly and his management of the college. Despite the equally positive and negative comments received by the board and as you have seen tonight, the board felt it nevertheless prudent to commission a second independent inquiry into newly raised allegations. Know that we are endeavoring with all due diligence to get to the facts in the matters at hand. We ask for your patience as we proceed with proper protocol and respect to all parties involved.

“Secondly – There is an open accusation that the college is mismanaging funds. We find it extraordinary that we are being accused of malfeasance by accomplishing the very thing the board is primarily tasked with. That being, guarding the public trust and maintaining the financial stability of the college.

“As has been reported in the press, the college has reserve funds. It has been implied that this is a giant slush fund, it is neither giant nor is it a slush fund. Chapter 12 funding (which is designed to fund capital improvements) falls significantly short of current needs. In addition, funding strategic investment in the college’s programs is essential to the sustainability of the institution. Investment allows the college to keep pace with the needs of county students and local businesses. Programs like optics technology, Welding, Medical Assisting, Line Worker, Nursing, Culinary, Ramapo at Sussex 3+1 and many others, along with capital improvements like the MTEC building, the Makers Space, Optics Building, The Culinary Institute all would not be possible without vision, foresight and a firm financial foundation from which to work.

“In terms our faculty and staff, it goes without saying that we appreciate them and genuinely believe they are numbered among the best in the country. The board recently approved the collective bargaining agreements for both our staff and faculty unions and signed contracts that received overwhelming support from those negotiating including the union representative; who actually complemented management on the tone, tenor and effectiveness of the negotiations.

“In conclusion, I want to emphasize that this board is confident in the overall philosophy of a fiscally responsible balanced budget approach and the strategy of maintaining the proper level of reserve funds in keeping with both accreditation

and State standards. We believe continued investment is essential in maintaining the financial stability of the college. The college is an asset to county residents and businesses, its growth and expansion are essential to a vibrant community. We assure you we are, and will continue to, work diligently toward those ends. As always, we welcome constructive dialogue with anyone who truly has the well-being of the college in view.”

7.5 The next meeting of the Board of Trustees will take place Tuesday, April 23, 2024, location TBD.

8. Executive Session – Pending Litigation and Personnel Matters

Now be it resolved that the Board of Trustees will now go into an Executive Session to discuss matters pertaining to pending litigation and personnel matters. The matters discussed will be made public if and when the circumstances requiring confidentiality no longer exist, however it is not presently known if and when that will be.

It is expected that the Executive Session shall last approximately 60 minutes and no action will be taken after the Executive Session

At 6:28 p.m., Mrs. Smith motioned for the Board of Trustees to enter into an Executive Session. Mr. Santillo seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

At 7:34 p.m. Mrs. Smith motioned for the Board of Trustees to adjourn the Executive Session. Mrs. Frank seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Adjournment

At 7:35 p.m. Mrs. Smith moved to adjourn the Regular meeting. Mr. Santillo seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Approved: