A letter from the CCRIFA Executive Committee on Performance-Based Funding
April 6, 2015

Dear members of the CCRI community and allies,

A proposal currently under consideration to enact Performance Based Funding (Senate bill 0603 http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/search/) is highly problematic because it (1) misunderstands our student population; (2) excludes substantive CCRI participation; (3) is not designed to improve learning.

1. Misunderstanding of CCRI’s student population:

   1.1. Many CCRI students transfer before graduating. The principal metric proposed is based upon achievement of associate degrees within a two- or three-year time frame. But one quarter of CCRI students start at CCRI then transfer to four-year schools without obtaining an associate’s degree. Currently, these transfers are not counted towards CCRI’s graduation rate.

   1.2. Two- and three-year graduation targets are not realistic for the majority of CCRI students who do not fit the typical profile of a college student.
   - CCRI is the only open enrollment college in Rhode Island.
   - Four times as many have a documented disability as at RIC or URI.
   - Two thirds do not arrive college-ready, needing at least one developmental course.
   - One out of six speaks English as a second language.
   - The majority are first-generation college students.
   - Three quarters work while attending CCRI.
   - One out of twelve is a single parent.

   In spite of these many challenges, half of entering full-time freshmen will ultimately graduate from CCRI.

   1.3. Much of the data, gathered from sources outside of Rhode Island and being used to promote the legislation, is outdated and misleading. Policy should be based on accurate data generated by CCRI’s Office of Institutional Research.

2. Lack of CCRI participation:

   2.1. CCRI was not involved in any stage of development of the PBF proposals. Legislation that permits the president of the College to choose only one metric of CCRI’s performance excludes faculty participation, seeks no student input, and ignores the expertise and experience of the College.

   2.2. The legislation gives excessive control to the Postsecondary Commissioner (PSC). Assigning to one individual the power to determine the metrics, set targets, control budget, take corrective action and oversight, and reset the targets to advance the goals, is unprecedented and lacks checks and balances. It is counter to Rhode Island’s lively experiment to give so much control one person. Control should be in the hands of the Council for Postsecondary Education with input from stakeholders, especially faculty, staff and students.

   2.3. Placing PBF decisions predominantly within the Postsecondary Commissioner’s purview undermines faculty co-governance. This is counter to state law (RIGL 16-33.1-3) that guarantees co-governance and key planning roles for faculty at CCRI.
3. Performance-Based funding is not designed to improve student learning

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3.1. PBF is based on a production model: deliver X amount of product (students with degrees) within a predetermined timeframe. CCRI does not manufacture a product--we offer students the opportunity, resources, and guidance to transform their lives.

3.2. Performance based funding shifts responsibility for learning onto the institution rather than the student. Students are free agents who are ultimately responsible for their own learning and will progress at varying rates due to varying circumstances. Part of CCRI's charge is to foster independence and teach responsibility so that students are prepared for the rigor of any four-year institution and the workplace.

3.3. Research suggests PBF leads to grade inflation and other unintended consequences. Students may be fast-tracked through courses by lowering expectations and outcomes; they may not acquire necessary knowledge and critical thinking skills. (“Unintended Impacts of Performance Funding” CCRC, Nov. 2014)

Efforts to improve higher education success require adequate funding; first assess current spending, waste and needs, and then fund the College to increase capacity. A committee should examine how finances are allocated at the college. CCRI and NEASC, our institutional accreditor, have already identified actions that need to be implemented, including establishing an admissions floor; instituting mandatory orientation; and increasing the numbers of counselors, academic advisors, tutors, full-time disabilities specialists, and full-time faculty. At every stage, all stakeholders should be involved to develop plans for improvement.

Please contact your state senator and representative to encourage them to consider the Senate bill 0603 very carefully, share the concerns outlined above, thank them for their efforts to improve the quality of public higher education in Rhode Island. You can find your legislators’ contact information at the Secretary of State’s Voter Information Center website (https://sos.ri.gov/vic/).

We also ask that you share it with others, anyone you know, and encourage them to do the same.

Sincerely,
The Community College of Rhode Island Faculty Association (CCRIFA) Executive Committee

For questions or comments, please contact CCRIFA President, Shawn Parker at sgparker@ccrifa.org
Talking points developed by the Communications Working Group, latest draft March 4, 2015.

CCRIFA’s Mission
The Community College of Rhode Island is the state’s only public comprehensive associate degree-granting institution. We provide affordable access to higher education at locations throughout the state. Our primary mission is to offer recent high school graduates and returning adults the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for intellectual, professional and personal growth through an array of academic, career and lifelong learning programs. We meet the wide-ranging educational needs of our diverse student population, building on our rich tradition of excellence in teaching and our dedication to all students with the ability and motivation to succeed. We set high academic standards necessary for transfer and career success, champion diversity, respond to community needs, and contribute to our state’s economic development and the region’s workforce.