2012 State of the District
Riverside Community College District
Chancellor Gregory W. Gray
February 10, 2012

Good morning.
Most of you probably are familiar with the saying: Strength in numbers.
You probably have used it in conversation or to make a point.
As a society, we rely upon numbers.
The number of dollars we have in the bank. The number of pushups we can do. The number of questions we got right on a test. Do I have 30 students in my class or 36? Are there 12 or 13 students waiting in line to register? Are we ranked in the top 20, the top 10? Is the budget problem we face $14 million or $20 million?
Numbers are important. But they should not be the sum total of what we accomplish or value as educators.
I considered starting this year’s State of the District address by talking about the budget. I figured, why not? As the 800-pound gorilla in the room, it’s hard to ignore.
But I’ve said many times that the budget or lack thereof will not define us as a community of colleges. I’ve talked about greatness...what it means and how to achieve it.
This morning I want to begin where I will end: excellence.
Despite the challenges we faced over the past three years, and the ones we are dealing with this year, our colleges remain excellent choices for students and excellent investments for our communities.
I cannot think of another community college district in the state or country that could successfully address a $45 million budget problem, lose 150 employees through attrition and early retirement and continue to provide a high quality of services, attract significant major grants, accredit two new colleges, complete $300 million in construction projects, and launch a major gifts campaign.
By any measure, those achievements are remarkable. Yet they are not without cost, and they are only possible because of the individuals who choose to work at Moreno Valley College, Norco College, Riverside City College, and in the District offices.
I have said this before, but it cannot be overstated: Our faculty, staff, and administrators are among the most talented professionals anywhere in higher education. You have a passion for what you do.
It’s great to be named one of the top 25 colleges in the nation or the top 10 in California, but it’s not the reason we come to work every day.
It’s nice to garner a 4.8 or a red chili on Rate Your Professor, but it’s not the reason faculty stand and deliver every day.

It’s rewarding to earn comp time or praise, but it’s not the reason that staff answer “just one more question” after hours or arrive at the office 30 minutes early so that students can meet paperwork deadlines.

Excellence may be recognized from big accomplishments, but it is earned through small ones.

Let’s take a look at some of the things for which RCCD colleges are known.

One: Excellent programs that prepare students to live and work productively in the 21st century. Examples are the range of foreign language programs we offer—unusual for a community college, as well as strong MUN, CTE, Honors, and international education programs.

Two: Our faculty possess terminal degrees from top public and private universities.

Three: Our graduates transfer to top universities.

Four: Our alumni garner national recognition in their fields.

Five: RCCD attracts external funding at one of the highest levels among community colleges—all because of the trust and reputation our colleges enjoy.

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You all know that last fall, in partnership with the RCCD Foundation, we launched the Invest in Excellence major gifts campaign.

In doing so, we chose four pillars of excellence: Student Excellence, Academic Excellence, Community Excellence, and Workforce Excellence.

Why did we choose these four pillars? How can we be confident that they will attract support from private donors?

The answers to these questions are simple.

First, excellence inspires confidence.

Second, RCCD colleges are incubators for excellence.

Let’s look at just a few examples.

Student excellence.

Our students make headlines. They are invited to perform at the Kennedy Center and at national conferences. They win state championships. They out-write, out-think, and out-march the competition.

Students like Mayra Cortez, who emigrated from Mexico and as an early college high school student has earned a 4.4 GPA, was named valedictorian, and will graduate from high school at the same time she earns her associate degree from Moreno Valley College. Mayra is a semi-finalist for a $20,000 Dell scholarship and plans to attend UCR to pursue a career in biomedical engineering.

And Louise Daniels, a Marine Corps veteran and physics major at Riverside City College, who received a $40,000 scholarship and will attend UC Riverside to
continue her studies in physics and her work on water quality issues with UCR researchers.

And Sergio Alfaro, an Iraq war veteran and Norco College graduate who went on to enroll in the UCR/UCLA Thomas Haider Program in Biomedical Sciences and is currently completing his medical studies at Harvard.

Our colleges invest in students. 24/7 library reference service. One-stop student services and student-success centers, a national center for excellence, and seamless programs to move from community college to university.

We push for success.

Academic excellence.

Our colleges build for the future. New classrooms and laboratories in Dental, Nursing, Science and Math. New partnerships with K-12 that expand and improve career academies and better prepare incoming high school students for college-level math. Dr. Sharmistha Banerjee, our Fulbright Scholar in Residence at Moreno Valley College. A program to launch new game technology products. Millions of dollars each year in grants.

We control our own destiny.

Community Excellence.

Local residents benefit from things like a developing water demonstration garden. A low-cost, student-staffed dental care clinic serving at-need families. The future Center for Social Justice and Civil Liberties set to open in June 2012. A leadership academy that grows leaders from within—faculty, staff and students already connected and involved in our communities.

We progress and improve.

Workforce Excellence.

Our colleges strengthen the local workforce. We graduate firefighters, assist entrepreneurs, prepare cooks, and train technology and new media professionals. We provide opportunities for individuals to be life-long learners and for businesses and workers to refocus, retrain, and re-emerge more competitive in the domestic and internal marketplace.

We challenge ourselves to do more.

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Recently, a couple of your faculty colleagues reminded me that our commitment to excellence, to greatness, is the one thing that, against all odds, must continue to define us as a community of colleges.

We cannot let the State’s financial punches knock us out. That’s why I decided to title this address *Excellence Burns Bright*—because I don’t believe that our spirit will ever be extinguished.

Make no mistake. We are only in the mid-rounds of the fight. Community colleges already have suffered from a funding reduction of nearly three quarters of a
billion dollars and an estimated 400,000 students are going unserved. There is more pain to come.

But to quote Jack Dempsey, “A champion is someone who gets up when he can’t.”

So, what are we facing the rest of this year and in 2012/13? It’s no secret that the State continues to disinvest in higher education. Unfortunately, this is a race to the bottom, not to the top.

The 2011/12 budget triggers cost California community colleges $102 million in additional funding cuts. For RCCD, that meant an additional $2.4 million reduction that we need to cover this fiscal year—on top of an $18 million budget gap we had for this year. (SLIDE #10)

If Governor Brown’s proposed tax measure makes it onto the November ballot and wins voter approval, community colleges will get some relief and more benefits in the future. Reimbursement of deferred community college payments would ease RCCD’s budget. Passage isn’t a sure thing. If the measure fails, K-12 and community colleges would be hit hard by new state funding cuts.

Right now, RCCD faces a $14.6 million budget problem in 2012/13. This is the best-case scenario.

I mentioned numbers in my opening. Numbers become real at the campus level.

Dollars from the State translate directly into programs to interest students, faculty to teach students, staff to serve students and faculty, and facilities to maintain an excellent learning environment.

How much and how many are two major challenges facing our institution. What size institution will we be in 2012? More critically, given decreased state funding, increased regulations, changes in student population and preparedness, findings of the Student Success Initiative, and available external resources, what will our colleges and district need to look like in the year 2016 and beyond?

Over the next several weeks and months, budget forums and planning sessions at each of the colleges will give us opportunities to come together as a community of colleges to discuss these issues. Reminder notices for those meetings will be distributed on the rccd-all and college list-serves, as well as on the websites. I encourage you to participate in the process. We need your best ideas moving forward.

In addition, discussions must continue with the CTA, CSEA, and others regarding how best to handle projected increases in costs related to insurance, health and benefits, step and salary, and other annually recurring expenses.

The reality is that while we do many things well, RCCD is a much different college district than it was just a couple of years ago. One can see this in the most basic institutional measures.

We are a smaller institution today than in 2009.
The reason is no surprise. We have reduced sections to correspond with the state-mandated workload reduction.

And why like every other community college district in California we have reduced significantly our unfunded FTES. We know that these factors have affected access. They’ve also affected how we operate on the instructional side. In 2011, full-time faculty taught a greater percentage of our sections.

What long-term impacts do these indicators foreshadow?

In adapting to this new reality, we must make changes. We must ask tough questions. And our answers must be based on what the colleges and district determine to be core missions. I’m encouraged that the colleges already have begun some of those discussions.

I will close in just a minute, but first I want to touch on a few reasons that I am excited to be standing before you today.

For the first time in this history of this district, we have three fully accredited institutions. This summer we will have three permanent presidents leading our colleges. Each is an experienced and capable leader and I look forward to working with them. Today, I would like to thank Dr. Debbi DiThomas and Dr. Tom Harris for their excellent work as interim leaders of our colleges.

I am also inspired by the dedicated community members who have pledged their time and support to make the Invest in Excellence Campaign a success. These are top leaders in our communities—individuals who believe in our mission and in you.

With the help of the RCCD Foundation, I am certain that we will bring the Campaign to a successful conclusion to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Riverside City College and the 25th anniversaries of Moreno Valley and Norco colleges in 2016. Our campaign chair, Henry Coil, Jr., was honored in Washington, DC as the Western Region’s top community college philanthropist. With his leadership, we will surpass the 100@100 mark and raise an additional $20 million in private support over the next four years. To our friends and supporters in the audience: thank you for standing with us.

I believe that’s the key, standing together. We may end up smaller, but we will be stronger...as long as we advance with shared purpose and shared commitment.

We will deal with the budget problem.
We will reshape our Moreno Valley, Norco and Riverside City colleges in accordance with their missions.
We will continue to sensibly allocate resources where they are most needed.
We will strive for greatness.
We will achieve excellence.
And we will keep the lights of learning shining brightly at our three colleges.