



Minn State Policy Committee

President – Jennifer Erwin

Vice President – Jessica Thompson

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Board of Trustees, Chair Cowles, Chancellor Malhotra, and other guests, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for this month's Board of Trustees meeting.

Congratulations to all on another successful academic year at Minnesota State colleges and universities, where we granted awards to approximately 38,000 students. This has been the weirdest year ever, and I don't know if we'll see another in our lifetimes.

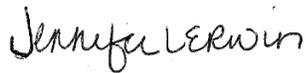
I want to take a moment to thank Chancellor Malhotra on his kind words of appreciation to AFSCME members and his acknowledgement of their role in keeping our colleges open and safe for our students, faculty, and staff. We met the students where THEY are at, rather than expecting them to come to us. While the pandemic has been hard on everyone, new ways to serve our students and help them to be successful were born. We found new avenues for our students to ask for help, get tutoring, talk with instructors, and navigate through their college career. Zoom became the new classroom, and we found that aspects of Zoom should carry on after the pandemic is over. We get more interaction from people who might not be able to attend a meeting on campus; we don't have to spend time and money traveling in our vehicles or by public transportation to attend professional development opportunities; and we don't have to try to find meeting space on campuses who are running out of room.

AFSCME employees do the work – and are appreciated by Chancellor Malhotra, but yet we are not considered professionals; we do not have the opportunities afforded to us as others do in Minnesota State to further our education beyond the college level where we work; and we don't get treated with the respect we deserve by some of our leadership teams. We are the ones on the frontlines – we greet and assist the students; we answer the telephones; we make the appointments; we help them with registration and Financial Aid; we tutor the students; we prepare the labs for classes and support faculty and Administration; we schedule meetings and take meeting minutes; we clean the campuses; we plant the flowers and mow the grass to keep our campuses beautiful; we come in during blizzards to shovel snow and ensure campus safety. These are only a handful of the jobs we do – but they are important jobs. We are important to the colleges. As employees of these educational institutions, we deserve to be respected for the work we do. And we deserve to be recognized by our presidents and their cabinets.

There are a lot of good things happening on our campuses. We enjoy being involved in that work and want to continue making a difference. Our colleges are in tough spots financially right now, especially with the Legislature (more than likely) not completing their work during the regular session. Our students can't budget their tuition for next academic year; our colleges can't budget revenue next year without an agreement and passage of a Higher Education bill. We realize that personnel is 80% of the college budget. AFSCME positions have been cut year after year; not filled after retirements; positions being converted to MAPE. But we do the work – we are on the frontlines with our students. We are the first person they see when they step on campus. We are the ones who answer the questions. Let's work together – instead of against each other – to get the work done. Let's fill the positions instead of doing more with less. Let's respect each other.

Thank you for the opportunity. We look forward to the 2021-2022 academic year beginning in a few short months and the chance to continue working together to graduate another 38,000 students next spring. Have a great summer!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Erwin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "E".

Jennifer Erwin - President