

July 2, 2024

BY CERTIFIED MAIL

Dr. Milan Hayward
President
Pierpont Community and Technical College
500 Galliher Drive
Fairmont, WV 26554

Dear President Hayward:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Pierpont Community and Technical College (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, June 27, 2024. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent comprehensive evaluation, including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the Institution submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

Summary of the Action: The Institution has been placed on Notice because it is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. This action also resulted in a reaffirmation of the Institution’s accreditation. The Institution meets Core Components 2.C, 3.C, 4.B, 4.C, 5.A, 5.B, and 5.C with concerns. The Institution is required to host a Notice Visit no later than December 2025 to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the imposition of the sanction.

Institutional Disclosure Obligation: HLC policy¹ requires that an institution inform its constituencies, including Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, prospective students, and any other constituencies about the sanction and how to contact HLC for further information. The policy also requires that an Institution on sanction disclose this status whenever it refers to its HLC accreditation. HLC will monitor these disclosures to ensure they are accurate and in keeping with HLC policy. The Institution must submit drafts of its planned disclosures to these various audiences to its HLC Staff Liaison in advance of transmission and provide its Staff Liaison with a link to relevant information on its website. At a minimum, an institution must: i) provide a copy of this Action Letter to its governing board, administration, and faculty, ii) provide a copy of the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice to its currently enrolled students, and iii) prominently display the Mark of Accreditation Status where accreditation status is described on its website. Once disclosures have been made, the Institution must submit copies of its disclosure documents as a single .pdf file to www.hlcommission.org/upload (by selecting “Information

¹ INST.E.10.010, Notice.

about Institutional Disclosures”) no later than seven (7) business days following receipt of this Action Letter. HLC will retain this information as part of the Institution’s record.

Substantive Change: HLC policy² requires that an institution placed on Notice be subject to additional requirements for substantive change during the Notice period and for three (3) years following the removal of Notice.

Notification Program: HLC policy³ states that an institution placed on notice is ineligible for the Notification Program for Additional Locations for three (3) years following the removal of Notice, providing all other requirements for the Notification Program are met.

Board Rationale

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the Institution as well as the entire record before the Board:

Pierpont Community and Technical College (“the Institution”) meets, but with concerns, Criterion Two, Core Component 2.C, “the governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution’s integrity,” for the following reasons:

- A new Board of Governors was appointed in 2020 and has yet to adopt a strategic plan for the Institution.
- The Board of Governors is championing a new aviation center at the Institution. The Board of Governor’s active role in implementing such an initiative raises concerns, including regarding the Board of Governors making decisions in the best interest of the Institution and sufficiently delegating day-to-day management of the institution to the administration.
- The Board of Governors lacks sufficient attention to matters concerning the Institution, particularly those stemming from the Institution’s separation from Fairmont State University.
- Minutes of the Board of Governors meetings provide inadequate assurances of transparency regarding its actions.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services,” for the following reason:

- The Institution continues to experience staffing issues. While these issues are due to its previous status as part of a larger university, the Institution remains in the planning stages of addressing these issues as it awaits completion of its budgeting process.

² INST.F.20.040, Substantive Change.

³ INST.E.10.010, Notice.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students,” for the following reason:

- While the Institution has continued work on general education assessment, cocurricular assessment remains under development, and the Institution would benefit from defining the difference between cocurricular and extracurricular activities.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.C, “the institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution’s goals for retention are imprecise and actions to affect a more positive retention rate are not yet fully developed.
- The Institution is exploring routes to improve retention, persistence, and completion rates, but it has yet to firmly establish its direction in these areas.
- The Institution does not have robust systems in place to disaggregate retention, persistence, and completion data for its programs or other segments of its student population.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Five, Core Component 5.A, “through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution’s leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission,” for the following reasons:

- Because the Institution has been without a permanent full-time institutional effectiveness professional, data collection and dissemination has been wanting. The Institution is in the process of recruiting and hiring such an individual.
- While the Institution has a draft strategic plan, it is not clear when the Board will approve such a plan and the Institution continues to operate without a strategic plan approved by its Board of Governors.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, “the institution’s resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future,” for the following reasons:

- While the Institution has addressed some of the concerns regarding its fiscal health through a more inclusive and transparent budgeting process and the development of a financial management plan, it is still in transition and a work in progress.
- While the Institution has plans to increase enrollment, it is too soon to understand the impact and results of these plans.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, “the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement,” for the following reasons:

- The recent change to a more inclusive budgeting process is a significant departure from years of a top-down approach, but the Institution is still developing its related data-tracking systems and the work in this area is still in progress.

- The Institution was required to take on debt due to its separation from Fairmont State University. Because of this, debt repayment is a priority in the Institution's budgeting process ahead of other needs such as expanding staffing levels, professional development, and other expenses. Thus, there are concerns about the Institution's ability to retire debt, expand staffing levels, and create an operating reserve.
- While the Institution has a positive trend line for its CFI scores, it is lower than it would be for a financially secure institution.
- The Institution lacks an approved strategic plan that informs the budgeting process with strategic, programmatic, and operational needs.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and the evidence in the record that the Institution is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Notice Report: The Board required that the Institution submit a Notice Report at least eight weeks prior to the Notice Visit providing evidence that the Institution is no longer at risk for non-compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and that it has ameliorated the issues that led to the Notice sanction.

Notice Visit: The Institution will host a Notice Visit no later than December 2025 to determine whether The Institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the imposition of Notice and to make a recommendation about whether to remove Notice or take other action.

Board Review: The Board will review the documents associated with the evaluation at its June 2026 meeting to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings of Met with Concerns and is no longer at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and thus whether Notice shall be removed, or if the Institution has not ameliorated the findings, or is no longer in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, whether other action should be taken under HLC policy, up to and including withdrawal of accreditation.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution has been maintained on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation (Year 4) in 2027-28.

HLC Disclosure Obligations

The Board action resulted in changes that will be reflected in the Institution's Statement of Accreditation Status as well as the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. The Statement of Accreditation Status, including the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the HLC website.

In accordance with HLC policy,⁴ information about this action is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. This Action Letter and the enclosed Public

⁴ COMMA.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements

Disclosure Notice will be posted to HLC's website not more than one business day after this letter is sent to the Institution. Additionally, a summary of Board actions will be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. This summary also will be published on HLC's website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the Institution.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have questions about any of the information in this letter, please contact your HLC Staff Liaison, Dr. Linnea Stenson.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Pierpont Community and Technical College
Michael Waide, Provost and Vice President of Academics and Student Services, Pierpont
Community and Technical College
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Linnea A. Stenson, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning
Commission
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission
Sara Armstrong Tucker, Chancellor, West Virginia Higher Education Policy
Commission
Herman Bounds, Director, Accreditation Group, Office of Postsecondary Education,
U.S. Department of Education