



March 2, 2022

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Stanley Fields, President
Morton College
3801 S. Central Ave.
Cicero, IL 60804-4398

Dear President Fields:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Morton College (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, February 25, 2022. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the recent Notice visit, including, but not limited to: the Notice report the Institution submitted, the report from the Notice visit team, and the institutional response to the report.

Summary of the Action: The Board determined that the Institution is no longer at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and removed the Institution from Notice. The Institution meets Core Components 2.A and 2.C with concerns. The Institution is required to submit an embedded Interim Report, as outlined below, with its next Assurance Filing.

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:

The Institution continues to meet, but with concerns, Criterion Two, Core Component 2.A, “the institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has made improvements with respect to Board education. However, the Institution has not fully established and implemented a formal strategy by which Board members can comprehensively understand Board policies, responsibilities, and fiduciary standards, as well as the ‘business’ of higher education. A program of governance education is part of Illinois legal requirements regarding professional development for community college trustees.
- The Institution's Board needs to establish a process for a rigorous self-evaluation and use the results of these evaluations for planning and improvement.
- While some evaluations of the president have been performed by the Institution's Board, the Board has yet to establish a regular schedule and process for performing this function.
- The Institution's Board is engaged in an ongoing review of its policies.

- All of the Institution's Board members have signed appropriate conflict of interest documentation.
- While the Institution's president has offered some orientation to new Board members, there is not a formal or consistent orientation process in place that includes a summary of Board policies and an introduction to good practice in Board governance.

The Institution continues to meet, 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:

- The Institution's Board is less involved in the Institution’s everyday operations than it used to be.
- Even though the pandemic has limited interactions among the Institution's Board members and between the Board and administration, progress has been made on several issues and initiatives, and there are plans to establish a calendar that will include an annual Board retreat for self-evaluations and evaluation of the president.
- The Institution's Board lacks engagement in some respects. For example, the Board asks very few if any questions regarding items on lengthy consent agendas, and typically does not attend activities Trustees usually attend, such as commencement.
- The Institution has clarified the reporting lines for its attorney, with the attorney working at the direction of the president.

The Institution now meets without 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:

- The Institution’s College Council continues to meet regularly and communication with the administration has improved. The College Council's recommendations on major issues are considered by senior leadership.
- The Institution's faculty members are responsible for all academic matters, including the curriculum, academic programs, course requirements, and instructional delivery methods.
- The Institution's Board has ceased to interfere in employee issues and relationships between the administration and the four unions have improved due to the responsiveness of senior administration.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record that the Institution has otherwise demonstrated that it is in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices, and Federal Compliance Requirements and is not at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria, and thus, should be removed from Notice.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Interim Report: The Board required that the Institution submit an embedded Interim Report with its next Assurance Filing regarding Core Components 2.A and 2.C.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Board maintained the Institution on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation (Year 4) in 2022-23.

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,¹ 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 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, Morton College
Keith McLaughlin, Provost and Executive Vice President, Morton College
Evaluation Team Chair
Brian Durham, Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board
Linnea A. Stenson, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, Higher Learning Commission

¹ COMM.A.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements