The President of the University of California should be a leading advocate for all of Public Education throughout the nation. This means working with others to avoid and reverse the disease of privatization that is so severely damaging democracy's most vital institutions.

Here is a sharply drawn statement, published last year by a local group of activists.

Mission Statement for Occupy Education Northern California

The attack on public education is one aspect of a larger attack on the public sector and on democracy more generally, where corporate interests now dominate political, social, and economic decisions. Occupy Wall Street has reshaped the debate over this country’s direction with the demand that the destruction of our communities and our earth resulting from corporatization must end: we seek something entirely different.

Occupy Education Northern California shares these broad goals and believes that we need more than simply increased funding for public education. The problems with education are deeply linked to and cannot be treated separately from racism; privatization; global economic competition rather than cooperation; and lack of access to food, housing, and healthcare. In order to address these issues, we must change the conditions in which students live and learn and provide them with tools to reimagine and reclaim their futures. Furthermore, education must prepare students to be empowered participants in a democratic community and to take respectful care of each other and of the planet.

To these ends, this is our vision:

- Public education, from birth to life-long learning, is to be government-funded and free of charge for all individuals.
- End the privatization of education, which includes funding cuts and fee hikes, top-down control, outsourced labor, standardized test-driven curricula, competition for access to schools, internet-based classes without human interaction, and the militarization of our campuses.
- Education must be shaped by the needs of students, teachers, workers, and community members with their full, democratic participation in decision-making.
- In the interests of education and all other public services, end corporate personhood and revoke the charter of any corporation that acts against the public’s political, financial, social, or environmental wellbeing.
- Focus the goals of education on supporting the ethical and democratic interests of all the world’s inhabitants.
Now, turning away from that broad view, here are some specific suggestions for Janet Napolitano, as the new President of the University of California.

A. See what you can do to assist in the preservation of CCSF – City College of San Francisco. This, the largest community college in California, has been severely threatened by the accrediting commission. In addition to its valuable service to the citizens of San Francisco, CCSF has been a major feeder of transfer students coming into CSU and UC.

B. The State of California has a set of Open Meeting Laws that apply to most statewide and local agencies of government. Typically, in any city, the meetings of the City Council and its various Boards and Commissions are held before a public audience that can not only observe the officials in action but can also speak to them. However, in application to the University of California those laws are very much restricted: it is only the Board of Regents and its own Committees that must conduct their business openly. I have attended many meetings of the regents where it appears that the real discussions, debates and decisions have already taken place; and the open sessions are merely for a public show and formal ratification of what has already been decided behind closed doors. There is a widespread feeling, on the campuses and throughout California, that the governance of this University is remote and unaccountable; and that cannot help in promoting public support for UC (and its budget). I suggest that a useful step to counter that situation would be for the UC President to arrange that meetings of the Council of Chancellors, and other top-level advisory bodies throughout the University, be conducted openly.

C. Invariably, debates about privatization, in public education and in other areas of public services, devolve into debates about the role of employee unions. Certain parties charge that the bad performance of America’s public schools is due to the misdeeds of teachers’ unions; and they say that the bankruptcy of cities is due to the greed of the public service unions (police, firefighters, municipal clerks, etc.) These are not new issues of contention within the University of California: the Board of Regents has always been dominated by big business operatives, who habitually see labor unions as their enemy. But I hope that the new president of UC will start out with some declaration of principled respect for unionized workers as an essential component of American democracy.

If readers have any further suggestions on this topic or wish to comment on what is above, please enter your thoughts below.

Next week (August 5), Lesson #2 – Executive Compensation at UC and the Misplaced Corporate Mentality.