



July 12, 2019

Mr. Mark E. Ojakian
President
Connecticut State System Office
61 Woodland Street Rm 302
Hartford, CT 06105

Dear Mr. Ojakian:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on April 11, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the report submitted by the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities System and took the following action:

that the report submitted by the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities System (the System) be accepted;

that the System be asked to report in Spring 2020 on its progress toward:

- 1) merging the twelve community colleges into a single institution, with emphasis on *Organization and Governance, The Academic Program, Students, and Institutional Resources*;
- 2) ensuring that the separately accredited institutions continue to meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* with particular emphasis on the Commission's standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, and Institutional Resources*;

that representatives of the System, its governing board, and a representative sample of leadership of the community colleges be asked to meet with the Commission to discuss the report;

that until the Commission approves any merger of the Connecticut community colleges, each separately accredited institution will continue to be monitored by the Commission under its current schedule, as updated, among the considerations to be whether the institution continues to meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*;

DAVID OUGLEY, Chair (2021)
Boston College

GEORGE W. TETLER, Vice Chair (2019)
Worcester, MA

HARRY E. DUMAY (2019)
College of Our Lady of the Elms

JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)
Groton, CT

COLEEN C. PANTALONE (2019)
Northeastern University

MARIKO SILVER (2019)
Bennington College

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2020)
Trustee Member, Concord, NH

RUSSELL CAREY (2020)
Brown University

FRANCESCO C. CESAREO (2020)
Assumption College

F. JAVIER CEVALLOS (2020)
Framingham State University

RICK DANIELS (2020)
Cohasset, MA

DONALD D. DEHAYES (2020)
University of Rhode Island

PAM Y. EDDINGER (2020)
Bunker Hill Community College

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2020)
Thomas College

KIMBERLY M. GOFF-CREWS (2020)
Yale University

MARTIN J. HOWARD (2020)
Boston University

SUSAN D. HUARD (2020)
Manchester Community College (NH)

JEFFREY S. SOLOMON (2020)
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

ELEANOR BAKER (2021)
Falmouth, ME

KATHERINE BERGERON (2021)
Connecticut College

PETER L. EBB (2021)
Trustee Member, Boston, MA

GREGORY W. FOWLER (2021)
Southern New Hampshire University

DENNIS M. HANNO (2021)
Wheaton College

LILY S. HSU (2021)
Johnson & Wales University

ELLEN L. KENNEDY (2021)
Berkshire Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2021)
Lebanese American University

JOHN M. SWEENEY (2021)
Providence College

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that the letter representing a public comment be accepted for consideration by the Commission as it reviews the plans for the CT Community College consolidation.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The Commission appreciates the update provided by the System on its plans to merge the twelve community colleges into a single institution in 2023. The Commission recognizes the commitment reflected in the name of the initiative to put “Students First” in the planned changes. The Commission also appreciates the conditions in Connecticut: a relatively large number of separately accredited community colleges in a time of declining enrollments and financial challenges. The Commission understands that the Connecticut State College & University System is committed to not closing any of the community colleges in the System.

The Commission requests a report from the System in Spring 2020 so that the Commission can be updated on the progress toward the planned 2023 merger of the twelve community colleges into a single institution. While we will welcome a full report of the progress, the Commission requests particular emphasis on how the proposed institution will meet the Commission’s standards on *Organization and Governance*, *The Academic Program*, *Students*, and *Institutional Resources*.

In the Spring 2020 report, we are interested in learning how the proposed organizational structure, particularly in the area of academic administration, will demonstrate “administrative capacity, by assuring provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component.” (*Organization and Governance*, Statement of the Standard). While we understand there will be an academic administrator on each campus and a chief academic officer for the merged institution, to date the Commission has not seen plans to establish a centralized academic administration office of sufficient capacity to support the twelve campuses, dozens of degree programs, and projected student enrollment. In addition, the Commission asks that the report include plans for how the new institution will place “primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty [and assure that] faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise” (3.15). While the Commission prescribes no particular means of accomplishing this requirement, we note the inherent complexities of developing, implementing, and ensuring the effectiveness of a governance system involving faculty from twelve campuses.

Because a major purpose of the proposed consolidation is to put “Students First” in the combined institution, we look forward to an update about the System’s planning to ensure that, for the merged institution:

The institution’s academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. The institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded and develops the systematic means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program.” (*The Academic Program*, Statement of the Standard.)

We are also interested in understanding how the new institution will ensure comparability and consistency in learning outcomes for any academic program to be offered at multiple locations and note that the means involved will be related to the matter cited above about the governance system involving faculty.

As reflected in the plan's "Students First" declaration, we commend the System for its commitment not to reduce student-facing positions throughout the transition. In the report prepared for Spring 2020, we ask that the System provide further detail on how the combined institution will endeavor to "ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their educational program as specified in institutional publications." (*Students*, Statement of the Standard). Any transition of the magnitude proposed by the System will inherently be complex and not without its challenges. In the coming report, we look forward to learning more about how, through professional development and other means, the planning for the new institution can help ensure that it will offer a "systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals [and will provide] students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success" (5.7).

Finally, in the report prepared for Spring 2020, we ask that the System address how the proposed institution will meet the Commission's standard on *Institutional Resources*. In making this request, the Commission understands that the proposed merger is still several years away and that there are unknowns in terms of state support, enrollment levels, and tuition and fee levels. At the same time, the System is proposing the merger, without closing any campuses, both to serve students better and to address what is described as an unsustainable financial situation. The Commission applauds the dual goals and is asking for further information on how they can be achieved at the same time, as there will be no reductions in student-facing positions and a significant increase in centralized administration for the merged institution. The most pertinent portions of our standard on *Institutional Resources* include:

The institution has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission. Through periodic evaluation, the institution demonstrates that its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future. (Statement of the Standard)

The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission (7.1).

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The governing board reviews and approves the institution's financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting (7.7).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

The institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate (7.22).

Facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements to ensure access, safety, security, and a healthy environment with consideration for environmental and ecological concerns (7.23).

The institution's physical and electronic environments provide an atmosphere conducive to study and research (7.24).

The institution demonstrates the effectiveness of its policies and procedures in ensuring the reliability of its technology systems, the integrity and security of data, and the privacy of individuals. The institution establishes and applies clear policies and procedures and monitors and responds to illegal or inappropriate uses of its technology systems and resources. It has regularly updated disaster planning and recovery policies and procedures (7.25).

The Commission also asks that the report in Spring 2020 address how the twelve separately accredited institutions continue to meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* until any merger occurs with particular emphasis on *Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, and Institutional Resources*.

Because the System's planning for the combined institution will continue for another four years, it is important to ensure that the current separately accredited institutions continue to operate within the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* even as they participate in planning for the new institution. Important aspects of this continuation are reflected in our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution undertakes planning and evaluation to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes. It identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively. The institution demonstrates its success in strategic, academic, financial, and other resource planning and the evaluation of its educational effectiveness. (Statement of the Standard).

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

With respect to *Organization and Governance*, we are interested in how the three regional presidents will function before and after the proposed merger; we note that at the time of our recent meeting, the regional presidents were not yet appointed and the expectations for their positions were not fully outlined. Given these new appointments and the growing authority of the System office, we are interested in how the System can ensure that the separately accredited institutions have "sufficient independence from any other entity to be held accountable for meeting the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*." (*Organization and Governance*,

Statement of the Standard) Because the Commission will continue its monitoring of the separately accredited institutions, we seek assurance in the report that each will be able to fulfill these portions of the *Organization and Governance* standard:

The chief executive officer, through an appropriate administrative structure, effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purposes and objectives and assesses the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs faculty and staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope (3.12).

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

Finally, through the report prepared for Spring 2020, we look forward to understanding how the separately accredited institutions will continue to meet the Commission's standard on *Institutional Resources*:

The institution has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission. Through periodic evaluation, the institution demonstrates that its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future. (Statement of the Standard)

The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission (7.1).

Please submit four paper copies and an electronic copy of your report no later than April 3, 2020 to the Commission offices.

We ask that representatives of the System, its governing board, and a representative sample of leadership of the community colleges meet with the Commission at its April 2020 meeting to discuss the report. Further information about the date and time for the System's meeting with the Commission will be sent at a later time.

Finally, the letter representing a public comment was accepted for consideration by the Commission as it reviews the plans for the Connecticut Community College consolidation. The letter writer will be so notified.

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The Commission expressed appreciation for the report prepared by the Connecticut State College and University System and hopes its preparation has contributed to future planning. The Commission appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Matt Fleury, Chair of the Board, Jane Gates, Provost, Ben Barnes, Chief Financial Officer, Mike Stefanowicz, Interim Associate Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, and David Levinson, President of Norwalk Community College and Vice President for Community Colleges, during its deliberations.

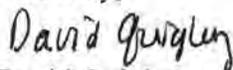
You are encouraged to continue to work with Commission staff on the development of the report due in Spring 2020 and otherwise as may be helpful in ensuring that the issues addressed in this letter and others that may arise can be addressed in a timely and satisfactory manner.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the System's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the System's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Matt Fleury. The System is free to release information about the Commission's action to others.

The Commission hopes that the process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David Quigley

DQ/sjp

cc: Mr. Matt Fleury
President Broadie
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer Coach
President Coco De Filippis
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer DeVonish
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer Ellis
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer Harris
President Jukoski
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer Millner-Harlee
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer Minkler
Interim Campus Chief Executive Officer Reome
President Rooke

Enclosures