



**Testimony before the Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession
by Chancellor David G. Carter, Connecticut State University System
Thursday, November 19, 2009
Legislative Office Building**

Good morning, Representative Jarmoc and Representative Urban, and members of the Task Force. My name is David Carter, Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System. I am pleased to be here today to offer comments on the impact of the recession on the children of our state, particularly those currently attending, or who aspire to attend, our state universities.

I commend you for your interest in this area, and for your work – past, present and future – on behalf of Connecticut's young people. I will limit my remarks given the constraints of time, but would be happy to address any questions you may have, and I would certainly welcome the opportunity to continue working with you to further explore the issues raised today.

You are absolutely on target in looking closely at the financial strains that many of our students and their families face. Accessibility is vitally important to us. There is nothing more important than keeping alive the dream of a young person who desires an education to improve their future. We cannot permit ourselves to stray from the conviction that "if you believe, you can achieve."

As the economy has faltered, keeping higher education within the reach of our current and potential students has become more challenging. While we may not have specific statistics to reflect what our students are facing, the anecdotal evidence is clear.

We know that many of our students who work to support their education expenses are having trouble finding jobs, or finding jobs that pay the wages they need to cover necessary expenses. The unemployment rate in Connecticut, especially among people in this age group, is as high as it has been in their lifetime. We know that in some cases, as unemployment or reduced employment has impacted many of our students' families, financial pressures have increased. For some of our students, it's quite fundamental. If they can't find a job, they can't continue their education. If their families need help to survive financially, education gets put on hold.

At the start of this academic year, we heard from our financial aid staff about students seeking to revise their financial aid packages due to changed family circumstances, and about students who had initially not sought financial assistance coming in to apply, just as the semester was getting underway. We are committed to working with these students, so that financial hurdles do not block them from continuing, or getting started with, their post-secondary education.

Let me offer you some context. This year, for the first time in our history, CSUS set all-time records for the number of full-time undergraduate and full-time graduate students, in the same year. Undergraduate enrollment is up for the seventh consecutive year. And graduate enrollment increased for the first time in the past six years. Overall, CSUS has more than 36,000 students.

For the current academic year, applications for admission were up by 11 percent from a year ago, on top of an 18 percent increase over the previous four years. Transfer applications have increased from just over 4,000 as recently as 2004 to well over 5,000 in 2009, an increase of 27 percent.

As you know, our focus is squarely on the young people of Connecticut. A robust 93 percent of our students are from Connecticut, and 86 percent of our graduates stay in Connecticut after graduation.

Interestingly, 29 percent of those graduates, perhaps in recognition of the current job market in Connecticut, have decided to pursue a master's degree. That's up from 22 percent a year ago. I should also add that 60 percent of them are pursuing their advanced degrees at Central, Eastern, Southern or Western, which is up from 53 percent a year ago.

Overall, nearly half of our students, 49 percent, are the first in their families to attend college. Slightly more than 75 percent of full time students receive some form of financial aid, and 71 percent of all financial aid awarded is need-based. Nearly 90 percent of all non-loan institutional aid awarded is need-based. And we are very proud that the financial aid we provide to students exceeds the state-mandated 15 percent of tuition funds we receive. Another significant source of aid provided by the universities is student employment, which provides assistance to over 1,800 students.

Some recent statistics regarding transfer students may also interest this Task Force:

- First, the number of students transferring from Connecticut Community Colleges continues to climb, up 51 percent since 2001. At seven of the 12 Connecticut Community Colleges this year, the number of transfer students to CSUS matched or surpassed previous record levels.
- Second, more than 1,000 students transferred from out-of-state colleges and universities to CSUS universities in Fall 2009, and four out of five, about 83 percent, were Connecticut residents coming home to attend CSUS universities. That's up from 76 percent last year.

In our view, there are a number of drivers behind those numbers, including the caliber of our academic programs, the quality of our faculty, and the connections to Connecticut businesses that we offer. But certainly, the economy has been a factor, as families have considered how to allocate their limited resources and maximize the value they receive for the money they spend.

History would suggest that even in a tough economy, and even if the overall high school population declines, the student population at colleges and universities will grow. For example, between 1980 and 1986, as high school graduation numbers dropped by more than 15 percent nationwide, college enrollment increased by nearly 20 percent.

Locally, at Eastern Connecticut State University, enrollment increased by 34 percent during that period. And we believe for a number of reasons that if we do our job right, and meet the demand for the education we provide, more students – not less – will want to attend our universities and stay in our state.

There's no question that the education we provide is an excellent value – you could even call it a bargain. We are among the lowest cost institutions among our peers, and across New England. But we are always looking for ways to help Connecticut students, both educationally and financially.

Along those lines, a new program we initiated this year with the Connecticut Community Colleges should help Connecticut students in both categories. The goals of the Dual Admission Program are simple but substantial: to make the transfer of credits from community college to university easier, to better advise students at the community college level so that they will take courses that will transfer, and to provide students with the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree after completing their associate's degree.

This program should make it even easier for students to spend their first two years at a community college, and then continue at one of our universities – which provides a substantial financial savings for them on the bottom line.

We are also noticing that students are becoming much more attuned to career objectives, when determining their academic areas of emphasis. Let me give you some examples: Accounting broke the top ten in the list of most popular majors for our graduates last year, and at Central it is now ranked second. Management is the leading major among graduates at Western, and fourth at Central. Business administration tops the list at Southern, and public health is also in the top ten.

From a policy standpoint, providing support for programs that are believed to be needed in the state, in order to keep our students here and provide well-qualified individuals to fill positions at Connecticut businesses, makes good sense.

There are four things that I believe we ought to keep at the forefront:

1. Education is an economic driver in Connecticut.
2. Education enables people to obtain jobs, which not only benefits their individual circumstances, but also stimulates the economy.
3. Those jobs enable people to purchase homes, which helps the economy again.
4. There are some students that may not quite reach the threshold for traditional financial aid, but are still in need of financial support if they are to continue their education. That is another area where policy makers can pursue creative solutions.

Last month, I provided testimony to the Program Review Committee for a report they are now working on regarding education and the state's workforce. We have suggested a plan that would specifically target loan forgiveness in key workforce shortage areas. This is an approach that has had success in other places, and may help to address the financial challenges facing our students, as well as the future workforce needs of our state's businesses.

There is more I can say, but I know there will be opportunities to do so in the future. We are committed to working with you, and would appreciate being involved as your discussions continue. Thank you very much.