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April 24, 2018

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

Dear President Ojakian:

At its meeting on April 19, 2018, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report *Students First: Securing Connecticut's Future through Excellence in Higher Education* submitted by the Connecticut State College and University System proposing the creation of a new institution, tentatively named Community College of Connecticut. Because of the intense interest in the Commission's decision, I am conveying it to you in this summary letter, with a more formal letter to follow. The essence of the Commission's decision is outlined below.

While the Commission appreciates the considerable work done already to develop a proposal that addressed both the significant financial challenges faced by the twelve community colleges and the importance of improving student success, the Commission was not persuaded that planning for the new Community College of Connecticut as outlined in the *Students First* report is realistic.

The Commission determined that the Community College of Connecticut will be a new institution, and not a "substantive change" for the current twelve separately accredited community colleges. Therefore, in order to become accredited, the Community College of Connecticut will need to go through our established processes to become a candidate for accreditation and then an accredited institution. Because of the magnitude of the proposed changes, the proposed timeline, and the limited investment in supporting the changes, the Commission is concerned that the potential for a disorderly environment for students is too high for it to approve the proposed Community College of Connecticut as a candidate for accreditation based on this proposal.

Community College of Connecticut will be eligible to apply for candidacy for accreditation. This eligibility is the first step in the accreditation process, to be followed by a comprehensive evaluation of the new institution to consider it for candidacy, a status that can last no longer than five years, per federal regulation. Students at candidate institutions are eligible for Title IV federal financial aid. Students at institutions that are "eligible," but not candidate or accredited institutions, are not eligible for federal aid.

Many of the matters needed to assure a smooth transition, including alignment of academic programs, are in the early stages of development, and the Commission does not yet have confidence that sufficient progress will be made on implementation in the proposed two-year timeframe to ensure the College will be able to provide a clear and orderly environment necessary to support students. We note the considerable time and effort required in the proposed consolidation of 434 current degree programs into 225-250 degree programs, providing a way to ensure that identically named programs are in fact identical, while retaining certain unique programs at individual locations. We believe that this program rationalization, while necessary for a single community college, will take longer and require greater investment to support faculty and administrator time than is reflected in the current proposal. We are further concerned that consolidating the institutional research functions into the System office rather than at the institutional level will not provide the institution and the campuses with sufficiently responsive information and feedback to support planning and evaluation.

While the Commission is gratified to learn of plans to use the Guided Pathways model to improve performance on measures of student success, providing an academic plan for each student will take additional time and significant investment in training and professional development for the faculty and staff who will develop these plans and use them to support and increase student success.

In addition, we are concerned that the proposed institution does not appear to have sufficient support for academic administration to plan, oversee, and evaluate hundreds of academic degree and certificate programs, given that the chief academic officer will also be the chief student affairs officer and have only three other staff in the office (an administrative assistant, an Executive Director of Retention and Completion, and a Registrar). At the campus level, department chair and division director positions will be eliminated, to be replaced with program coordinators and academic discipline coordinators, with one academic officer per campus (who, on the smaller campuses, will also serve as the chief student affairs officer). It is also not clear how faculty can act in concert across up to twelve campuses to oversee the quality of the academic program. While this concern applies to all academic programs, it can be illustrated by the lack of clarity on how the specialized accreditation process would be overseen for multi-campus programs, such as nursing. Further, given the lightly staffed office of the Provost, we are not persuaded that the institution's chief academic officer will have the capacity to provide the important academic leadership required of what would be one of this country's largest community colleges.

The twelve separately accredited community colleges are continued in accreditation, with the previously determined requirements for scheduled monitoring by the Commission remaining in place.

If the Connecticut State College and University System wishes to pursue the plan as outlined, Commission staff are prepared to work with you as you prepare for a comprehensive evaluation for candidacy. Commission staff are also prepared to work with you should the System decide to pursue other options to address the twin financial and student success challenges.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the System's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. We will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Matt Fleury. The System and the twelve community colleges are free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Mr. Mark E. Ojakian
April 24, 2018
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

BB/srh

cc: Mr. Matt Fleury, Chair
Dr. James P. Lombella, Asnuntuck Community College/Tunxis Community College
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