



February 11, 2022

New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Members of the New England Commission of Higher Education:

We have made extraordinary progress since the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) administration submitted our first substantive change proposal in April 2018. Guided by the Commission's standards, we have accomplished the critical steps that enable the Connecticut State Community College (CT State) to submit a renewed request for a substantive change for the New England Commission for Higher Education's (NECHE) consideration and approval. Over nearly five years, through leadership and organizational changes and in the face of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, this team has worked diligently to stand up a single community college that meets the needs of students, is efficient and synergistic, and is on a pathway to fiscal sustainability. The document we present today outlines the history of those efforts; details the strategic and tactical work that has been done jointly by executive leadership teams, staff, and faculty; and, most importantly, details how every step taken thus far meets and exceeds NECHE's standards for accreditation.

As you will read in this report, the decision to merge Connecticut's existing colleges into CT State was not made lightly. We take great pride in our 12 unique colleges in every corner of the state, each of which is a cultural, educational, and economic hub. But the decision was responsive to the harsh realities that community colleges face – a steady enrollment decline, lagging student success metrics, and an unsustainable financial trajectory. The plan before the Commission today takes material steps to address those core challenges while maintaining the uniqueness of each of our current campuses and ensuring we have the resources to continue operations with sustainability and quality.

Most importantly, the central aim of CT State is to address systemic inequities – both between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds and between institutions. As the report clearly lays out, Connecticut's student success measures are simply not good enough, with students of color falling disproportionately behind their white counterparts. Central to the merger is the implementation of a Guided Pathways suite of reforms, including the hiring of hundreds of advisors to increase student retention and ultimately bolster completion rates, particularly for first-generation students and those from traditionally underserved backgrounds.

As always, we look forward to a thoughtful discussion with members of the Commission. We hope you agree that the CSCU and CT State teams have been open, transparent, and responsive to feedback we have received from both the Commission and from our many Connecticut stakeholders over the years. The results of that collaboration are evident in this report. We are proud that we have come to a point where we can submit a common-sense plan to meet our internal goals of access, equity, and success while simultaneously exceeding the Commission's high standards for accreditation.

We sincerely thank the Commission for your consideration of this critically important proposal. We would like to thank the members of our teams who have poured themselves into this work in recent months and years. It has been a labor of love, driven at its core by a steadfast focus on improving the community college experience for the students whose futures depend on it.

We humbly ask this Commission to read the report, judge it on its adherence to NECHE standards, and ultimately vote to approve our request for a substantive change. We look forward to working with the NECHE staff over the coming months to finalize plans for the opening of CT State Community College.

Sincerely,



Terrence Cheng, President, CSCU



Matt Fleury, Chair, BOR



Michael Rooke, Ph.D. Interim President, CT State