

**Dr. Merle W. Harris**  
**71 Emily Way**  
**West Hartford, CT 06107**

February 2, 2022

Dr. Lawrence Schall  
Members, NECHE  
New England Commission of Higher Education  
3 Burlington Woods Drive  
Suite 100  
Burlington, MA 01803

Dear Dr. Schall and Commissioners:

I am writing in support of the Substantive Change Proposal being submitted by the Connecticut Board of Regents. I served on the Board of Regents for 10 years, completing my last term in December 2021. During those 10 years, I chaired the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee. This followed a 40-year career in Higher Education, including serving as President of Charter Oak State College and Interim President of Central Connecticut State University.

During my time on the Board, Connecticut higher education, as much of the nation, experienced serious challenges. The Board's strategic goals throughout my term included graduating more students with the knowledge and skills to achieve their life and career goals and maximizing access to higher education by making attendance affordable and our institutions financially sustainable. The Board struggled determining how to best do this prior to approving the design of the proposal to consolidate the 12 Connecticut Community into a single institution. Every proposal discussed met with opposition and while these discussions occurred, fiscal threats to quality education continued and our Community College graduation rates remained lower than comparable peers.

Change is always difficult. I assure you as we moved forward with the single college proposal, we recognized this and listened to objections and recommendations from faculty and other constituents. The Academic and Student Affairs Committee had many lengthy presentations and discussions regarding academic policies for the single college. These major proposals included a plan for Guided Pathways, development of the Common General Education Core, the Process for Curriculum Alignment, and modifications to Developmental Education. Many modifications were made in response to specific concerns and recommendations.

A few of the changes that were made to the Alignment of Completion of Math and English (ACME) demonstrate how we took concerns seriously. First, we changed the final implementation timeline from 2023 to 2025 so there would be time to pilot the approach and make modifications before full implementations. In response to concerns that the state's free community college program (PACT) required students attend fulltime, making it difficult to add noncredit support commitments, the final policy remained silent on the topic of credit to allow maximum flexibility for design and not place additional burdens on students. The final policy also addressed concerns of the ESL Council regarding placement of ELL students directly into college-level math and English courses. These are just a few of the many modifications made to one policy in response to faculty recommendations and similar changes were made to other policies.

Although some faculty opted out to working on the development of the components of the Substantive Change Proposal, I assure you it reflects the thinking and work of faculty and others. The proposed consolidation will make it easier for students to navigate the system and among campuses. Importantly, additional student support has been built into the design. The consolidation should lead to increases in completion rates and a system that is fiscally strong and academically sound.

I urge your approval of the Substantive Change Proposal so the work can continue to create a system that will best serve students and the citizens of Connecticut.

Sincerely,



Merle W. Harris