



CONNECTICUT STATE CONFERENCE OF NAACP BRANCHES

February 11, 2022

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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:

I write today to express my support for the Board of Regents for Higher Education's (BOR) request for a substantive change and for the creation of Connecticut State Community College (CT State). People of color are all too often left behind within our community college system. This hurts our communities, our families, and our state. The principles upon which CT State is founded are in line with the NAACP's core mission of advancing the educational and economic opportunities, and the health and well-being of the more than 16,000 Black or Hispanic/Latino students who attend Connecticut community colleges.

The difficult truth is that, despite a staff, faculty, and administration committed to the success of students, students of color continue to fall behind academically. In fact, before the pandemic, Connecticut had a 29-point attainment gap between white students and students of color, one of the highest such gaps in the United States. COVID-19 has only exacerbated those inequities, making the need for systemic action even more imperative.

CT State's adoption of the Guided Pathways suite of reforms demonstrates that an equitable, holistic approach can accelerate student success. Guided Pathways strives to increase retention through planning, connection and accessing support beyond academics. It is already yielding positive results. One of the first campuses to adopt this advising structure (Northwestern CT) has seen a 50% increase in retention of students who attended in Fall 2021 and registered for Spring 2022 classes. With students of color discontinuing their studies at a higher rate than their white counterparts, this has major equity considerations.

The other critically important foundational aspect of CT State is its commitment to maintaining access. It is no secret that, with declining enrollment, community college budgets are strained. However, the BOR has made clear that closing campuses is not an option at this time. Instead, it is merging resources in order to allow all campuses to continue to operate. With campuses in the heart of the state's most diverse cities – often as the only higher education option for students from those communities – we must do everything possible to ensure they continue to operate and thrive. And doing so while making the student experience easier to navigate, which is particularly important for first-generation students, is a positive step.

The NAACP has worked closely with Connecticut community colleges to help provide opportunities for the students we serve. We are optimistic that the launch of CT State gives the state its best opportunity to, finally, increase equity and maintain access in higher education. That is why the Connecticut State Conference NAACP in 2019 endorsed the plan, and it is why we support this request for a substantive change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scot X. Esdaile".

Scot X. Esdaile
CT State Conference NAACP

NAACP National Board Member