



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:

As Connecticut's 12 community colleges prepare to become one CT State Community College, we reaffirm that the strategic goals of the merger to enhance career pathways, accelerate post-secondary success and build an equitable system of access, achievement and holistic advisement across the state will do no less than transform the impact of higher education.

We are witnessing the creation of Connecticut's largest public higher education system, with a "Students First" vision for helping all to not only choose a viable career path but get the support needed to persist and complete their academic goals. The adoption of Guided Pathways – an approach that increases retention through planning, connection and delivery of supports – is already bearing fruit at the CT Community College campuses as it has in 16 other states across the country. At Northwestern CT Community College alone, there has been a 50% increase in retention of students who attended in Fall 2021 and registered for Spring 2022 classes.

Such impact on retention and completion will not only benefit the students and our colleges, but businesses as well. Imagine the impact on employers to know that they can rely upon pipelines of talent from a potential pool of just over 32,000 candidates who are rooted in our communities and entering the workforce in a timely, coordinated way. Adding to that, the continued flexibility to customize programs "just-in-time" on a statewide, regional or campus basis through Workforce Development and Continuing Education presents the potential to grow our business and plan for the future.

Being a small state of 169 towns is one of the defining qualities of Connecticut. Our 12 individual community college campuses share that pride and the role they play in their communities. That pride can be sustained while also achieving a level of equity and access that so far has been only aspirational. The Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) and the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) share in CT State's commitment to equity and inclusion that holds that no campus or its students should be expected to function with fewer resources because of the geographic, socio-economic or racial make-up of its population.

Likewise, no campus or system can grow under the constant weight of financial instability. Neither long-term investments nor innovation can be fostered without sound financial footing. The merger of the 12 individual colleges, introduction of shared services and streamlined administration will ultimately stabilize community college finances. At the same time, allowing for systemwide approaches to increase enrollment, bolster retention and completion, and partner with the likes of OWS and others on revenue-generating and alternative funding initiatives will benefit all.

CT State's goals to address achievement gaps, increase equity and prioritize access align with the strategic goals of OWS and the GWC's mission and are featured prominently in the GWC Workforce Strategic Plan 2020. Credit degree and certificate programs feed into four-year programs and non-credit, short-term workforce programs create skilled candidates who meet employer demand.

A prime example is this collaboration that brought Amazon Web Services and Google certifications for IT fields to the community colleges in 2021. These industry-recognized credentials are in-demand by employers in Connecticut and beyond. The ability to integrate into statewide curricula and workforce development scheduling that CT State will enable is the key to the success of this initiative.



The GWC Workforce Strategic Plan describes our vision that: “Every Connecticut resident has access to a meaningful career pathway and the support needed to fulfill their aspirations. Every business in Connecticut has access to a skilled workforce.” We believe that CT State will help make this vision a reality.

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