



July 10, 2023

Dr. John Maduko
President
Connecticut State Community College
61 Woodland Street
Hartford, CT 06105

Dear President Maduko:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on June 15, 2023 the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Connecticut State Community College:

that Connecticut State Community College be granted initial accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education effective July 1, 2023;

that the accreditation of Connecticut State Community College include general approval to offer associate degrees and to offer programming through distance education and encompass all current and future instructional locations within Connecticut;

that each of the 12 Connecticut community colleges currently separately accredited by NECHE submit a letter relinquishing accreditation;

that all reports and visits currently scheduled for the separately accredited Connecticut community colleges be cancelled;

that the progress report originally scheduled for submission in October 2023 be rescheduled for submission by January 15, 2024 for consideration in Spring 2024;

that the January 2024 progress report give emphasis to Connecticut State Community College's success in:

1. accomplishing tasks and goals slated to be completed between June 2023 and January 2024, including the matters noted in our letter of April 12, 2023;
2. meeting its enrollment and financial goals;
3. continuing to establish a College-wide approach to the assessment of student learning, including implementing the Anthology data collection and analysis platform;

that the institution undergo a focused evaluation in Spring 2025 that will include visits to each of its 12 branch campuses;

that the report prepared in advance of the Spring 2025 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. continuing to address the matters specified for attention in the Spring 2024 report;
2. implementing its strategic plan;
3. implementing its governance processes and procedures;

that the comprehensive evaluation of Connecticut State Community College originally scheduled for Fall 2025 be rescheduled to Fall 2027.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Connecticut State Community College (CT State) is granted initial accreditation based on the Commission's finding that the institution is in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*. The Commission commends CT State and the Connecticut State College and Universities System on the substantial work that has been accomplished since the Commission, in March 2022, approved the System's plans to consolidate Connecticut's 12 community colleges into Connecticut State Community College. As documented in the three progress reports submitted since that time, many of the tasks and goals outlined in the substantive change proposal have been accomplished, and realistic timeframes have been established for completing the outstanding items and for implementing the dimensions of the merger that will, of necessity, be phased in over a longer period of time. Noteworthy recent accomplishments include completion of the CT State transitional strategic plan, including key performance indicators; implementation of the faculty governance structure; alignment of policies and procedures; selection of department chairs and hiring of a provost, academic deans, and communications staff; the launch of the CTState.edu website, the first CT State course schedule and the first student registration; and publication of the AY2024 CT State catalog.

The June progress report also discussed the institution's ongoing attention to three "themes" from public comments received by the Commission. We appreciate learning that staffing in all student support areas has either increased or has been maintained at "historic levels with modest adjustments to account for enrollment fluctuations." We also appreciate the continuing efforts of the System's Employee Equity Collaborative to address DEI issues and note with favor that by the end of the Spring 2023 semester, all managers within the System will have completed a day-long training program. Finally, we are gratified to learn CT State continues to promote collaboration, participation, and communication through "regular" webinars and information sessions, the establishment of state-wide Affinity Groups and Professional Learning Communities, and campus visits by CT State's president and senior leadership.

The accreditation of Connecticut State Community College includes general approval to offer associate degrees and to offer programming through distance education reflecting the range of degrees now offered by the separately accredited institutions and the demonstrated capacity of those institutions to offer programming through distance education. CT State's accreditation also encompasses all current and future instructional locations within Connecticut because the separately accredited institutions have demonstrated their effectiveness in overseeing off-campus instructional locations.

Since the 12 community colleges currently separately accredited by NECHE will become part of Connecticut State Community College on July 1, 2023, we ask that each of those institutions submit a letter requesting relinquishment of its accreditation. We understand that each of the 12 colleges will retain degree-granting authority through August 31, 2023 and will award degrees to students who complete program requirements in Summer 2023. Therefore, the effective date of

relinquishment of accreditation will be August 31, 2023. All previously scheduled visits and reports for the individual institutions based on prior Commission actions will be cancelled, as the salient matters will be addressed through the ongoing monitoring of CT State, as outlined below.

The progress report Connecticut State Community College was asked to submit in October 2023 is rescheduled for submission by January 15, 2024 for consideration by the Commission in Spring 2024. We ask that the report give emphasis to CT State's progress in addressing three matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Students*, *Institutional Resources*, and *Educational Effectiveness*.

In the progress reports submitted in February 2023 and June 2023, Connecticut State Community College acknowledges that there are a number of items related to the consolidation that remain to be completed. These include, as indicated in our letter of April 12, 2023, (1) continued progress with the Alignment and Completion of Math and English (ACME); (2) completing the faculty handbook; (3) review of college-wide curricular and non-curricular issues by faculty governance committees; and (4) continued progress with implementing the One College Banner system. The June 2023 progress report notes a number of other outstanding items, including implementation of unified data collection policies and a unified reporting format; the search for an academic dean to replace an individual who resigned; the rewriting of consortial agreements and contractual arrangements to reference CT State; the merger of Perkins grants programs, high school partnerships, and dual enrollment programs; the transfer of specialized accreditations to CT State; alignment of the non-credit curriculum and workforce development courses; completion of the CT State student handbook; ongoing review of student learning outcomes, curriculum maps, and assessment measures; and completion of the Academic Program Review process. We look forward, in Spring 2024, to receiving an update on the institution's progress in addressing these matters and on any other significant accomplishments related to the initial operation of Connecticut State Community College, in keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution has demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.5).

The Commission is pleased to learn from the report submitted by CT State College that FTE enrollment across the 12 community college campuses increased by 3.6% between Spring 2022 and Spring 2023, with an 11% increase in students 19 and younger and "double digit gains" among Black and Hispanic students. The enrollment projections included with the report, however, forecast declining enrollment for AY2024 and AY2025 (3% and 2% respectively) before "modest increases" of 1-2% are realized beginning in AY2026. From the budget update supplied by the College at the Commission's June 2023 meeting, we understand that CT State is budgeting an operating deficit of \$38.64 million in FY2024 and is projecting operating deficits of \$91.29 million and \$118.12 million in FY2025 and FY2026 respectively; these projections include fringe benefit expenditures estimated to range between \$46 million and \$48 million during those years. We are gratified to learn that the College has reserves of over \$100 million that will be used to address these deficits and also understand that, in October 2022, CT State "initiated a comprehensive deficit mitigation process" that includes "multi-year recommendations from each campus." We look forward, through the Spring 2024 report, to learning of the institution's progress in implementing its deficit-mitigation plans and in achieving its enrollment and financial goals. Relevant here are our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve (Students, Statement of the Standard).

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its

mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

The Commission notes with favor the significant investments Connecticut State Community College has made to improve student retention and success, including investments in Guided Pathways, mental health support, and wrap-around services. We are also gratified to learn of the progress that has been made to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning including the acquisition of the Anthology digital data collection and assessment platform, development of a student success dashboard with key performance indicators, and development of common College and Career Success course assignments and rubrics as well as rubrics for the Early Childhood Education program and for learning outcomes in General Education, Math, and English. We appreciate the College's acknowledgment that many of these initiatives are in the "initial stages" of development and implementation, and we therefore welcome an update, in Spring 2024, on the institution's continued progress with these efforts. Our standards on *Students* and *Educational Effectiveness* provide guidance for this section of the report:

The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment. The institution ensures that information about student success is easily accessible on its website (8.6).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the curriculum and learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

The Commission asks that Connecticut State Community College undergo a focused evaluation in Spring 2025 that includes visits to the 12 major campuses as part of that evaluation. We further ask that the report prepared in advance of the visit give emphasis to the institution's success in addressing three matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Organization and Governance*.

The report prepared for the Spring 2025 focused evaluation will afford Connecticut State Community College an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success in addressing the items specified for attention in the Spring 2024 report. We recognize that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the institution's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that evidence of continued progress be provided in Spring 2025.

As detailed in the institution's report, the transitional strategic plan for Connecticut State Community College, which was adopted in May 2023, includes three goals and twelve priorities that focus on "effectiveness, equity, and community." Following initial implementation of the plan in Fall 2023, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will prepare a progress report for review by the CT State leadership, and the Executive Strategic Planning Council will reconvene in Spring 2024 to review progress to date and "recommend adjustments for a college-wide continuous improvement planning process during the 2024/2025 academic year." We anticipate being apprised, through the Spring 2025 focused evaluation, of CT State's success in implementing its strategic plan, consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.5).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation (2.8).

The Commission takes favorable note that CT State's shared governance bodies have begun monthly meetings – the Curriculum Congress and College Senate started work in January 2023, and the Statewide Discipline Councils and School Area Curriculum Committees began in February 2023. We are gratified to learn of the widespread participation in these governance bodies that provide faculty with "clear responsibility over curriculum and voice in all matters of institutional governance." Each campus also has a "local" governance body "to discuss items of a local nature and make recommendations, ultimately to the campus CEO." We further understand that membership in the Faculty Advisory Committee and Student Advisory Committee is spelled out in state statute and that proposed changes to the composition of these committees will be considered in the 2024 legislative session. We welcome an update, in Spring 2025, about CT State's continued success in implementing its governance structures, including any changes made following the legislature's decisions about composition of the advisory committees. We remind you of our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other

administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

The system of governance makes provisions for consideration of student views and judgments in those matters in which students have a direct and reasonable interest (3.16).

Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations (3.17).

The rescheduling of the comprehensive evaluation of Connecticut State Community College to Fall 2027 is consistent with Commission policy that requires institutions granted initial accreditation to undergo a comprehensive evaluation within five years. As indicated in our letter of March 21, 2022, the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation will afford CT State an opportunity to report on its continued progress in achieving its enrollment and financial goals and in engaging faculty and staff in its governance structures, two matters that will require the institution's sustained attention over time. We also welcome, through the Fall 2027 comprehensive evaluation, updates on the College's success in implementing the dimensions of the merger that will continue to be phased in over a longer period of time. This request is consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, cited above.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report prepared by Connecticut State Community College and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Kerry Kelley, Chief Financial Officer, and Terrence Cheng, President of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System, during its deliberations.

The Commission appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education among institutions affiliated with the Commission.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Ms. JoAnn Ryan and Mr. Terrence Cheng. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Russell C. Carey

RCC/jm

Dr. John Maduko
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cc: Ms. JoAnn Ryan
Mr. Terrence Cheng

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions