

100 Day Report

Christina Royal, Ph.D., Interim President



Your Community. **Your College.**

CT STATE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Dear Members of the CT State Community

Through my first one hundred days, I had the privilege of listening, learning, and connecting with the people who bring our college to life. The most important thing a new leader can do is to listen, so that's exactly where I began. When I started my tenure in August as interim president, my priority was to visit our campuses and engage with as many faculty, staff, and students as possible. From classrooms to labs, student gatherings to community events, and from campus forums to meetings with elected officials and workforce partners across the state, I've witnessed firsthand the pride, resilience—as well as the strain—that defines our college community. Just as importantly, these past few months have more clearly defined both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead as we reach the midpoint of year three as a statewide institution.

Before setting foot on our campuses, I did one important thing first. I became a Connecticut resident. It was important for me to fully immerse myself in the communities we serve. Since that time, I've been grateful for the manner with which you've embraced me as the college's second president. I've also appreciated your honesty and the high expectations you clearly hold for your president. By the end of September, I had completed my tour of CT State and each of our campuses, as well as our Danbury instructional site. Each campus community welcomed me with openness and pride, and I'm especially grateful to our campus presidents for their gracious hospitality and for ensuring that every visit reflected the unique spirit of their campus.

Many of you know that I am a first-generation college student myself, so the community college mission is deeply personal to me, knowing that approximately 67% of our students are first generation college students



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themselves who rely on our success as an institution of higher education. However, I also recognize the complexities that the college merger created. There are certainly remnants of the merger that we still need to work through together, with grace and by assuming good intentions, especially in those moments when solutions may feel difficult to find, or in those moments when our processes, practices or policies need refinement.

Even as we confront certain headwinds, we should be intentional about celebrating our wins. Enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are on the rise. We’ve demonstrated the power of our college to the state’s economy through our first economic impact statement, and we continue to make significant progress toward full accreditation through NECHE. These are meaningful signs of momentum and proof of what we can achieve when we act as one college with shared purpose.

In this report, I’ve tried to share a bit of what I have learned through 12 themes that emerged from my campus visits and through my first 100 days, both the progress and the challenges. It reflects not only my observations, but also the collective wisdom of the people who make CT State what it is. As we move forward, my focus, in part, will be on clarity of purpose, roles, and responsibilities, while preserving the traditions and identities that make us who we are across all our campuses.

It’s important to acknowledge that the work ahead is not the project of any one person, and most certainly not of the president alone. It is rooted in our commitment to shared governance, strong collaboration, clear communication, and the willingness to have hard conversations that move us forward for the good of our students, employees, communities, and state.

Now, to some of what I have learned.

Themes



1. Our Focus on Student Success, and Our Mission, Is Clear

During my campus visits, I heard again and again how deeply our faculty and staff believe in the mission of Connecticut State Community College. Their pride in our students' success and their commitment to the communities we serve came through in many of my conversations. It's clear that our people understand just how important CT State's work is, not only to each student who walks through our doors, but to the economic strength and future of Connecticut itself. This is a great foundation for future progress.

2. General Operations

I heard throughout my visits how the transition to launching New England's largest community college continues to create operational strain on our teams. Across teaching and learning, student services, and many other areas, employees are navigating new processes and expectations while continuing to deliver for students. The dedication of our workforce remains remarkable, but it's clear that we have opportunities to strengthen efficiency, reduce friction in our systems, and better align our operations to support the day-to-day work happening across campuses.

3. Accreditation Progress Signals Positive Momentum

CT State continues to receive encouraging updates from its regional accreditor, the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). The college remains on track for a comprehensive evaluation visit in fall 2027—a clear signal that meaningful progress is being made in strengthening systems, assessment, and governance across the institution. This progress reflects the commitment and professionalism of our faculty, staff, and administrators whose daily work continues to advance CT State's mission and readiness for full accreditation as one unified college.

4. Communication, Transparency, and Coordination Gaps Remain

Many faculty, staff, and students shared frustrations about inconsistent communication and unclear decision-making. I take this feedback seriously. We'll continue to strengthen the flow of information between campuses and the college office and to find the right balance of communication to ensure transparency in how and why decisions are made. Clear, two-way communication builds trust, and that trust is the foundation of our success as one college. This will continue to be important work in progress.

5. Workforce Partnership and Economic Impact, Alignment

Our campuses are engaging local employers, municipalities, and community leaders to create workforce pathways that meet regional needs. From manufacturing to healthcare to STEM, CT State continues to establish itself as the engine that drives Connecticut's workforce while positioning the college as the state's training leader. Across our campuses, we are preparing students for in-demand careers in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and other high-growth industries. Through close collaboration with employers, state agencies, and workforce boards, CT State is aligning education and training with real-world needs, ensuring our graduates are job-ready, adaptable, and equipped to strengthen Connecticut's economy today and in the future while earning family-sustaining wages. In fact, in FY 2022–23, CT State supported nearly 29,800 jobs statewide—roughly one out of every 82 jobs in Connecticut—demonstrating the significant role our college plays in advancing both individual opportunity and statewide needs.

6. Shared Services and System Integration Challenges

The transition to one college has brought benefits but also highlighted the need for better coordination within these shared services, such as the creation of service level agreements to define expectations and clarity of work between collaborating entities. Our goal moving forward is to refine these systems so that centralized functions support, not slow down, campus operations, while preserving local responsiveness.



7. Student Voice

Our students spoke passionately about the importance of belonging—to a campus, to a community, and to CT State as a whole. Their pride in their local campuses is inspiring, and their desire to shape the future of this college is powerful. Students shared positive experiences with the consolidation (such as being able to take classes at multiple campuses), as well as some frustrations (such as home campus designations limiting services on some campuses). The goal is to continue to improve the student experience for all learners and for the employees who support their success.

8. Facilities, Technology, and Infrastructure Needs

Across our campuses, many classrooms, labs, and student spaces are ready for thoughtful modernization. I heard clearly that outdated technology and limited facilities can challenge teaching and learning. Yet I also saw encouraging progress—campuses planning for growth, pursuing bond funding, and reimagining spaces to better serve students and faculty, but we must be pragmatic and realistic given our fiscal constraints. We have deferred maintenance needs across our college, and while resources and funding may

be at a premium, I can assure you that we will continue to advocate for the investment into our spaces, so our learning environments reflect the excellence of our students and faculty who use them.

A recent example is the State Bond Commission's approval of \$22.1 million to upgrade the B-Wing at CT State Norwalk, addressing structural and accessibility issues, modernizing systems, and enhancing the academic environment for nearly 4,000 students.

9. Academic and Curriculum Alignment

Faculty expressed both concern and commitment regarding academic consistency and standards. It's clear that our collective voice must guide us to how CT State defines quality learning and program alignment. As we move through NECHE accreditation, we'll ensure that faculty and staff remain active partners in shaping an academic model that maintains rigor and relevance for our students. I want to give a special acknowledgment to our faculty, the Curriculum Congress, our Curriculum Discipline Groups, and the Provost's Office for their oversight and collaborative work on the curriculum.

10. Opportunities in Enrollment, Retention, Marketing, and Student Experience

We've recently experienced our first year-over-year enrollment growth in 15 years! This accomplishment signals a positive step forward in our return to pre-pandemic goal setting.

During my visits, students shared inspiring stories about how CT State has opened doors, yet they also reminded us that access alone isn't always enough. We must continue to consider how we can make it easier for students to find the help they need through mentoring and advising, and communicate the true value of a CT State education. Indeed, we need to do more to promote our value proposition and to celebrate the work that we do. Marketing was also discussed on many of my visits and the gaps that exist locally. In higher education, enrollment and marketing are deeply intertwined and often operate as two sides of the same strategic effort. We need to be stronger in this regard.

11. Transition Fatigue

Many colleagues acknowledged the fatigue that comes with years of transition. The pace of change has been demanding, and it's understandable that morale has been affected. Still, amid the challenges, I also sensed genuine pride in how far we've come and a belief in what we can achieve together. We are still a young college, finding our rhythm and refining our systems, and we are moving in the right direction. Still, fatigue and even frustration exist and our vision should be to collectively identify ways to elevate our success, reduce our pain points, and enhance statewide and local pride.

12. Foundations and Community Engagement

Campus foundations remain a cornerstone of our local support systems. I was impressed by the creativity and care that go into scholarships, food pantries, and community events. As we grow, we must strengthen collaboration among our foundations while preserving their independence and local focus—because our community partners are essential to advancing our mission.



The Connecticut State Community College Foundation

I'll take a moment here to share that CT State is in the process of establishing a statewide foundation. Its development is underway and currently in the administrative and legal stages of forming. Let me be clear, the goal of this new foundation is to enhance our ability to attract large-scale gifts, corporate partnerships, and grant funding that support multiple campuses or collegewide initiatives.

While statewide coordination will bring strategic benefits, it's not designed to replace the community ties that define each campus and its local foundation. Each foundation will certainly continue to operate and support its campus mission. As we strengthen the relationship between the college office and our foundations, I've begun meeting individually with each foundation chair to learn more about their work and to explore how we can further support and strengthen our foundations together.



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Moving Forward

This report offers a high-level summary of observations rather than an exhaustive or granular analysis. I'd certainly welcome your feedback if you have any comments on my observations.

Looking ahead, I do believe our work must continue to center on building our inaugural strategic plan, preparing for full accreditation, improving operational efficiencies, and strengthening the student experience. In doing so, we will continue to foster our CT State identity while celebrating the distinct character of each campus that contributes to our extraordinary college.

Across the institution, we must embrace this ongoing evolution by streamlining our processes; making them clear, accessible, and well-defined, and ensuring that they strengthen our ability to deliver on our mission. This is not an easy undertaking, and it remains very much a work in progress. At the same time, we must be pragmatic and balance our aspirations with the realities of our financial limitations, ensuring that every decision is intentional, strategic, and sustainable. We cannot meet every demand, but we can and will focus on strengthening the college in ways that elevate our student-centered mission.

Most importantly, let us continue to acknowledge and take pride in the progress we are making, because we are indeed making progress. Change and evolution take time but let us keep having the important and hard conversations that build a better foundation for the college that connects Connecticut.

In closing, thank you for your continued partnership. There is much to accomplish in the months ahead, and I am confident we have the right people in place to advance our work in ways that strengthen our people, our places, and our programs.



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