



CSCU Faculty and Professional Unions Issue a Statement of Unity Opposing Consolidation Efforts

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HARTFORD – The faculty and professional unions that comprise the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) released a joint statement today in opposition to the Board of Regents’ proposal to consolidate the 12 independently accredited community colleges.

The statement issued by the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (The 4Cs), the Federation of Technical College Teachers (FTCT), AFT Local 1942, the Connecticut State University chapter of the American Association of University Professors (CSU-AAUP), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Local 2480 and the State University Organization of Administrative Faculty (SUOAF-AFSCME, Local 2836) states that the consolidation plan

“will not realize the projected savings, will be disruptive for students, will have negative consequences on critical student outcomes, and will erode the value of the community colleges for students and for the state of Connecticut for years to come.”

As currently proposed, the consolidation plan, which is titled “Students First,” will not be completed until 2023, but it has already “steered tens of millions of dollars into a central office that does not educate anyone, while starving the campuses of needed resources,” said Maureen Chalmers, the president of the 4Cs. “The system office budget has increased from \$30.3 million in 2017 to \$46.7 million for fiscal year 2020 – a 54 percent increase.”

Dennis Bogusky, the president of the local chapter of AFT, said, “the only things we have seen so far in the implementation of ‘Students First’ is a sharp reduction in the number of faculty and staff working at the colleges and the hiring of more high-priced administrators. Replacing professional educators with more bureaucrats and administrators is not a recipe for success.”

Chalmers added that “the concentration of all authority and control in a system office will result in the teaching faculty losing control over the academic programs they have developed to meet the workforce needs of businesses in their local communities.”

Patty O’Neill, president of CSU-AAUP, stated, “while the community college consolidation does not affect the universities directly, our members also are opposed to this plan. Many of our students who graduate from our universities have earned at least some of their credits at a community college. We have a responsibility to speak up for those students and for the institutions that serve some of the most economically challenged young people and adults in the state.”

The joint statement closes with a pledge that the unions will “support mutual efforts to end the ‘Students First’ consolidation.”

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Statement of Unity

The faculty and professional unions (The 4Cs; FTCT 1942, AFT; CSU-AAUP; SUOAF, and AFSCME) of the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) stand united in opposition to the proposed consolidation of the community colleges and the strategies referred to by the euphemism, “Students First.”

The united unions of CSCU hold that the so-called “Students First” consolidation will not realize the projected savings, will be disruptive for students, will have negative consequences on critical student outcomes, and will erode the value of the community colleges for students and for the State of Connecticut for years to come.

This conclusion is based, in part, on the following facts:

- “Students First” has already failed to meet initial budgetary expectations and timelines, yet the CSCU System Office continues to accumulate resources and managerial personnel while draining resources from the colleges. Since the announcement of “Students First” the total expenditures for the 12 community colleges have been largely stagnant, while the System Office budget has increased from \$30.3 million in 2017 to \$46.7 million for fiscal year 2020 – a 54 percent increase.
- Mergers of higher education institutions in other states have saved little or no money. There are no documented examples of a merger saving anything close to the 4.5 to 5.0 percent savings that are forecasted for this consolidation.
- No public plan has been created to guide the institutional changes necessary to receive accreditation. The 2018 Substantive Change Request to NEASC to create a consolidated institution was not approved. NECHE’s response to the System Office’s 2019 April Update cited 24 different standards that were not adequately addressed. The BOR’s gamble that the System Office will eventually find a way to meet accreditation standards risks the very existence of the community colleges while ensuring that there will be years of uncertainty and dissension.
- The planning process for curricular and academic consolidation violates principles of shared governance, does not provide adequate faculty representation in academic decision-making, and risks the integrity of academic programs. Jurisdiction over managing disputes and final decision making over all academic and curricular decision-making lies in the hands of a committee that is overwhelming comprised of administrative appointees. The charges to committees and workgroups for developing a General Education Core and aligning programs ignore such foundational concepts as evidence of student learning, maintenance of rigorous learning outcomes, or the use of assessment data.
- The planning process for governance is almost non-existent. In the three meetings of the “Shared Governance Workgroup” since December 2018, absolutely nothing has been accomplished. Further, this committee has no authority over the current development of a common General Education Core or the rationalization of programs across the colleges. No governance process is in place to oversee these important changes.

- The centralization and concentration of administrative control disempowers all faculty and staff who are not pulled into the System Office, and thus separates the administration from professional practice and the student experience. The disempowerment is having a negative impact on morale, innovation, and engagement. Teaching faculty understand they will lose control over the programs and the curriculum they teach, which severs the connection between curricular design and the direct assessment of how well programs address the teaching and learning needs of students and communities.
- “Students First” has fostered a “brain drain.” The colleges are losing experience, knowledge, and expertise. Nine college presidents have left; college IT directors have been removed from planning in favor of a top-down model of administration; IR directors are being replaced with regional directors who will report directly to the System Office; 80 teaching faculty who left in the last year were not replaced along with a large number of non-teaching faculty. Retirements and resignations accelerated in the last year. No matter how enlightened, a centralized leadership cannot foster the collective collaboration necessary to sustain innovation and engagement.
- "Students First" is based on magical thinking. It purports that additional deep cuts into what were and are unsustainable budgets of austerity for the community colleges will result in improved student outcomes, higher graduation rates, and reductions in the achievement gap through an enlightened and expanded central state bureaucracy.

The faculty and staff unions that comprise CSCU have been at the forefront to save and defend public education in Connecticut for many years. In continuing that effort, union leadership have recently come together to consider the different ways that our organizations can work as one to reject the so-called “Students First” consolidation. Our unions are committed to developing a common strategy that defends our students, our communities, our institutions, and our members from this attack. In the weeks ahead, union leadership will continue to meet and explore different avenues to stop this consolidation.

As we monitor the actions of the Board of Regents and think about the way forward, we encourage all union members to reach out to one another, to collaborate with one another, and build alliances across the colleges and universities and across unions. The unions pledge to support mutual efforts to end the “Students First” consolidation. To date, a variety of efforts have been undertaken to stop this attack. Direct appeals to the public, the Board of Regents, the legislature, the Governor, and to NECHE ought to continue, but we, as organized labor, have an important part to play.

Five Unions, One Message: **let us be stronger together.**