



State of Connecticut
Department of Higher Education

Testimony
by
Michael P. Meotti
Commissioner of Higher Education
before the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
11:00 a.m. – LOB Room 2C
March 10, 2011

Good morning Chairman Willis, Chairman Bye, distinguished members of the Committee. For the record, I am Michael P. Meotti, Commissioner of Higher Education. I am here this morning to discuss the Governor's proposal for a unified leadership model for governing Connecticut public higher education, and to answer any questions you may have.

The Governor's proposal is about providing new governance and leadership for Connecticut public higher education that better fits the educational pathways of today's students. It proposes that there is a smarter, more responsive way to meet the needs of today's 21st century public college students than the system of separate silos founded more than three decades ago.

Under the proposed unified approach, a single board, a Board of Regents, and a single central office, would oversee the Connecticut State University System, the community colleges and Charter Oak State College. The students who attend these colleges, notably CSU and the community colleges, have much in common:

- The vast majority are Connecticut residents who attend a campus in their backyard where they work and raise families.
- Growing numbers are enrolling with an intent to earn a degree. Survey results show that more than three-quarters (78%) of students attending the community colleges in fall 2008 planned to get a degree, up 11 percent from 2002. Of these, 57 percent plan to earn a degree beyond the associate's level.
- A surprising number are moving across the two systems, and not just in traditional transfer patterns. Rather, they are taking classes in each system concurrently. A study of Connecticut public high school graduates of the class of 2004 reveals that between then and now, more than one-third who enrolled at a CSU campus also took classes at a community college during the same period as they pursued an undergraduate degree. While an estimated 40 percent were transfer students, some 60 percent had periods of

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overlapping enrollment – a pattern that better fits their needs. In short, many students are changing the way they attend college, in so doing bypassing traditional notions of two-year and four-year educations. If it's one system to many of them, shouldn't it operate as one system from a governing and policy perspective?

This new governing model would meld the current 62 members of four separate boards, and their 200+ employees who work mostly within a half mile of each other on Woodland Street. It contains no campus mergers or closings, no diminution of campus decision-making, nor any impact *whatsoever* on campus missions, daily business, academic freedom, or faculty bargaining.

Nor, as noted during last week's Appropriations Committee hearing, does this proposal seek to include the University of Connecticut in the new governance structure. I hope we will be able to discuss this further this morning. Let me offer for now, however, that the University of Connecticut has vastly different responsibilities for research and for the Health Center than exist at the other systems.

Finally, we have shared with the Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education a consolidation strategy for combining the central offices that would save at least \$4.3 million on an annual basis. If this amount of money were not spent at the central office level, it could translate into 40 new (or saved) faculty positions across the campuses of the Connecticut State University and community college systems.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.