

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee March 26, 2019

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PERSPECTIVE FROM SERVING AS PRESIDENT OF THREE OF THE TWELVE  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

FACT—Community colleges were created by legislators before you to meet the educational and workforce needs of individual communities. We take our middle name seriously and communities differ in demographics, prime industries and businesses, presence or absence of transportation, ranking of high schools, economic status of residents, etc. You as legislators know this. I have been president of Quinebaug Valley in Killingly, Middlesex in Middletown, and Mohegan in Norwich now Three Rivers and know how different the college cultures are internally and the communities served.

QUESTION—How does making them “consistent” and taking out the deliberate uniqueness make them better for students or the State? Does anything improve when there are more layers of bureaucracy such as being proposed?

FACT—For unknown reasons the legislature that created our community colleges turned accountability over to an appointed Board of Regents when the two systems were merged. I applaud this committee for voting unanimously to move SB749 forward and as elected officials take back the responsibility and accountability for public colleges when consolidation or closing is proposed. I trust you will hold firm on this when the inevitable compromising and “horse trading” takes place. I cast no aspersions on individual Regents, but you have to look at the record since the BOR was created. They have had five system presidents since the system merger, the promised savings from the merger of the two systems to be used for students has never been verified nor any improvement in transfer rates, there is no required geographical representation, and the number of female presidents is down to 3 from a high of 9. Nine of the fifteen members are appointed by the governor. This appointed and mainly unknown to the public entity should not make decisions regarding the largest unit of public higher education.

QUESTION—Why would any legislator not want this responsibility to their community?

FACT--Over the years there have been six proposals to reorganize the community colleges with three enacted and this is the fourth. The community colleges are the largest unit of CT public higher education and serve the highest percentage of minority students and first generation college students. Except in the border colleges, students are almost all CT residents and the vast majority stays in CT. In a state fighting the “two Connecticut” issue it is often said these colleges, between their credit and noncredit job training, create and maintain a middle class. In addition whether in business or agencies, any consolidation or merger causes incredible disruption and misdirected

energy and effort. Ask anyone involved in the community college/technical college merger the years of effort involved and that was just ten colleges into five in the same cities!

QUESTION—As the community colleges are repeatedly the unit of higher education targeted for reorganization, at what point does it start to signal a value judgement? With the multiple numbers of proposed committees and work groups, how will this impact the regular full time responsibilities of faculty and staff?

FACT—Nationally, mergers have never saved the money projected. In the 80s a smaller merger of three community colleges in the Hartford area was implemented. It became clear that it was not working and added a layer of bureaucracy and reduced responsiveness—the legislature at the time threatened to cut the budget because of the additional bureaucracy and an objective outside consultant was called in. That happened to be Dr. Kay McClenney who is now leads the Guided Pathway initiative presented earlier in this forum. She is a Senior Advisor to the President and CEO of AACC. Based on that review the district was dismantled and the extra layer removed.

QUESTION—Why should we believe that a complete restructuring adding additional layers of bureaucracy to the largest system of public higher education in a relatively short period of time without the approval of the regional accrediting body and still fought by many be successful?

FACT—Students First, like the Connecticut 2020 and Go Back to Get Ahead initiatives, is misnamed and to many an insult. Students were always first to the faculty, staff and leadership since the founding of the first community college through the present. This we can agree is about money, and I think President Ojakian is trying to lessen the negative impact of this plan on students. But it is not needed to put students first.

FACT—The identifiable group that represents a community college locally is its foundation and Regional Advisory Committee. Two meetings were held with foundation leadership with the last in April 2018. These foundations, made up of key committed community leaders, raise and award an average of 5 million dollars annually in scholarships, financial aid, and other college support based on their 990s. Some of these foundation members signed the Reluctant Warrior petition which you have received.

QUESTION—Will local people continue to support a Hartford managed college to the same degree?

FACT—Community colleges have an identity in their communities and the president is the face of that college. That means being involved in every aspect of life—chambers, Rotary, workforce boards, hospital boards, meeting with local officials and superintendents, business groups, going to community events and functions 24/7 etc. Now those positions will become CEO's at a lower salary and will be expected to carry

the same external load because a regional president serving 3, 4 and 5 colleges will not be doing that. I leave you with an example of that

**At commencement a name was called and the graduate was not there. After the ceremony a program leader came up to me to tell me the student had been texting her madly because she was in labor and couldn't slow it down to get to commencement that her entire family was coming to and was in the hospital. She was very upset which is not good for a woman in labor. So I quickly called a foundation member who was an administrator at the hospital who made some calls and got some permissions signed. The dean and I then left the reception to get in my car in full academic regalia and went to the labor room to award her degree with her family there. She later had a successful delivery.**

**That is a college with a middle name of community. Please preserve it.**