



January 19, 2023

Dr. Nicole Esposito
Chief Executive Officer
Manchester Community College
Great Path, P.O. Box 1046
Manchester, CT 06045-1046

Dear Dr. Esposito:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 17, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Manchester Community College:

that Manchester Community College be continued in accreditation;

that, should the anticipated consolidation of the 12 Connecticut community colleges within the Connecticut State College and University (CSCU) System into Connecticut State Community College not be completed as planned by July 1, 2023, Manchester Community College submit a progress report by January 15, 2025 for consideration in Spring 2025 that provides an update about its success in:

1. achieving its enrollment goals and maintaining financial stability;
2. evaluating the effectiveness of its shared governance structures with emphasis on improving communication and community engagement;
3. assuring that staffing is sufficient to support its mission;
4. achieving its diversity goals for faculty and staff;
5. achieving success and achievement goals for the institution's students of color;

that, subject to modification pending the outcome of the proposed consolidation of the Connecticut community colleges, an interim report be scheduled for submission in Spring 2027 and a comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2032.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Manchester Community College is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Manchester Community College (MCC) for preparing a comprehensive self-study that documents the ways in which the College is sustaining its mission to “advance[] academic, economic, civic, personal and cultural growth by providing comprehensive, innovative and affordable learning opportunities to diverse populations” during a time of “significant uncertainty” as the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) System proceeds with its plans to consolidate the state’s 12 community colleges. We are heartened to learn from the visiting team that MCC takes exceptional care to connect with students and the community in ways that have a lasting and transformational impact and of the pride MCC takes in maintaining its facilities and creating spaces that facilitate learning and support artistic expression. The College’s exemplary work in assessing its general education program is commendable, and we are gratified to note that MCC has “benefitted from system-generated data” to inform the institution’s planning and decision-making with respect to maintaining fiscal viability, addressing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and addressing inequity in student learning outcomes. Given the complicated nature of the pending consolidation and the significant disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission praises MCC faculty, administrators, and staff for their continued, collective dedication to serve as “a learning-centered community committed to access, excellence and relevance.”

Should the establishment of Connecticut State Community College (CT State) not transpire, and Manchester Community College remain a separately accredited institution, the Commission asks that the College submit a progress report by January 15, 2025, for consideration in Spring 2025, that gives emphasis to its success in addressing five matters related to our standards on *Students*; *Institutional Resources*; *Organization and Governance*; *Teaching, Learning and Scholarship*; and *Educational Effectiveness*.

As Manchester Community College candidly acknowledges in its self-study, enrollment has been steadily declining over the last decade, most notably in recent years, with the headcount dipping from 6,321 students in Fall 2017 to 4,448 students in Fall 2021. In addition, while the state appropriation increased from \$29.1 million in FY2018 to about \$35.0 million in FY2021 (an increase of 20%), we are concerned that net student revenue decreased by 31% over this same period from \$13.3 million to just over \$9.0 million. We are therefore encouraged to learn that MCC realized a slight uptick in its Fall 2021 enrollment; enrollments in Fall 2022 were relatively flat; and Fall 2023 enrollments are expected to remain stable with a fluctuation of +/- 2%. We are also aware that once the consolidation takes place, all areas of recruitment will be unified into one strategic enrollment management plan. In the event Manchester Community College remains an independently accredited institution, however, we seek assurance, in the Spring 2025 report, that the College “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) and that it “is financially stable” (7.5).

In addition, the Commission recognizes that the consolidation process has “led to confusion and frustration among campus staff, faculty, administration, and students,” and we support MCC’s assessment that “regular, clear, and comprehensive communication, especially during times of transition” is critical to maintaining effective internal governance structures. Accordingly, we are gratified to note that “administration is committed to transparent and frequent communication.” We understand that, to accomplish this goal, the College is committed to “regular email communication from the CEO and Dean of Student and Academic Affairs to keep the campus community apprised of incidents involving the campus as well as any key issues or events,” and plans to hold periodic all-campus meetings. In the event the consolidation does not take place, we look forward to receiving an update on the College’s success in evaluating the effectiveness of its

shared governance structures with emphasis on improving communication and community engagement as evidence that its “internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution” (3.13).

The Commission further understands that the consolidation process has had an impact on the College in many ways, including leadership transitions and the departure of employees that have left some positions vacant. We also acknowledge that retaining employees and filling vacant positions will continue to be a challenge during the consolidation process. In the event the proposed consolidation does not take place, the report submitted for consideration in Spring 2025 will provide Manchester Community College an opportunity to assure the Commission that vacant positions have been filled and that the College “employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission” (7.1).

We note with approval that, since the team visit, Manchester Community College has “revamped” its Fellowship Program whereby “qualified individuals from underrepresented groups interested in beginning or advancing a career in higher education” are matched with experienced full-time faculty and administrators who serve as mentors. In addition, MCC has begun to integrate diversity courses into its curriculum ahead of the scheduled CT State implementation plans that include goals to “embed diversity requirements into each certificate and program and to grow additional statewide professional development trainings in DEI across all employee lines.” Should MCC remain a separately accredited institution, the Spring 2025 report will afford the College an opportunity to include evidence that it “addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty and academic staff and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals” (6.5).

The Commission appreciates that Manchester Community College is using system-generated data to better understand variations of success within its student population. At the same time, we share the team’s concern that the College has uncovered significant achievement gaps, with more of its White and Asian students meeting KPIs for credit momentum, gateway momentum, and retention than do its Black and Hispanic students. While we note with favor that closing these achievement gaps is one of the College’s top priorities, and plans are in place to establish “a systemwide Diversity and Inclusion Committee that will promote diversity, inclusion and equity throughout the CSCU System,” in the event the consolidation does not take place, we ask that MCC provide evidence, through the Spring 2025 report, of its progress in meeting “its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its students” (*Students: Statement of the Standard*), with attention to the success and achievement goals for the institution’s student of color. Our standards on *Students* and *Educational Effectiveness* provide this additional guidance:

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve an equitable educational experience for all of its students and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these efforts and services and improve their achievement (5.20).

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 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).

Finally, consistent with its Policy on the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions, the Commission schedules an interim report for submission in Spring 2027 and a comprehensive evaluation for Spring 2032. We understand that CSCU anticipates the consolidation of the 12 Connecticut community colleges into Connecticut State Community College will be completed by July 1, 2023, at which time each of the 12 colleges, including Manchester Community College, will relinquish its separate accreditation. Manchester Community College's schedule of upcoming reviews may, therefore, be modified pending the outcome of this proposed consolidation.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Manchester Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Larissa Baía, team chair, during its deliberations.

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 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 JoAnn Ryan and Terrence Cheng. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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

Sincerely,



Russell Carey

RC/sjp

cc: JoAnn Ryan
Terrence Cheng
Visiting team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions