

Post-Secondary Education Annotated Resource and Research List
Curated by the New Hampshire Alliance for College and Career Readiness
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The New Hampshire Alliance for College and Career Readiness offers this literature review to increase understanding of the value of community colleges, and of 2- and 4-year college mergers. This initial literature review was drafted to spark informed conversations around these questions:

- [What is the value of a community college education?](#)
- [Who else is considering such mergers and what do those case studies reveal?](#)
- [What role will community colleges play in rebuilding the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic?](#)

While this source list yields results of an initial query, it offers a starting point for well-informed dialogue about a significant shift in NH higher education policy.

The current proposal merges the Community College System and University System's Board of Trustees into a single, consolidated Board with a single Chancellor. These leaders would be tasked with mapping out the details of the merger. We offer the following questions as a result of this literature review, for lawmaker consideration:

- Will there be an opportunity for faculty, staff, students, and the public to offer input into the merger apart from the state budget process?
- To what extent will the consolidated Board and Chancellor seek input from College and University faculty and staff, and program accrediting agencies, as a part of the merger process?
- States who have started this process have taken several years to study and consider the long-term effects on student experiences and outcomes, faculty needs, fiscal viability, and other factors. What preparation has the Governor's office, Department of Education, USNH, and CCSNH done regarding this proposal? What other information is necessary to make an informed decision?
- Community colleges are known for effectively and efficiently training the skilled workers that are so critical to New Hampshire's economy including the state's workforce attainment goal ([65 by 25](#)); yet, other states' mergers have suggested that 2-year programs would be at risk for program cuts and layoffs. How will leaders ensure that our community colleges will be protected as a critical piece of the state's workforce development efforts?

- ❑ How does the state anticipate building on the **existing** credit transfer systems, given that program accreditation happens at the individual department and/or program level?
- ❑ Has the state developed an array of performance measures and objectives to ensure that the consolidation plan will meet student, workforce, community, and state needs?
- ❑ Is there a governance plan in place to clarify the role of the Chancellor, Board, and administrative staff in planning for the merger once HB 1 and HB 2 are signed? What are the responsibilities of each entity, and will all decision making rest with them?
 - ❑ Will there be opportunities for New Hampshire students, faculty and staff, business leaders, and the public to weigh in on planning and decision making?

Background on NH's Proposal

[NH already has a robust system that allows students to transfer credits between institutions](#) (NH Transfer, 2021)

CCSNH and USNH currently offer a variety of credit and program transfer systems that work to yield an aligned and seamless transition for NH students. In most cases, difficulties with credit transfers are because of program- and department-based accreditation requirements, and not the result of College or University policy. Merging the systems will not alleviate this problem because unlike K-12, higher education accreditation happens at the individual department level.

[New Hampshire Merger Proposal Takes Shape](#) (Inside Higher Education, 2021)

NH's proposal to merge the CCSNH and USNH system has received national media attention. Much of this attention is driven by similar consolidation efforts in other states. Questions have emerged about the voice of students and faculty in the process with no clear examples of when and how they have been consulted.

A Case for Community Colleges

[The Evolving Mission of Workforce Development in the Community College](#) (Columbia University, 2019)

This paper discusses the ways this innovation continues to evolve to meet the needs of students, employers, and local communities. The essential features of America's community colleges are these: (a) curriculum driven by the needs of local industry; (b) delivery systems sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse needs of students and industry; and (c) a mixture of work-based and classroom learning, often with the actual equipment used at the workplace, and significant counseling and other wraparound services. These features combine to help students succeed at a postsecondary education and gain important training with less than a four year degree.

[The Underappreciated Value of Community Colleges](#) (Governing the Future of States and Localities, 2020)

Community colleges play a distinct and discrete role in the post-secondary education environment. Globally speaking, their purpose for existing is to provide opportunities for students who most often face barriers to higher education learning, as well as successful entry and sustainability in the workforce with livable incomes. Those student populations range from first generation college students, older students, part time students, students not yet

college-ready, students navigating poverty from families of poverty, and minority populations. The benefits community colleges bring to these and other students, among others, as well as their commitment to the local community in addressing regional workforce needs, has long been undervalued.

[Community Colleges are More Important than Ever](#) (Community College Review, 2020)

The role community colleges play in their states and nation has been expanding with time. This may be particularly true as the country and communities begin to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. As Steve Mintz from Inside Higher Ed says, “**community colleges have a critical role to play in addressing the country’s greatest challenges: stagnant family incomes, disparities in income and wealth, and political polarization.**” These institutions play a significant role in their communities and in the greater educational system.

2-Year and 4-Year College Merger Case Case Studies

[A Revised Report of the Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education in Vermont](#) (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Report issued February 2021)

This report includes recommendations by a state-mandated Committee to study the financial viability of Vermont’s higher education system. The report concluded that “restructuring will be a necessary, but not sufficient, strategy. Further, any restructuring must be strategic and result in institutions that have clearly defined and distinct institutional missions.”

Regarding the Community College system, the Committee recommended: Maintain the Community College of Vermont (CCV) as a separate institution with a mission to focus on exclusively sub-baccalaureate programming expanded to encompass a greater focus on workforce-relevant education and training and services to adult learners and to employers, including non-credit programming.

[‘Good faith’ and community college consolidation](#) (CT Mirror, 2018)

In a joint letter, 36 community college leaders penned this letter outlining their concerns with Connecticut’s plan to consolidate its system into a single system. Of note:

“We have yet to discover a college consolidation anywhere in America that has achieved cost savings at the level this consolidation plan promises... While college budgets have remained relatively stable (an average increase of about 1% overall), the system office —at which there are no students— has increased its budget by over 45% since 2017. The dollar amount by which its annual budget has increased is enough to fund an expanded version of debt-free college...

“And yet, the dollar amount is not the most crucial drain on our resources. Our efforts devoted to consolidation have siphoned human and financial resources away from our colleges and dramatically reduced the time, energy, attention, and resources necessary to maintain quality educational programs at our institutions... Consolidation stands in the way of faculty and staff fulfilling their professional responsibilities to their students, their programs, and their local institutions, which are all independently accredited.”

[NECHE Letter to Connecticut State System Office Regarding System Merger](#) (NECHE, 2018)

In 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) rejected a plan by Connecticut officials to merge their systems into one, consolidated system, noting:

"Because of the magnitude of the proposed changes, the proposed timeline, and the limited investment in supporting the changes, the commission is concerned that the potential for a disorderly environment for students is too high for it to approve the proposed Community College of Connecticut as a candidate for accreditation based on this proposal."

[U of Wisconsin's consolidation critics fear cuts to its regional colleges](#) (Higher Ed Dive, 2020)

The University of Wisconsin merged its 2- and 4-year colleges and universities into a single system in 2018. In 2020, the System's president called for all campuses, excluding the major institutions, to review their academic offerings by mid-January, opening up the possibility of program cuts and calling layoffs "inevitable."

As a result of the merger, Wisconsin's community colleges are most vulnerable to layoffs, cuts in programming, and decreased funding.

Impact of Covid-19

[Decline in Community College Students Big Problem for the Economy](#) (Hechinger Report, 2021)

Sectors that typically hire community college graduates, including health care, construction and engineering, and cybersecurity, are facing a severe worker shortage that is expected to worsen as a result of the pandemic. In New Hampshire, the pandemic-induced shortage is exacerbated by the state's aging workforce, and it is hampering the economy. Community colleges have played a significant role in training and upskilling people to fill these positions quickly, meet employer demands, and keep the economy afloat.

"Our capacity is down, our enrollments are down, and therefore a year or two years from now our production of those skilled credentials is going to be worse," said Jan Yoshiwara, executive director of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Meanwhile, **"if anything, the need for skilled workers like the kinds of people who attend community and technical colleges is actually going to be going up."**

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