

Statement from Robert Clark
Chair, Maine Community College System Board of Trustees
January 14, 2015

It is with deep regret that the Board of Trustees of the Maine Community College System announces that MCCS President John Fitzsimmons has informed us that he will be stepping down as soon as an acting president is in place.

As hard as this is for the Board to accept, this very difficult decision offers a perfect insight into Dr. Fitzsimmons who always puts the best interest of students and the colleges first.

It is very important to the Board and to our colleges that the public understands the tremendous work that has been done over the past five years to strengthen our community colleges and expand educational opportunities for Maine people:

- The Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges was launched and has raised \$26 million in private investment, funding scholarships, new academic programs, and state-of-the-art instructional equipment and technology as state support as a percentage of our budget has declined.
- The colleges have also secured \$48 million in grants, including a \$13 million competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to expand and add programs and new educational pathways in computer forensics, network security, and other growing areas of information technology.
- New academic programs have been added in precision machining, veterinary technology, health information technology, and other high demand fields to meet the workforce needs of Maine employers.
- Two new college campuses have opened in Brunswick (SMCC Midcoast Campus) and Hinckley (KVCC Harold Alford Campus), adding properties and facilities valued at \$100 million.
- 92% of graduates have landed jobs or continued their education.
- Transfer activity has increased significantly: 42% of MCCS graduates in three recent classes pursued further education at over 223 different colleges and universities. Forty percent of those students (1,115) enrolled in the University of Maine System.
- 2,700 high school students are currently enrolled in community college courses, earning college credit and saving themselves and their families \$800,000 in tuition and fees.

The Board has asked President Fitzsimmons to stay on in a fundraising capacity through the summer to complete multi-million dollar donor requests that he has initiated through The Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges and in which we will need him to play a key role.

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Statement by Dr. John Fitzsimmons
President, Maine Community College System
January 14, 2015

Over the last few days, I have had to weigh out what is best for the 18,000 students, 900 employees, and hundreds of businesses across the state that rely on our colleges. Because the Governor has flat funded the community colleges in his proposed budget and threatened further harm if I remain in my post, I have informed the Maine Community College System Board of Trustees that I will be stepping down. I am simply not willing to put our colleges at risk.

I believe that the community colleges are a true Maine success story. I am so proud of what they have achieved during my 25 years as President, including:

- **Expanded educational opportunity.** Enrollment has grown nearly 80%, to 18,160 students since 2003.
- **An affordable pathway to higher education:** The colleges have committed to holding the line on tuition, which is now the lowest of any college or university in New England (\$3,400 in tuition and fees). They have done this even as state appropriations (as a percent of the total MCCS budget) have decreased from 46% to 32% over the past ten years.
- **Strong fiscal health:** For over 25 years, often during difficult economic times, the System has never run a deficit and has enjoyed clean audits.

I encourage all those who care about the community colleges to work together to build on their strengths and invest in their future.

I have been humbled by the many messages I have received over the last few days, and I want to thank all those who have reached out to voice their support and encouragement.

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The following statement from Dr. Fitzsimmons was issued on Tuesday, January 13, 2014, to update the press and public. Dr. Fitzsimmons decided to step down the following day.

**Statement from MCCS President John Fitzsimmons
January 13, 2014**

My attention today—as always—is focused on serving the best interests of the 18,000 students, 900 faculty and staff, and businesses across the state who rely on our colleges.

Throughout my time with Maine's community colleges, I have placed an emphasis on open communications, transparency, and responsiveness, which has helped our system adapt to Maine's changing economy and educational needs.

Governor LePage has made known his desire for a change in leadership at the Maine community colleges. He has also called for flat funding of the MCCS budget, while increasing the University of Maine System and Maine Maritime Academy.

Yesterday, the Governor suggested that he is prepared to take additional punitive action against the community colleges if I remain as president.

Because I report to the MCCS Board of Trustees, I have approached the Board leadership to discuss the Governor's concerns, actions, and the implications they hold for the System.

The Governor has cited two issues that are of concern to him. Yesterday, I shared with him additional information about both.

The Governor has expressed concern about the seemingly slow pace of progress in making transfer between the MCCS and UMS as seamless as possible.

The community colleges and the university system have been working collaboratively to reduce the barriers to transfer credits between the two systems, but the work is complex.

We have made very real progress and expect to have a full and comprehensive transfer agreement in place by May.

Before the community colleges and the university could begin the work of better aligning transfer between the two systems, the university had to first address issues related to transfer of credit among its own institutions. That process

required more than a year of work. Once it was complete and the university was ready to focus on external transfer, our staff and theirs began meeting in earnest last summer to build a stronger transfer system.

The teams have been meeting monthly since then, with hundreds of hours of staff time dedicated to strengthening transfer between the two systems.

The Governor raised concerns about the 5th-Year Bridge Program.

The Governor is correct that the MCCS did not initially commit to an expansion of the pilot Bridge program. Our concern was not with the program but the cost of implementation and expansion.

The goal of providing access to college credits for Maine high school students is important, and the MCCS is proud to be the largest provider of these credits in the state, serving 2,700 high school students each year (1,000 of them are enrolled in the CTEs). However, the loss of revenue our colleges would face by further expanding the program make it difficult to meet our obligations to other students without additional state funding or higher tuition.

Students and their families save \$800,000 a year with this jumpstart on college, but because the state pays for only half of the tuition and fees for early college courses, the community colleges must account for the rest, \$400,000 annually.

With tight budgets, we could not identify a way clear to expanding these offerings without additional state resources.

With a workgroup coming together to review the funding model for all dual enrollment courses in the state, our colleges have agreed to participate in the Bridge program going forward.

I remain committed to working to expand access to quality higher education and to help improve the state's economy and expand opportunity.

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