

President Wall joins CONNECT CEO's in a meeting with Higher Education Commissioner Richard Freeland to discuss CONNECT initiatives.

January 28, 2013

WAREHAM— Department of Higher Education Commissioner Richard Freeland joined top leaders from five public colleges and universities in Southeastern Massachusetts on Tuesday afternoon, January 29, 2013. The Presidents and Chancellor of Bridgewater State University, Bristol, Cape Cod, and Massasoit Community Colleges, and UMass Dartmouth reported on how the institutions are working together through the CONNECT college consortium to save money, promote college attendance and completion, improve workforce alignment, increase interest and achievement in science and technology, and foster civic engagement.

Stated Commissioner Freeland, "CONNECT is an example regionally, as the Vision Project is statewide, of how we are knitting the system together so that we can act in a more unified way to reach public higher education's goals."

CONNECT, founded in 2003, is the only consortium in the state that focuses on public higher education and brings together all three segments of the Commonwealth's higher education system: community colleges, state universities, and UMass. Its mission is to foster the accessibility, quality, and affordability of higher education, and to advance the educational, cultural, and economic life of the Southeastern Massachusetts region.

President of Massasoit Community College and CONNECT Chair **Dr. Charles Wall** pointed out how in response to Governor Deval Patrick's call for a closer alignment between higher education and workforce needs, CONNECT launched the CONNECTLink Internship Portal, a one-stop site for employers to access student talent from all five campuses. CONNECT announced the portal at a summit with the region's Chamber of Commerce Presidents earlier in January. "The CONNECTLink portal is being extremely well received out there—by Chambers, by WIBS, by all kinds of people—folks are depending on us," commented Dr. Wall. CONNECT is planning high-level meetings between the CONNECT CEOs and leaders in specific industries such as Advanced Manufacturing and Life Sciences to proactively meet future workforce needs.

CONNECT Executive Director Kathleen Kirby illustrated how CONNECT continues to launch forward-thinking programs promoting college participation and student success. "Just last week, we finalized a Reverse Transfer initiative that could affect as many as 900 students at Bridgewater and over 800 at UMass Dartmouth." Reverse Transfer allows students who left a two-year college before successfully completing an Associate's degree, to transfer back credits earned at a four-year institution and complete the Associate's degree.

CONNECT also focuses on college readiness, so that fewer incoming freshmen spend time in remedial Math and English. "We have established partnerships between our colleges and universities and area K-12 school districts. College faculty and high school teachers have engaged in a year-long project promoting curriculum alignment and college readiness, so that students can move faster into and through their college programs," explained Dr. Kirby.

The five CONNECT campuses are working collaboratively on an initiative to dramatically increase the number of students entering and succeeding in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) majors. The Patrick administration and the Department of Higher Education have put a high priority on expanding the STEM pipeline, predicting that more STEM professionals are going to be needed to advance Massachusetts' innovation economy. In addition to its work at the college level, CONNECT leads the Southeastern Massachusetts STEM Network, with nearly 1900 members from industry, education, and the community dedicated to promoting STEM interest and achievement amongst young people, grades K-12.

In a recent opinion piece that appeared in the *New Bedford Standard-Times* and the *Fall River Herald News*, UMass Dartmouth Chancellor Divina



Grossman said that in Southeastern Massachusetts, public higher education institutions provide nine out of ten college classroom seats, making investment in public higher education particularly important in this region. "Through partnerships such as CONNECT, every segment of public higher education is collaborating to operate as economically and efficiently as possible," she said. "We look forward to working with any partner in education, business or government who values the power of higher education to transform lives and communities."

Governor Patrick has proposed adding \$152 million in higher education funding in FY14 to make public institutions more affordable and improve alignment with workforce needs. Commented Commissioner Freeland, "Massachusetts needs the most educated citizenry and workforce in the nation. To achieve that goal, you have to invest in public higher education."

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