

**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 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.