

Regional Higher Education Consortium: How our partnership enhances regional outcomes

Regional higher education institutions are making a remarkable impact on how students become career-ready by seamlessly transferring in a cost-effective manner. Transferring between a community college and four-year institution to achieve a bachelor's degree saves thousands of dollars. Adult learners especially, do not want to travel far to achieve their education.

CONNECT, established in 2003, collaboratively endeavors to enhance educational collaboration and efficiency, while improving student success, increasing educational pathways and strengthening economic health throughout the region. As a consortium of higher education institutions in Southeastern Massachusetts and Cape and Islands: Bridgewater State University, Bristol Community College, Cape Cod Community College, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Massasoit Community College and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth-

What does this mean for our students? CONNECT's impact is significant, particularly with respect to educating citizens who populate the local workforce in a variety of critical, contemporary sectors. The degree and certificate programs offered by CONNECT institutions span vital industries in Massachusetts and beyond, including aviation management, aviation maintenance technology, business & management, culinary & hospitality, cybersecurity, education, environmental protection, human services & social sciences, marine transportation, nursing, offshore wind technology, photonics and STEM, among others.

In 2022, our institutions collectively offered 250 certificate programs and 300 degree programs, to more than 36,000 undergraduate students. In addition, our collective institutions collaborated with business and industry partners to offer more than 3,000 paid and unpaid internship opportunities to our students. In 2022, our institutions, on average, served 52% of the first-generation college student population, which reflects a 10% increase in 3 years. Together, over 200,000 undergraduate degrees have been conferred by our institutions.

It is important to consider the extent to which our region flourishes as a result of this higher education consortium, beyond the measure of its graduates.

- Legislative gatherings
- CONNECT4Wind MOU
- Professional Development for higher education faculty and staff
- PK-12 partnerships
- SE MA STEM Network/ STEM week

CONNECT will soon launch its first joint media venture! The media campaign will be used to illustrate the efficacy of our collaborations through one specific initiative, CONNECT's "transfer pathways". The campaign will highlight students who have successfully transferred between the consortium's institutions, mitigating the time and money spent on acquiring their degree. Research has shown (Banks & Dohy, 2019) that these savings of time and money, as well as the mitigation of other barriers for students of color in higher education, commonly result in increased college persistence and, eventual completion. Each student will share their unique learning journey and emphasize how their community college prepared them for successful

careers, as well as equipped them with the skills and confidence to pursue their bachelor's degree, and beyond, from our institutions. Be sure to watch for our new joint marketing campaign, this summer.

This OP Ed was authored by Ray DiPasquale, President, Massasoit Community College, and newest member of the CONNECT Chief Executive Officer's Board of Directors. This Op Ed is being published as part of an ongoing series, authored by the Chief Executive Officers of the CONNECT institutions.

CONNECT is a consortium of the six public colleges and universities in Southeastern Massachusetts and the Cape Cod & Islands Region: Bridgewater State University, Bristol Community College, Cape Cod Community College, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Massasoit Community College and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The presidents and chancellor of each of these institutions of higher education serve as CONNECT's Board of Directors and daily operations are facilitated by its Executive Director. CONNECT is a valuable regional resource, not only for the students served by these institutions, but also for the communities that are impacted by its collective impact.