

To: Vermont State College System Communities

From: Chancellor Sophie Zdatny

Re: **Transformation Update #1**

Date: April 12, 2021

Our goal is to provide regular updates to you throughout the Transformation process as we work to unify Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College under a single accreditation while maintaining the Community College of Vermont as a separate entity, and for the system to pursue administrative consolidation. This first update outlines the initial steps taken since the Board of Trustees made the decision to adopt [this plan](#) at its February 22nd Board Meeting.

VISION

Our shared goal is to create one vibrant, student-centered university that provides accessibility to students across the state, regardless of home campus or location. Administratively, we are looking to develop one set of policies, practices, and business procedures across the system wherever possible to streamline what we do, eliminate duplication, and focus on adding value for our students, for the state, and for our host communities.

We want to create the most innovative and flexible VSCS organization we can, understanding that higher education and the wider world will continue to change. We want to ensure that we are positioning the VSCS for the future – whatever that might look like.

STATE FUNDING

Over the next several months, we will continue to work with the state to secure the additional funding for resources the VSCS needs to manage this transition and build a higher education system for the generations of today and the future. We are continuing to work with the Legislature and the Governor to secure funding to support both our system needs and transformation needs, and additional scholarships and supports for our students.

The Legislature is in the process of crafting the state budget and allocating additional federal funds. You can read more about the initial proposals the House made for the VSCS funding [here](#). We are continuing to work with the Senate this month to secure this funding and look forward to sharing another update on this soon.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

The state's *Select Committee on the Future of Public Higher Education in Vermont* concluded their work this week. This committee did important work establishing a vision for the future of the VSCS and for public higher education in Vermont. We are grateful for the work of the Committee and particularly for that of the VSCS members of the committee, including: Joyce Judy, CCV President and Chair of the Select Committee; Devin Tingle, Vermont Tech student and student representative; Dan Daley, NVU faculty member and faculty representative; Jeff Weld, Castleton University alum; and Megan Cluver, VSCS Board of Trustees Vice Chair and member of the *Select Committee's* Steering Group. We also appreciate the many stakeholders both within and outside of the VSCS whose interviews, feedback and participation in focus groups informed the Committee's work.

You can find the [final report of the Select Committee here.](#)

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSOLIDATIONS

Work on the consolidation of administrative services has begun. First, the Marketing, Admissions, Registrars, and Financial Aid leads from each institution met to identify critical timelines, initial projects, success factors, opportunities, barriers, decision points, and critical resource needs for each of these functional areas. Other groups, including Development and Alumni Relations, Information Technology, Finance, Libraries, Workforce Development/Career Services, and more are starting to engage in initial conversations regarding actions to support system transformation.

PROJECT MANAGER

Recognizing the vital role of experienced project management to organize and oversee the many projects associated with transformation, we have posted the position of VSCS Director of Transformation Projects, as well as a Request for Proposals for an Internal Program/Project Manager for System Transformation. Both postings are available on our website at <https://www.vsc.edu/employment/>. We are pursuing both routes in order to cast our net as widely as possible to find the person or firm that will be the best fit for the VSCS. We look forward to interviewing candidates and sharing another update on this soon.

UNIFICATION

In the coming months, we will be working with our accreditors to unify Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College into one institution of higher learning. Initial work was done by teams across all three institutions to analyze if moving up the accreditation timeline to Academic Year 2022-2023 was feasible. After careful consideration, it was apparent that the risk of pursuing an accelerated timeline far outweighed the benefits. Therefore, **we will be seeking to admit students to the new combined entity in Fall 2023.**

In response to a commonly-asked question, students who are currently studying at Castleton University, Northern Vermont University or Vermont Technical College or are admitted to one of these institutions before Fall 2023 and complete their studies and graduate after July 1, 2023, will be able to request a diploma with the name of the institution where they started.

We have not yet identified the process for selecting a name for the new unified institution. The final decision will be made by the Board of Trustees, absent legislative intervention.

ACADEMIC UNIFICATION

rpk GROUP, the consulting firm supporting the Vermont State College System's efforts to reimagine the academic portfolio for the new unified institution, is currently in the process of sharing its analysis with faculty and academic program leaders, collecting feedback, and framing recommendations for next action steps. The goals for this project are to develop a framework for evaluation of current academic programs within the VSCS portfolio, identify gaps in the existing academic portfolio relative to Vermont's labor market demand, recommend an ideal portfolio that meets the needs of Vermont students and the work force, and design action plans to help VSCS implement the recommended academic portfolio.

PUBLIC INPUT

We will continue to work on soliciting broad input as our transformation continues. **We've established an ongoing opportunity to collect your feedback and encourage you to share it at [this link](#).** Additionally, we will continue to accept public comments at Board and Committee meetings and will continue to post regular updates on our [Transformation page](#).

I hope you will continue to reach out with your questions and concerns as this process unfolds. I plan to provide periodic updates on transformation as the internal working groups move forward with their work and decisions are made by the state and the Board of Trustees.

Thank you for your continued engagement in this critical work.

With kind regards,

Sophie