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October 28, 2019

Dr. James C. Mabry  
President  
Middlesex Community College  
591 Springs Road  
Bedford, MA 01730

Dear President Mabry:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 20, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Middlesex Community College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Middlesex Community College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2024 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2024 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. continuing to enhance communication between the Board of Trustees and the campus community;
2. implementing the recommendations from the Financial and Human Resources Business Process review;
3. achieving its diversity goals for full- and part-time faculty;
4. evaluating the impact of the College's student success initiatives, with an emphasis on retention rates and completion rates among historically underserved populations;
5. implementing its strategic plan.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Middlesex Community College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of April 2, 2015 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Middlesex Community College for its candid and comprehensive interim report. We understand that, with the arrival of President Mabry in 2015, the College developed a new strategic plan, *Transformative Education FY2016-2020*. As part of the strategic planning process, new mission, vision, and values statements were developed and endorsed by the Middlesex community. The Commission is pleased to learn that, as a result of the institution's academic program and pathways mapping process, new programs were developed and existing ones revised, reflecting Middlesex's "responsiveness to external factors ... and its commitment to improve the graduation rate...." We note with favor the establishment of an Admissions Office at the College's Bedford location as well as the hiring of additional staff positions for the Bedford and Lowell sites to better support students at those locations. As part of the College's recruitment strategy, the "Pathways to Success" program supports first-generation, low-income students in the admissions process, and dual enrollment programs were expanded from four high schools in 2014 to 16 in 2018. Faculty development is now under the purview of the Middlesex Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Community, which is coordinated by two faculty members and has approximately 200 members. The Commission notes that Middlesex Community College is one of seven founding members of the Higher Education Libraries of Massachusetts network, which has provided cost savings to the College and additional resources for students.

In its reflective essay, Middlesex Community College describes the significant progress it has made in educational effectiveness and assessment. We appreciate that the College measures students' experiences at the "beginning, middle, and end" of their time at Middlesex with an eye towards improvement and that the College is using an equity lens to support an increasingly diverse student body and increase completion rates. We note with favor that 150% graduation rates have increased from 13% in Fall 2010 to 21% in Fall 2015. A redesign of Middlesex's developmental reading and writing courses yielded increased pass rates (from 47% pre-redesign to 74% post-redesign) in English 101. A redesign of mathematics courses also yielded increases in student success. We appreciate that the College's "Guided Pathways" academic mapping efforts resulted in a 22.4% increase in STEM student persistence. We are gratified to learn that Middlesex has infused six institutional student learning outcomes throughout its General Education curriculum, co-curricular activities, and experiential activities. Assessment of those outcomes is conducted primarily at the course and institutional levels. Additionally, each program annually assesses and analyzes its program and course student learning outcomes, using the data to inform program improvements. The Commission appreciates that a wide range of programs, including Graphic Design, Criminal Justice, Fashion Merchandising, Psychology, and Dental Hygiene, have all made program improvements based on assessment findings. We commend Middlesex Community College for its strong culture of assessment and congratulate the institution on receiving the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment "Excellence in Assessment" designation.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2024 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance; Planning and Evaluation; Institutional Resources; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Students; and Educational Effectiveness*.

The Commission understands that the Middlesex Community College Board of Trustees' role is to foster "the continued growth and development of the college" and that the Board interacts with faculty and staff through its various subcommittees. We appreciate Middlesex's candor that while this committee structure has "fostered additional channels of communication among faculty, staff, and trustees, new challenges emerged." We note that an Ad Hoc Committee was appointed by the Board to "define the issues and find solutions" related to these challenges. The Fall 2024 self-study will provide the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on its

continued success in assuring that its Board of Trustees “establishes and maintains appropriate and productive channels of communication among its members and with the institutional community” (3.9).

The Commission is pleased to learn that Middlesex worked with an external consultant to conduct a Financial and Human Resources Business Process Review that identified key recommendations for improvements in the College’s human resources, financial, and information technology areas. We understand that an action plan is being developed to respond to those recommendations and will be implemented over the next three years. We anticipate being apprised, in Fall 2024, of Middlesex Community College’s success in “using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation” (2.8). Our standard on *Institutional Resources* provides additional guidance here:

The institution’s financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly (7.14).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

We note with favor that Middlesex has developed new policies and procedures to make the full-time and adjunct hiring process more equitable in order to develop a “well-qualified, diverse group of full-time faculty.” The Commission is gratified to learn that retention strategies such as new faculty seminars, mentoring, the establishment of an Adjunct Faculty Liaison position, and an adjunct faculty website resulted in an increase in the percentage of new underrepresented full-time faculty from 20% in 2014-2015 to 28% in 2018-2019 and of underrepresented part-time faculty from 8% in 2014-2015 to 10% in 2018-2019. We ask that the Fall 2024 self-study give emphasis to the College’s continued success in “address[ing] its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff” (6.5).

The Commission appreciates Middlesex Community College’s efforts to improve student success. The College is implementing a number of new initiatives including supplemental instruction, academic maps, corequisite courses, and activities related to its Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving Institutions grant. Assessment and evaluation efforts are underway for each of these initiatives. We welcome further information, in the Fall 2024 self-study, regarding Middlesex’s success in evaluating the impact of the College’s student success initiatives, with an emphasis on improving retention and completion rates among historically underserved populations as informed by our standards on *Students* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution’s goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these goals and services and improve their achievement (5.20).

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students,



employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

We understand that Middlesex is in the final year of its current strategic plan, *Transformative Education FY 2016-2020*. A new Steering Committee was formed to “manage the transition” from the current plan to the development of a new strategic plan. This process is scheduled to begin in Fall 2019. The Fall 2024 self-study will enable the institution to provide evidence of its success in “implementing the results of its planning” (2.5). Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* provides further guidance:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the interim report submitted by Middlesex Community College and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution’s constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution’s governing board and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. James J. Campbell and Dr. Carlos E. Santiago. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission’s action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. James J. Campbell  
Dr. Carlos E. Santiago