

Report Highlights

An Interim Report on the Establishment of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College

Article XVII-E.1 of Act 2014-126 [Repealed], and subsequently Article XIX-G of Act 2016-86, provide for the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of a rural regional college (RRC) in a multi-county rural area that is underserved by comprehensive community college education and workforce development, and direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) to review the success of the RRC in satisfying the goals set forth in the RRC plan approved by the Secretary of Education, and the needs of the multicounty area the RRC was established to serve. The LBFC is required to submit an interim report to the General Assembly by June 30, 2018, and the final report by June 30, 2022. As the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) was only approved by the PA Department of Education (PDE) in May 2017, the data required for the interim report was not available. Instead, we prepared a brief report updating the General Assembly on the progress that has been made to date. We found:

- **The RRC serves 9 contiguous counties.** Cameron, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, McKean, Potter, Venango, and Warren Counties were designated to be served by the establishment of the RRC.
- **Act 2014-126 directed the FY 2014-15 appropriation to the RRC, not the RRC Board of Trustees.** The appropriation was not available to the RRC until the college was established, which required the RRC plan to be submitted to, and approved by, the Secretary of Education. Due to these funding stipulations, the deadline for the submission of the RRC plan was extended to December 2016, and the Board of Trustees entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the PDE to make payments for the Board for services and fees incurred during the development of the plan.
- **Northern Pennsylvania Regional College was established in May 2017.** The Board submitted their RRC plan to the Secretary for review in December 2016, and the plan was approved in May 2017.
- **NPRC adopted the education delivery model used by the Education Consortium of Upper Allegheny (ECUA).** The ECUA, in Partnership with Gannon University, provides education to rural students by combining traditional classroom instruction with synchronous delivery of instruction to remote classrooms through the use of live interactive television (ITV) technology.
- **NPRC established a partnership with Gannon University.** The NPRC/Gannon University partnership is providing two associate degree programs—Business Administration and Interdisciplinary Studies—during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years.
- **NPRC/Gannon University Tuition and Fees are in line with Community College fees.** The combined tuition and fees for the 2017-2018 academic year were set at \$198 per credit hour, with dual enrollment (high school) students paying tuition of \$60 per credit.
- **NPRC/Gannon University Student Enrollment.** A total of 45 students were enrolled (Fall Semester 2017), and 29 students were enrolled (Spring Semester 2018). During both semesters, 58% in an Associate’s Degree program and 42% in dual enrollment program.
- **NPRC anticipates increased student enrollment.** Improved marketing strategy and the addition of several non-credit courses and associate degree programs are anticipated to increase student enrollment. These include 3 non-credit technical training courses during the Summer Semester 2018, and 2 additional Associate Degrees (Early Childhood Development and Criminal Justice) starting in the Fall Semester 2018.
- **Middle States Commission on Higher Education Accreditation.** NPRC staff currently anticipate being recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the 2021-2022 academic year, with full accreditation attained by the 2025-2026 academic year.
- **Recommendation:** The General Assembly should consider extending the final report date from June 30, 2022, to June 30, 2025, to allow NPRC to be established as an accredited institution and to collect data necessary for the final report.