

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Report on the Establishment of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College

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Act 2016-86, as amended by Act 2022-55, provides for the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of a rural regional college, now the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC), in a multicounty area that is underserved by comprehensive community college education and workforce development and directs the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) to review the success of the college in satisfying the goals set forth in the plan approved by the Secretary of Education. The LBFC was required to submit an interim report to the General Assembly by June 30, 2018, and the final report by December 31, 2022. The interim report was released in June 2018. This is the final report under the act and reports on academic year 2017 through fall 2021. Highlights of our report include the following:

A JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- ❖ **The NPRC became independent in spring 2020 limiting our ability to evaluate the success of satisfying its goals.** The NPRC was originally affiliated with Gannon University but became independent in spring 2020. Due to this relatively brief period to review NPRC as an independent institution, and that period includes the initial COVID-19 lockdowns, we could not assess actual success in meeting the overall goals of its plan but report on the progress of the college in key areas since academic year 2017.
- ❖ **From fall 2017 through fall 2021, 889 students attended NPRC/Gannon and NPRC.** In academic year 2020-21, the majority of academic students were under 29 years of age and were also first-generation college students. Almost all students are from the nine-county area (Cameron, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, McKean, Potter, Venango, and Warren Counties) the college was established to serve.
- ❖ **NPRC offers courses at numerous locations in the nine-county area.** NPRC has partnered with regional educational facilities and invested in live, interactive video technology to give students a classroom experience without requiring them to leave their communities or contend with long commutes. Due to the COVID-19 lockdowns in the spring 2020 term, all courses were temporarily remote, with some location-based courses resuming in fall 2021. The flexibility of these options contributes to NPRC's goals of accessibility to all populations and innovative delivery.
- ❖ **During the period we reviewed, 8 students graduated from NPRC/Gannon and 21 from NPRC.** According to NPRC graduate survey responses from the 21 graduates from NPRC, several are furthering their academic goals with five pursuing nursing degrees at the University of Pittsburgh – Titusville, and one pursuing a four-year degree at another institution. Students have also earned various certifications at NPRC. The majority of graduates responding to a follow-up survey from NPRC indicated that the college met their academic and employment development needs.
- ❖ **Thirty-four employers have used NPRC workforce development (WFD) courses.** Since 2018, when WFD courses were initiated, 75 company-sponsored enrollees and 283 self-paid enrollees have participated in these WFD courses. In addition, 266 enrollees have participated in customized WFD courses which are developed for a specific employer and only that employer's employees may be enrolled. The employers we spoke with expressed satisfaction with the courses for their accessible locations, content, and cost.
- ❖ **NPRC continues to work towards accreditation.** NPRC's submitted its pre-candidacy application in September 2019 and was granted eligibility to develop an accreditation readiness report (ARR). The ARR outlines the alignment of NPRC's policies and processes to standards of common accrediting bodies.
- ❖ **The NPRC has four Articulation Agreements with the Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania (CU) (the integrated universities of Bloomsburg, Lock Haven, and Mansfield) and one with the University of Pittsburgh-Titusville (Pitt-Titusville).** The arrangement between NPRC and CU provides for the transferability of certain NPRC credits to CU universities and guarantees transfer opportunities for NPRC associate degrees into four CU undergraduate curricula with no credit loss for qualifying students. The articulation arrangement with Pitt-Titusville allows nursing students to complete general education foundational courses at NPRC that are designed to meet Pitt-Titusville's pre-requisites.
- ❖ **NPRC has dual enrollment agreements with seven school districts.** These allow a high school student to take courses at both the high school and college levels at the same time. NPRC has had fewer dual enrollment students in recent academic terms. This may be related to concerns about the transferability of credits as NPRC is not yet accredited.
- ❖ **Recommendation.** We recommend the General Assembly consider directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study of NPRC in five years to determine whether the college has met its plan goals and become an accredited college. We believe another review may be useful to the General Assembly.

For a full copy of the report, email us at lbfcinfo@palbfc.us or download a copy at <http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/>.