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

Conducted Pursuant to Act 2014-126 and Act 2016-86

May 2018

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## Summary

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Article XVII-E.1 of Act 2014-126 [Repealed], and subsequently Article XIX-G of Act 2016-86, provide for the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of a rural regional college (RRC) in a multicounty rural area that is underserved by comprehensive community college education and workforce development. Both acts also 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 Pennsylvania 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. See Appendix A for a copy of the relevant section of Act 2016-86.

In our review, we found the following:

### **The Counties Served by the Rural Regional College**

The Secretary of Education designated nine contiguous counties—Cameron, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, McKean, Potter, Venango, and Warren—to be served by the establishment of the RRC, and selected 15 representatives of the designated area to serve on the RRC Board of Trustees. The region is over 7,000 square miles, and the nine counties are rural, with the exception of the area in and around the City of Erie. According to the RRC plan, the demographic trends of the region show that the population is slowly aging, experiences higher poverty and public assistance rates than the state and national average, and overall, has lower educational attainment rates above a high school credential than the state and national average.

### **The Development and Approval of the Rural Regional College Plan**

The members of the Board of Trustees met for the first time and were sworn in by the Secretary on December 2, 2014, with the requirement to submit their proposed RRC plan to the Secretary within one year. However, language in Act 2014-126 directed the FY 2014-15 appropriations to the college, not the Board itself. Therefore, the funds were not available until the college was established, which would not happen until a college plan was submitted to, and approved by, the Secretary.

Due to these funding stipulations, the statutory deadline for the submission of the RRC plan was extended to December 2016, and the Board of Trustees entered

into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the PDE that allowed the Department to directly make payments for the Board for contracted services and fees incurred during the development of the RRC plan. The MOU was limited, however, to the development of the RRC plan, and as a consequence, marketing and the search for a President and other administrative staff for the regional college was postponed until direct funding could be secured. Although language in the Fiscal Code was amended in April 2016 to appropriate funding directly to the Board, as opposed to through PDE and the state contracting system, the Board continued to experience complications accessing their appropriations. Therefore, the Board had to primarily rely on the PDE contracting system throughout the development process of the RRC plan.

The Board submitted their complete RRC plan to the Secretary for review in December 2016, and the plan was approved and the RRC was established on May 25, 2017. The RRC formally adopted the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) name in January 2018.

### **NPRC Adopted the ECUA Education Delivery Model**

The NPRC adopted the education delivery model used by the Education Consortium of Upper Allegheny (ECUA), which partnered with Gannon University to provide education to students in eleven northwestern Pennsylvania rural counties by combining traditional classroom instruction with synchronous delivery of instruction to remote classrooms through the use of live interactive television (ITV) technology. The NPRC delivery model currently includes six college centers and twelve satellite sites located in population centers within their counties, and each location has classrooms, office spaces, parking space, and networking capability. According to the NPRC, these locations are fairly accessible to most communities within the region, and allows courses and degree programs to be continuously offered, rather than cancelled due to low student enrollment.

### **NPRC Established a Partnership With Gannon University**

Based on the successful partnership between the ECUA and Gannon University, the NPRC established a partnership with Gannon University until the NPRC can successfully transition to an independently operated college at the start of the 2019-2020 academic year. For the 2017-2018 academic year, the NPRC entered into an MOU with Gannon University to continue offering the two Associate Degree programs—Business Administration and Interdisciplinary Studies—that were previously offered through the ECUA/Gannon partnership. The curriculums for both degrees are designed to meet the general education core requirements to provide the widest range of credit transfer options. Under the agreement, Gannon University provides the instructors and coursework, and awards university credit for the courses taken by NPRC students. The NPRC assumed responsibilities for student

recruitment, admissions, and enrollment from the ECUA, and provides support services to facilitate program delivery.

### **NPRC/Gannon University Tuition and Fees - Academic Year 2017-2018**

Under partnership with Gannon University, the tuition rate for the 2017-2018 academic year was set at \$180 per credit hour, with dual enrollment students (high school) paying \$60 per credit. Although dual enrollment students are not charged student fees, students enrolled in an associate's degree program are charged student fees of \$18 per credit hour, up to a maximum of \$100 per semester.

The tuition rate at NPRC is higher than Pennsylvania's fourteen community colleges. However, when estimating the average cost of student fees per credit hour, the combined tuition and fee rate of \$198 per credit at NPRC is in line with the other community colleges, ranging from a low of \$136 per credit at Lehigh Carbon Community College to a high of \$216 per credit at the Harrisburg Area Community College.

### **NPRC/Gannon University Student Enrollment - Academic Year 2017-2018**

In partnership with Gannon University, the NPRC conducted a "soft launch" for the 2017-2018 academic year, with nine courses offered through twelve college centers and satellite sites for the Fall Semester 2017, and eleven courses through nine sites for the Spring Semester 2018. A total of 45 students were enrolled during Fall Semester 2017, and 29 students were enrolled during Spring Semester 2018. During both semesters, 58 percent of the students were enrolled in an Associate's Degree program, with the remaining 42 percent enrolled in a dual enrollment program.

### **NPRC Plans to Increase Student Enrollment With Improved Marketing and an Expanded Curriculum**

According to NPRC staff, student enrollment during the 2017-2018 academic year was lower than originally anticipated, because, due to time and budgetary constraints, there was little opportunity for a marketing campaign prior to the College's "soft-launch." However, the NPRC anticipates increased student enrollment with an improved marketing strategy and the addition of several non-credit courses and associate degree programs.

The NPRC has an agreement with the Pennsylvania College of Technology (PCT) to offer three non-credit technical training courses during the Summer Semester 2018, and anticipates providing two additional Associate Degrees in Early Childhood Education / Early Intervention and Criminal Justice starting in the Fall Semester 2018. The NPRC is also in discussions with Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) institutions about the possibility of taking over several

of their Associate Degree programs, and is seeking to develop additional partnerships with local career and technical institutes within the region to utilize their unused laboratory space during evenings and weekends. According to NPRC staff, the opportunity to provide technical laboratory time throughout the region would enable the College to offer Associate Degrees in Applied Science to better meet local workforce development needs, such as manufacturing, industrial, and machining-related technologies.

As shown in the table below, the NPRC anticipates a steady increase in the enrollment of Associate Degree and Dual-Enrollment students over the next five academic years, increasing from a total of 80 students in the 2018-2019 academic year to 500 students by the 2022-2023 academic year. NPRC staff noted that most of their students are likely to be part-time, especially in the earlier years.

<b>Five-Year Projection For the Number of NPRC Students Enrolled</b>			
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Associate Degree</b>	<b>Dual Enrollment</b>	<b>Total Students Enrolled</b>
2018-2019	40	40	80
2019-2020	80	80	160
2020-2021	180	120	300
2021-2022	200	180	380
2022-2023	250	250	500

### **Middle States Commission on Higher Education – Accreditation Process**

Pennsylvania institutions of higher education authorized by the PDE are statutorily required to be accredited through an accrediting agency that is approved by the United States Department of Education, and are required to maintain their institutional accreditation, or be recognized as a candidate for accreditation, for their enrolled students to be eligible for state aid provided by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) and Title IV federal financial aid programs.

Therefore, to meet the accreditation requirements of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), an approved accrediting agency, the NPRC is currently developing their own curriculum, plans to hire their own faculty during the 2018-2019 academic year, and anticipates launching as an independent college at the start of the 2019-2020 academic year. The NPRC plans to work closely with MSCHE and Gannon University in order to minimize any potential “gap period” during which state and federal financial aid would not be available to NPRC students. The College expects to be able to offer institutional grants to students during any gap period that may occur. 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:

***We recommend that the General Assembly consider extending the final report date from June 30, 2022, to June 30, 2025.*** The NPRC was established in May 2017, with NPRC staff anticipating being recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the 2021-2022 academic year and achieving full accreditation by the 2025-2026 academic year. This delay would enable the NPRC to establish itself an accredited institution of higher education, and provide enough time for the NPRC to collect the necessary data for the final report, i.e., student enrollment, student success measurements, etc.

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# I. Introduction

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Article XVII-E.1 of Act 2014-126 [Repealed],<sup>1</sup> and subsequently Article XIX-G of Act 2016-86,<sup>2</sup> provide for the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of a rural regional college (RRC) in a multicounty rural area that is underserved by comprehensive community college education and workforce development.<sup>3</sup> Both Acts also 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 Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in May 2017, the data required for the interim report was not available.<sup>4</sup> Instead, we prepared a brief report updating the General Assembly on the progress that has been made to date. See Appendix A for a copy of the relevant section for Act 2016-86.

## Study Scope and Objectives

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the activities that have occurred and the progress to date in establishing the rural regional college.
2. Review the rural regional college plan approved by the Secretary of Education.
3. Identify the activities currently underway and planned to further realize the goals set forth in statute.

## Methodology

To identify the activities that have occurred and the progress to date in establishing the rural regional college, we reviewed both Acts and the criteria set forth in establishing the college. We contacted the RRC Board of Trustees, NPRC staff, and PDE officials. We also reviewed legislative amendments to the PA Fiscal Code and Public School Code, meeting minutes and press releases from the RRC Board of

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<sup>1</sup> Act 2014-126 (Fiscal Code) - 72 P.S. §§ 1701-E.1 to 1717-E.1 [Repealed].

<sup>2</sup> Act 2016-86 (Public School Code of 1949) - 24 P.S. §§ 19-1901-G to 19-1917-G.

<sup>3</sup> On July 13, 2016, Act 2016-86 amended the Public School Code to include the language that provided for the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of the rural regional college, and repealed Article XVII-E.1 of Act 2014-126.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee report requirements.

Trustees, and the key contracts and memoranda of understanding entered into by the RRC Board of Trustees and the NPRC. We reviewed the rural regional plan approved by the Secretary of Education, and key correspondence related to the plan submission.

To identify the activities currently underway and planned to further realize the goals set forth in statute, we reviewed the NPRC's current and planned organizational structure and staffing levels, the associate degree programs and non-credit courses, the partnering educational delivery sites, and the number and type of students enrolled. We also reviewed the requirements of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation process, and the projected timeline for NPRC to achieve full accreditation.

## **Acknowledgements**

LBFC staff completed this study with cooperation from the Rural Regional College Board of Trustees, the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College staff, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In particular, from the Board of Trustees, we thank Senator Mary Jo White, Chairperson, and Dr. Richard McDowell, President Emeritus of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. From the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College, we thank Dr. Joseph Nairn, President; Ray Pring, Vice-President of Finance and Administration; Dr. Debra Teachman, Vice-President of Academic and Student Affairs; and Duane Vicini, Project Executive. From the Pennsylvania Department of Education, we thank Michael Dotts, PDE Technical Advisor. Without their assistance we would not have been able to complete this study.

## **Important Note**

*This report was developed by Legislative Budget and Finance Committee staff. The release of this report should not be construed as indicating that the Committee members endorse all the report's findings and recommendations.*

*Any questions or comments regarding the contents of this report should be directed to Patricia A. Berger, Executive Director, Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, P.O. Box 8737, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120.*

## II. The Establishment of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College

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The rural regional college established by Act 2014-126, and subsequently Act 2016-86, is defined as “a public institution of higher education which is established in a rural area and operated in accordance with the provisions of this article as a college which provides up to a two-year, postsecondary education not to exceed the level of an associate of arts or sciences degree, and which is active in work force development.”

Both acts provided various duties to be performed in pursuit of the establishment of the RRC:

- The Secretary of Education shall designate an established nonprofit organization which represents a rural multicounty region underserved by a comprehensive community college program, including workforce development, to assist with the identification of a service region for the college, as well as to advise the Secretary on the appointment of the board of trustees for the RRC.
- The Secretary shall, in consultation with the nonprofit organization, designate contiguous counties or parts of contiguous counties to be served by establishment of the RRC.
- The Secretary shall, in consultation with the nonprofit organization, appoint 7 to 15 representatives of the designated area to serve on the board of trustees for the RRC.
- Within one year of its initial meeting, the board of trustees shall submit to the Secretary a proposed RRC plan.<sup>1</sup> The Secretary shall issue an approval or denial of the plan within 60 days of the date of submission. If the plan is rejected, the board shall submit a revised plan within 60 days of the initial rejection.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to funding stipulations outlined in Article XVII-E.1 of Act 2014-126, the Secretary of Education, and subsequently Article XIX-G of Act 2016-86, extended the rural regional college plan deadline to December 31, 2016.

## **The Education Consortium of Upper Allegheny**

In August 2014, the Secretary of Education selected the Education Consortium of Upper Allegheny (ECUA) to assist with the identification of a service region for the college, as well as to advise the Secretary on the appointment of members for the RRC Board of Trustees.<sup>2</sup> The ECUA was formed in 2009 with the goal of delivering open admissions and low cost, high quality community and technical education and training opportunities to a rural regional area that was underserved by a community college program, including workforce development.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2012, the ECUA, through a partnership with Gannon University, has provided two Associate Degree programs—Interdisciplinary Studies and Business Administration—across an eleven-county rural area of northcentral and northwestern Pennsylvania through a combination of traditional classrooms and the use of live interactive television technology (ITV). Several Community Education Councils (CECs) have been the primary delivery sites, offering resources and capacity to ensure smooth delivery.<sup>4</sup> The eleven counties served by the partnership were Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Potter, Venango, and Warren. The ECUA expects to conclude operations by the end of summer 2018.

## **The Designated Area to Be Served by the Rural Regional College**

As illustrated in Exhibit 1, the Secretary of Education, in consultation with ECUA, designated nine contiguous counties—Cameron, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, McKean, Potter, Venango and Warren—to be served by the establishment of the RRC.<sup>5,6</sup> The region is over 7,000 square miles, and the nine counties are rural, with the exception of the area in and around the City of Erie. According to the RRC plan, the demographic trends of the region show that the population is slowly aging, experiences higher poverty and public assistance rates than the state and national average, and overall, has lower educational attainment rates above a high school credential than the state and national average.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for the nonprofit designation letter from the Secretary of Education.

<sup>3</sup> Open admissions is a policy that permits enrollment of a student in a college or university without regard to academic qualifications

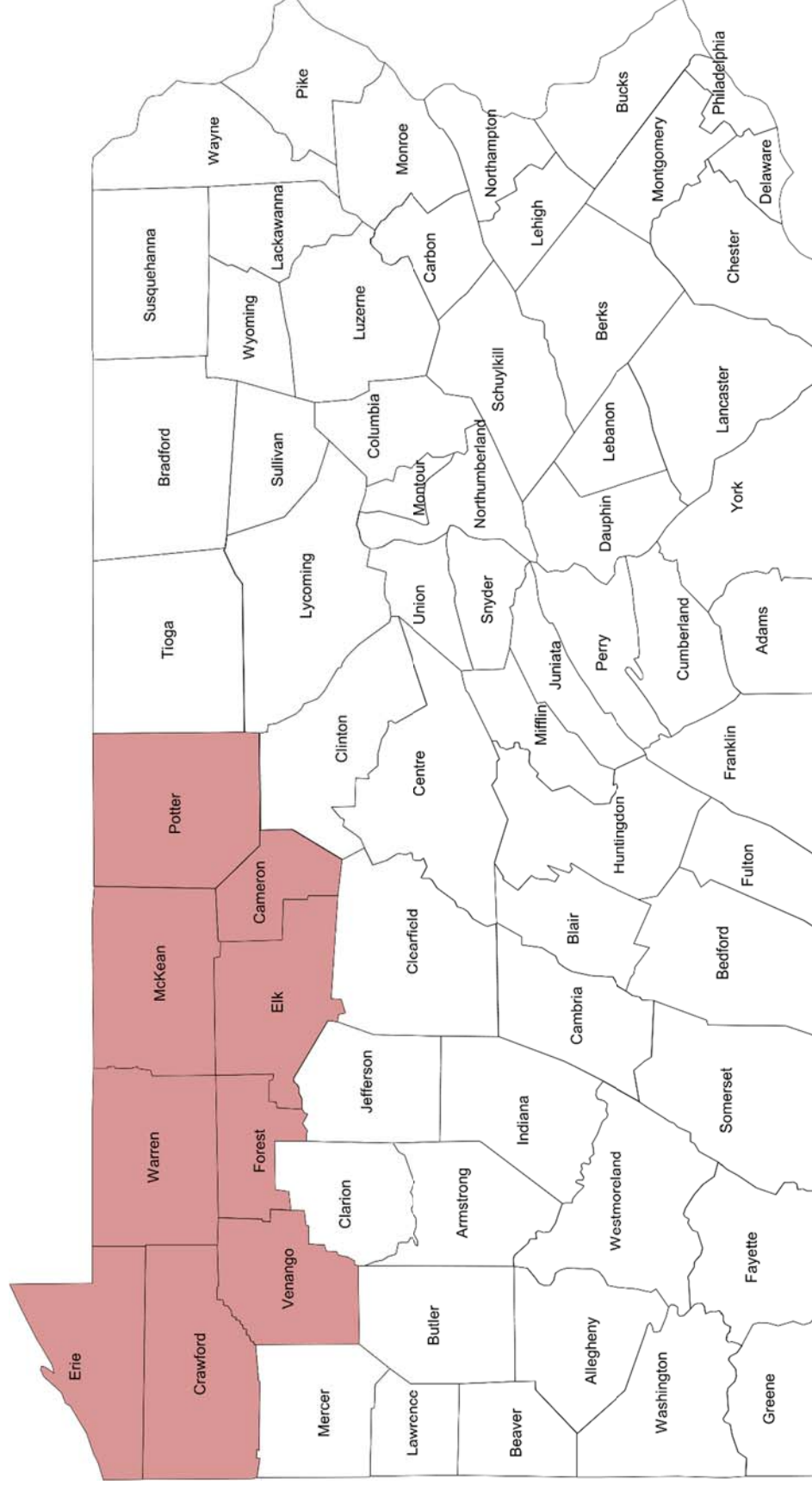
<sup>4</sup> Community Education Councils were established through PDE to identify gaps in education and training and to facilitate the provision of needed education and training in their rural regions.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C for the region designation letter from the Secretary of Education.

<sup>6</sup> Beginning on July 10, 2018, additional counties or parts of counties may apply to PDE and the RRC Board of Trustees for inclusion.

Exhibit 1

**Designated Area of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College**



Source: Developed by LBFC staff from the Rural Regional College Plan.

## The Appointment of the Rural Regional College Board of Trustees

In November 2014, the Secretary of Education, in consultation with the ECUA, selected 15 representatives of the designated area to serve on the RRC Board of Trustees. As outlined in Act 2014-126, and subsequently Act 2016-86, three officer positions were established: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretary; each member serves a three-year term; and approximately one-third of the terms expire each year. The members of the Board met for the first time and were sworn in by the Secretary on December 2, 2014. Table 1 lists the current members and positions of the RRC Board of Trustees.

Table 1

Current Members of the Rural Regional College Board of Trustees			
Position	Name	Title	Organization
Chair	Mary Jo White	Retired State Senator	PA General Assembly
Vice Chair	Ed Pitchford	President/CEO	Cole Memorial Hospital
Secretary	Kate Brock	Executive Director	Community Education Council of Elk and Cameron Counties
Member	Mary Bula	Regional Manager	Learning Ovations
Member	Nancy Decker	President	Laurel Technical Institute
Member	Andy Foyle	President	H & H Machined Products
Member	Amanda Hetrick	Superintendent	Forest Area School District
Member	Robert Kaemmerer	Vice President	United Refining Company
Member	Hank LeMeur	President/CEO	Superior Tire and Rubber Company
Member	Greg Mahon	Budget/Policy Director	Office of the Senate Pro Tempore
Member	Richard McDowell	President Emeritus	University of Pittsburgh at Bradford
Member	Douglas Morley	County Commissioner	Potter County
Member	Susan Snelick	Executive Director	Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania
Member	Kevin Sprong	Director	Crawford County Career and Technical Center
Member	Dennis Wilke	Chairman	Precision Manufacturing Institute

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by Board of Trustees.

## The Development and Approval of the Rural Regional College Plan

Since the appointment of the RRC Board of Trustees, the members have consistently held monthly meetings and took the necessary steps to develop and submit their RRC plan to the Secretary of Education. The Board submitted their complete RRC plan to the Secretary of Education for review in December 2016, and after making recommended adjustments, the plan was approved<sup>7</sup> and the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) was established on May 25, 2017.<sup>8</sup> However, as

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix D for the rural regional college plan approval letter from the Secretary of Education.

<sup>8</sup> The Rural Regional College Board of Trustees voted to change the name of the college from the “Rural Regional College of Northern Pennsylvania” to the “Northern Pennsylvania Regional College” on October 13, 2017. The name was formally adopted in January 2018.

shown in Exhibit 2 and Table 2, the Board repeatedly experienced complications accessing the appropriated funds during the development of the RRC plan, and continues to have difficulties today.

## Exhibit 2

### Timeline for the Development of the Rural Regional College Plan (2014 – 2017)

Date	Event
<b>2014</b>	
July	Act 2014-126 (HB 278) amended the Fiscal Code to establish a rural regional college (RRC), appropriated \$1.2 million in funding to the college for FY 2014-15, and directed an RRC plan be submitted to the Secretary of Education one year from the day the Board members are sworn in.
November	The PDE provided guidelines to the RRC Board of Trustees to facilitate the development of the RRC plan that would guide the development and establishment of the regional college.
December	RRC Board members were sworn in and met for the first time. The Secretary of Education clarified to the Board that the legal entity entitled to the funds appropriated in Act 2014-126 was the college itself, not the Board. Therefore, the funds were not available until the college was established, which would not happen until the RRC plan was submitted to, and approved by, the Secretary.
<b>2015</b>	
February	RRC Board voted to adopt the name Rural Regional College of Northern Pennsylvania.
March	RRC Board signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Board and the PDE that would allow PDE to directly make payments for the Board for services and fees.
April	RRC Board selected the ECUA as Project Executive to lead work in drafting the regional college plan.
June	ECUA completed the process of registering with the state contract system to be eligible to receive payments from the FY 2014-15 funds through PDE.
June	RRC Board authorized ECUA to pursue an agreement with Lyceum Group to conduct research for the RRC plan, the North Central PA Workforce Development Board to gather information for the RRC plan, and the Community Education Council (CEC) of Elk and Cameron Counties for clerical support.
August	RRC Board voted to engage Perry & Associates for the RRC Presidential search. The search was postponed until funding for the presidential search firm could be secured.
November	PDE began reviewing and providing feedback on components of the RRC plan.
<b>2016</b>	
April	Act 2016-25 (HB 1589) was enacted, amending the Fiscal Code to appropriate \$1.2 million in funding to the RRC Board of Trustees for FY 2015-16. The language directed the funding directly to the RRC Board of Trustees, as opposed to through PDE and the state procurement system. The funding was not released for another six months.
May	Regional Education Laboratories Mid-Atlantic developed three surveys and data collection protocols.
June	The Center for Survey Research at Penn State-Harrisburg administered the surveys.
July	Act 2016-85 (HB 1605) was enacted, amending the Fiscal Code to appropriate \$1.2 million in funding to the RRC Board for FY 2016-17. The funding was not released for another 13 months.
July	Act 2016-86 (HB 1606) was enacted, amending the Public School Code to include the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of the rural regional college.
October	The FY 2015-16 appropriation was released to the RRC Board of Trustees.
December	RRC Board submitted their complete rural regional college plan to the Secretary of Education.
<b>2017</b>	
February	The Secretary of Education provided comments and suggestions on the submitted RRC plan.
April	RRC Board resubmitted their adjusted RRC plan to the Secretary of Education.
May	The Secretary of Education approved the RRC plan and the college was established.
August	The FY 2016-17 appropriation was released to the RRC Board of Trustees.
October	Act 2017-44 (HB 674) was enacted, amending the Fiscal Code to appropriate \$5 million in funding to the RRC for FY 2017-18, however, funding currently remains in budgetary reserves.
October	The Board voted to change the name of the college to Northern Pennsylvania Regional College.

Source: Developed by LBFC from information provided by the PA Department of Education and the Board of Trustees.

Table 2

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**Current Status of the Rural Regional College Appropriations**


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<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Fiscal Code Authorization</b>	<b>Date Enacted</b>	<b>Disbursement Date/Status</b>	<b>Appropriation</b>	<b>Amount Received</b>
2014-15	Act 2014-126	July 2014	PDE Contracting <sup>a</sup>	\$ 1,200,000	\$ 196,000
2015-16	Act 2016-25	April 2016	October 2016	\$ 1,200,000	\$1,200,000
2016-17	Act 2016-85	July 2016	August 2017	\$ 1,200,000	\$1,200,000
2017-18	Act 2017-44	October 2017	Not Released	\$ 5,000,000	\$ -

<sup>a</sup> The legal entity entitled to the funds appropriated in Act 2014-126 was the college itself, not the rural regional college board of trustees, and therefore, the funds were not available until the college was established. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the RRC Board and the PA Department of Education that would allow the PDE to directly make payments for the Board for services and fees. The remaining funds from the FY 2014-15 appropriation, roughly \$1 million, were approved to be released to the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College in October 2017, and the application is currently being reviewed by the PDE, the PA Office of Attorney General, and the Comptroller's Office. The funds are anticipated to be released during FY 2018-19, and must be spent over a three-year period (January 1, 2018, through December 31, 2020).

Source: Developed by LBFC from information provided by the PA Department of Education and NPRC staff.

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During the initial meeting of the RRC Board of Trustees on December 2, 2014, the Secretary of Education clarified to the Board members that “the legal entity entitled to the [\$1.2 million in] funds appropriated [in Act 2014-126] was the college itself, not the board. Therefore, the funds were not available until the college was established, which would not happen until a college plan was submitted to, and approved by, the Secretary.” Due to these funding stipulations, the Secretary offered three mutually non-exclusive options to the Board: (1) the Pennsylvania Department of Education could extend existing contracts with a research firm to the board for the purposes of gathering the necessary data; (2) a PDE staff member could work with the board to prepare the RRC plan; and (3) one of the community education councils (CEC) in the region could amend their budget and grant application to include activities in line with assisting the board. It was also determined that the initial one-year deadline for the submission of the RRC plan would need to be extended to December 31, 2016, due to the amount of time that would be required for research firms to register with the PDE contracting system, and to arrange agreements with outside organizations for administrative and other necessary tasks.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the Board of Trustees entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the PDE that allowed the Department to directly make

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<sup>9</sup> Article XVII-E.1 of Act 2014-126 directed the Board of Trustees to submit a proposed rural regional college plan to the Secretary of Education within one year of its initial meeting. The Secretary, and subsequently, Article XIX-G of Act 2016-86 extended the deadline to December 31, 2016.



payments for the Board for contracted services and fees incurred during the development of the RRC plan.<sup>10</sup> The PDE also provided guidelines to the Board to facilitate the creation of the RRC plan that would guide the development and establishment of the rural regional college. Accessing the FY 2014-15 funds, however, continued to be delayed due to the application process and the limit of \$50,000 per contractor per fiscal year.<sup>11</sup>

In April 2015, the Board selected the ECUA as their Project Executive to lead the work in drafting the RRC plan. Two months later, the ECUA completed the process of registering with the PDE contracting system, and the Board authorized ECUA to pursue an agreement with the Lyceum Group to conduct research for the plan, the North Central PA Workforce Development Board (NC WDB) to gather information for the plan, and the Community Education Council (CEC) of Elk and Cameron Counties to provide clerical support. Although the Lyceum Group was able to register with the contracting system relatively quickly, the Elk and Cameron County CEC was not able to complete the application process until March 2016. That same month, the NC WDB elected to not proceed with the contracting system, and provided their services at no charge.

Throughout FY 2015-16, the Board continued to primarily rely on the PDE and the contracting system to access funding due to the FY 2015-16 budget impasse. For example, under an existing contract with PDE, the Regional Education Laboratories (REL) Mid-Atlantic helped the Board develop three surveys and data collection protocols: (1) a student survey, (2) a community survey, and (3) a survey of business and industry representatives; and the Center for Survey Research at Pennsylvania State University - Harrisburg administered the surveys through the PDE contracting system. However, the PDE MOU was limited to the development of the RRC plan, and as a consequence, marketing and the search for a President and other administrative staff for the regional college was postponed until direct funding could be secured.

Although the Fiscal Code was successfully amended in April 2016 to include language that appropriated \$1.2 million in funding directly to the RRC Board of Trustees, as opposed to through PDE and the state contracting system, the FY 2014-15 appropriation remained restricted to the PDE contracting system, and the FY 2015-16 appropriation was not released to the Board until October 2016.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Act 2016-85 was enacted in July 2016, amending the Fiscal Code to appropriate \$1.2 million in funding directly to the Board, but the FY 2016-17 appropriation was not released until August 2017.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, the Board had to primarily

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix E for the Memorandum of Understanding between the PDE and the Board of Trustees of the Rural Regional College.

<sup>11</sup> Pennsylvania Department of General Services procurement rules require that any contracts exceeding \$50,000 per contractor per fiscal year must be bid through the Request for Proposals process.

<sup>12</sup> Act 2016-25 (Fiscal Code) - 72 P.S. § 1722-L(4).

<sup>13</sup> Act 2016-25 (Fiscal Code) - 72 P.S. § 1722-B(7).

rely on the PDE contracting system throughout the development process of the RRC plan.

The RRC Board of Trustees and the NPRC continue to have difficulty accessing funds. For example, although the Fiscal Code was amended in October 2017 to appropriate \$5 million in funding directly to the NPRC for FY 2017-18, the funding has currently not been released.<sup>14</sup> However, the remaining funds from the FY 2014-15 appropriation, roughly \$1 million, were approved to be released to the NPRC in October 2017, and the application is currently being reviewed by the PDE, the PA Office of Attorney General, and the Comptroller's Office. The funds are anticipated to be released during FY 2018-19, and must be spent over a three-year period (January 1, 2018, through December 31, 2020).

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<sup>14</sup> Act 2017-44 (Fiscal Code) – 72 P.S. § 1722-F(5).

### **III. Through Partnership With Gannon University, the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College Is Providing Access to Higher Education Throughout a Nine-county Region**

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The Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) was established on May 25, 2017, with a mission to “provide affordable and accessible education opportunities to the underserved populace of the designated area by collaborating with local educational and administrative agencies, utilizing an innovative delivery model that is responsive to economic needs, and providing training which leads to family sustaining careers.” As described in the approved rural regional college (RRC) plan, the NPRC envisions:

A unique college model unlike anything else in the Commonwealth – and possibly the nation. What this college is not, is simpler to explain than what it is. This college is not an online college; and this college is not a traditional campus-based model. This college will operate in multiple existing facilities throughout any community in the region which has students in need of postsecondary education. This college will be every community’s college throughout the nine county region, and will offer its own degree programming and coursework.

In pursuit of achieving these goals, the RRC Board of Trustees and NPRC staff have begun to build the administrative organization of the college, adopted the education delivery model and support structure used by the Education Consortium of Upper Allegheny (ECUA), and entered into agreements with Gannon University and the Pennsylvania College of Technology to deliver open admissions and low cost, high quality, community and technical education, and training opportunities to the underserved communities within the designated area.

#### **The Establishment of the NPRC Administration**

Although the education delivery model of NPRC is different from a traditional campus-based institution, certain traditional organizational approaches are necessary to meet the needs of the institution. Therefore, Warren, PA was selected to be the location of the NPRC’s Central Administration Center. Once the Secretary of Education approved the RRC plan, the Board of Trustees began the process of hiring administrative staff; and partnerships were established with the Community Education Council (CEC) of Elk/Cameron Counties for clerical support, and the Potter County CEC for technical support during the transition period.

As shown in Table 3, twelve of the seventeen administrative positions have been filled, with plans to hire faculty as the college transitions to being an independently operated college. The President of NPRC exercises overall authority for

the institution, working directly with the Board of Trustees and regional stakeholders to develop and operate the regional college. The Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs (VPASA) and the Vice President of Finance and Administration (VPFA) both report directly to the President. In general, programming and faculty fall under the purview of the VPASA, and finance, administrative functions, information technology, and infrastructure management are the responsibility of the VPFA. Due to the urban nature of northern Erie County and the anticipated higher student enrollment, an Executive Director of Erie Operations and Workforce Development was hired to coordinate all college efforts in that region, and established an additional administrative office in the City of Erie. An administrative office was also established in Bradford of McKean County for the Assistant to the VPFA. Several other positions have been filled to meet the preliminary needs of the institution, and the College plans to fill the remaining positions throughout the 2018-19 academic year.<sup>1</sup> Exhibit 3 illustrates the current organizational structure.

Table 3

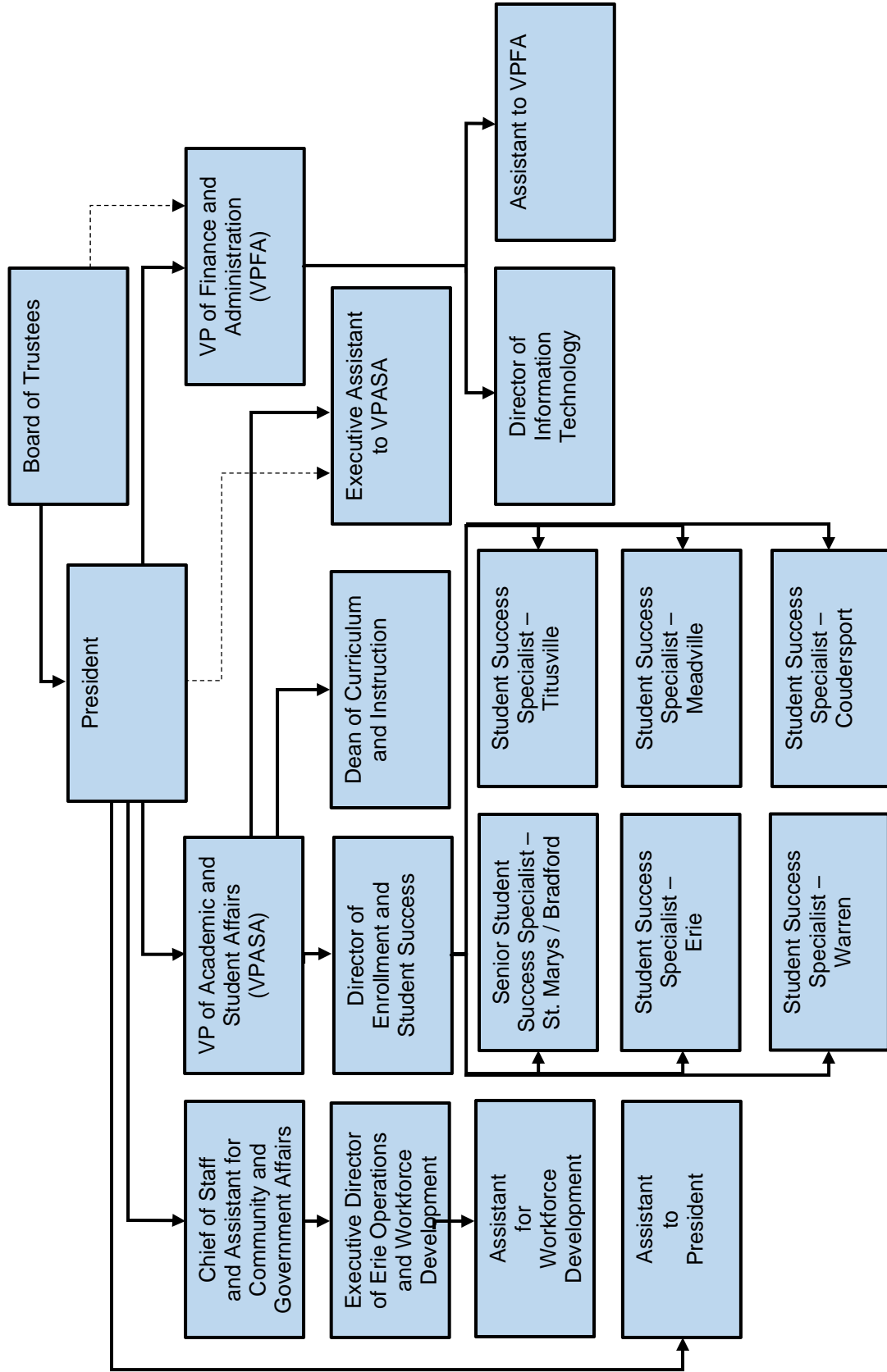
<b>Actual and Expected Administrative Staffing and Faculty Positions</b>			
<b>Position</b>	<b>Actual Hire Date</b>	<b>Expected Hire Date</b>	<b>Number of Positions</b>
President	7/17/2017		1
VP of Academic and Student Affairs (VPASA)	5/30/2017		1
VP of Finance and Administration (VPFA)	9/5/2017		1
Director of Enrollment and Student Success	9/11/2017		1
Assistant to the President	3/1/2018		1
Director of Information Technology	3/5/2018		1
Executive Director of Erie Operations and Workforce Development	2/4/2018		1
Dean of Curriculum and Instruction	3/5/2018		1
Senior Student Success Specialist	1/1/2018		1
Student Success Specialist	3/12/2018		5
Assistant to VPFA	12/18/2017		1
Executive Assistant to VPASA	2/9/2018		1
Assistant for Workforce Development		Summer / Fall 2018	0.5
Marketing/Communications Director		Summer / Fall 2018	0.5
Registrar/Operations		January 2019	1
Chief of Staff		January 2019	1
Director of Financial Aid		Fall 2019	1
Faculty - Fulltime		Fall 2018	3
Faculty - Adjuncts		Fall 2018	5

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by NPRC staff.

<sup>1</sup> An academic year starts in late August at the beginning of the fall semester, and ends in early August of the following year at the end of the summer semester.

Exhibit 3

**Current Northern Pennsylvania Regional College Organizational Chart – Academic Year 2017-2018**



Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by NPRC staff.

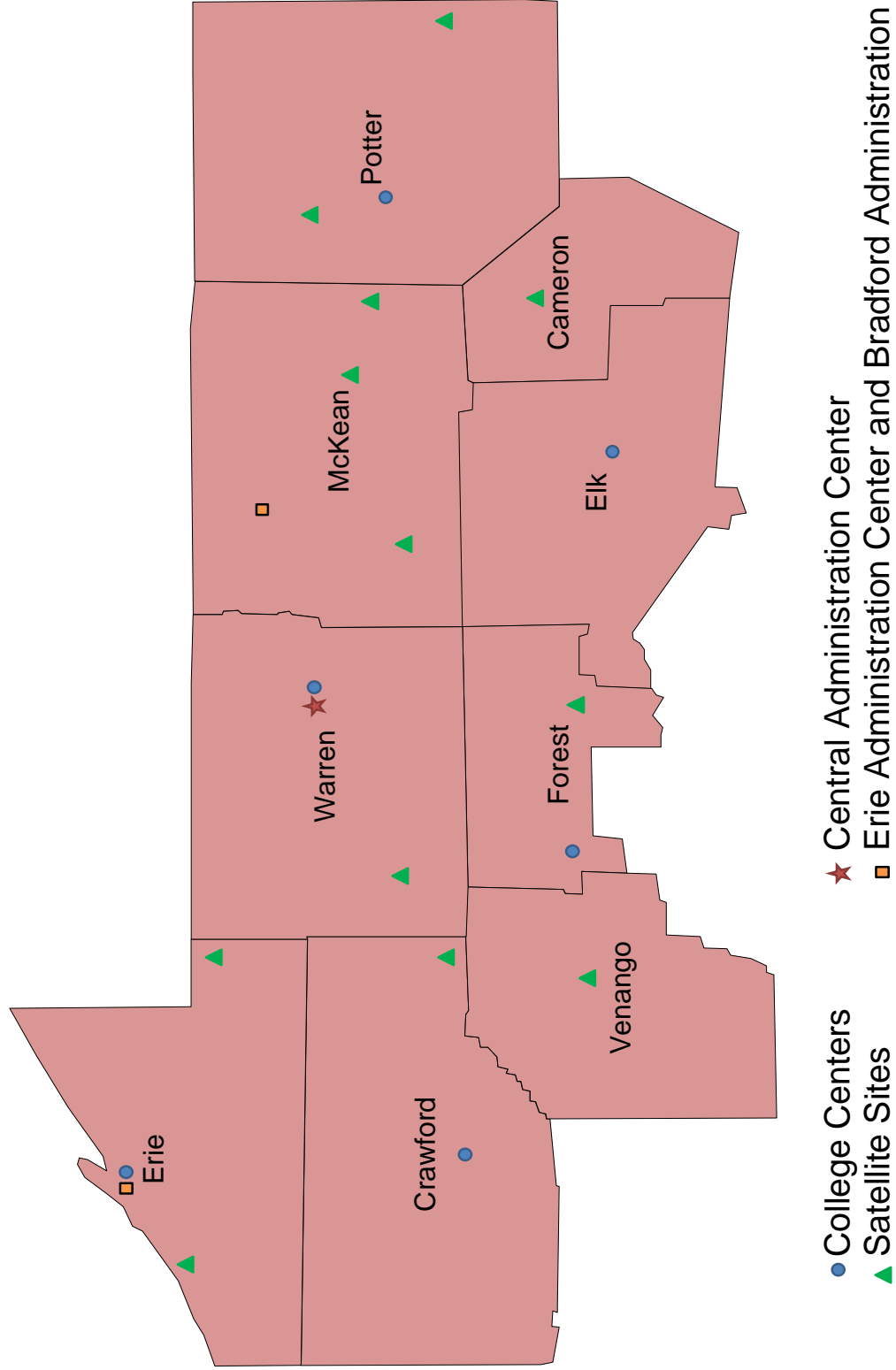
## **NPRC Adopted the ECUA Education Delivery Model**

The NPRC adopted the education delivery model used by the Education Consortium of Upper Allegheny (ECUA), which provided 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. Since 2012, the delivery model was tested and piloted under an ECUA and Gannon University partnership, and has been found to overcome enrollment challenges in small rural communities. Using these methods, the college is able to provide affordable and accessible education opportunities to a critical mass of students located in rural communities across the nine designated counties of northcentral and northwestern Pennsylvania.

The NPRC worked closely with the ECUA and the Potter County CEC to transition the students, education delivery sites, and ITV technology into the new college. The NPRC delivery model currently includes six college centers and twelve satellite sites located in population centers within their counties, and each location has classrooms, office spaces, parking space, and networking capability. According to the NPRC, these locations are fairly accessible to most communities within the region, and allows courses and degree programs to be continuously offered, rather than cancelled due to low student enrollment. See Exhibit 4 for a map of the participating college center and satellite site locations.

Exhibit 4

**Designated Area of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College With College Centers and Satellite Sites  
Academic Year 2017-2018**



Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by NPRC staff.

The NPRC education delivery model relies heavily on college centers located throughout the region. The six participating college centers are located in existing facilities that offer the daily support and student services necessary for a successful college experience, including access to classrooms for course delivery, technology, full-time staff, and faculty support. According to NPRC staff, there is significant diversity in work force development needs across the NPRC region, and therefore, the college is also planning, if warranted, to have flagship education programs that are unique to each college center based on local needs. See Table 4 for a list of the current NPRC College Centers.

Table 4

<b>Participating College Centers – Academic Year 2017-2018</b>	
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>County</b>
Coudersport	Potter
Erie, Gannon University	Erie
Meadville	Crawford
Saint Marys	Elk
Tionesta	Forest
Warren	Warren

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by NPRC staff.

To enable the NPRC to provide affordable and accessible education across its 7,000 square-mile service region, the NPRC delivery model also relies on satellite sites located in existing facilities. These locations offer classrooms and course delivery within a 30 to 45 minute commute for most communities in the region. These sites include school districts, intermediate units, career and technical centers, CECs, libraries, PA Career Link locations, and other community organizations. While the courses are taught in-person at a college center or satellite site, the courses are telecast live to other sites through the use of ITV technology. However, the use of satellite sites is largely driven by student demand, and the availability of academic and administrative support services is generally limited at these sites in comparison to college centers. However, there are currently six Student Success Specialists that travel to the different satellite sites and college centers to provide necessary support and services to students. See Table 5 for a list of the current NPRC Satellite Sites.



Table 5

**Participating Satellite Sites – Academic Year 2017-2018**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>County</b>
Corry	Erie
Emporium	Cameron
Galeton	Potter
Girard	Erie
Kane	McKean
Marienville	Forest
Oil City	Venango
Oswayo	Potter
Port Allegany	McKean
Smethport	McKean
Tidioute	Warren
Titusville	Crawford

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by NPRC staff.

**NPRC Established a Partnership With Gannon University**

Based on the successful partnership between the ECUA and Gannon University, the NPRC established a partnership with Gannon University until the NPRC can successfully transition to an independently operated college at the start of the 2019-2020 academic year.

For the 2017-2018 academic year, the NPRC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Gannon University to continue offering the two Associate Degree programs—Business Administration and Interdisciplinary Studies—that were previously offered through the ECUA/Gannon partnership.<sup>2</sup> The curriculums for both degrees are designed to meet the general education core requirements to provide the widest range of credit transfer options. See Exhibit 5 for the planned 2017-2018 academic year curriculum.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix F for the Memorandum of Understanding between RRC and Gannon University for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Exhibit 5

**Planned Curriculum for NPRC / Gannon University Associate Degree Programs  
Academic Year 2017-2018**

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Interdisciplinary Studies</b>	<b>Business Administration</b>
<b>Fall 2017</b>	First Year Seminar English Composition College Algebra Business Technology US Government and Politics Business and Professional Communications Philosophy of Knowledge Introduction to Literature	First Year Seminar English Composition College Algebra Business Technology Managerial Accounting Business and Professional Communications Principles of Marketing Principles of Management
<b>Spring 2018</b>	Critical Analysis and Composition Intro to Sacred Scriptures Principles of Microeconomics Basic Sociology Philosophy of Ethical Responsibility Intro to Psychology The Protestant Tradition Human Biology	Critical Analysis and Composition Intro to Sacred Scriptures Principles of Microeconomics Financial Accounting Philosophy of Ethical Responsibility Intro to Psychology Legal Environment of Business Labor and Employment Management
<b>Summer 2018</b>	Intro to Philosophy History without Borders Speech Environmental Issues Psychological Statistics Intro to Music	Intro to Philosophy History without Borders Speech Principles of Macroeconomics Managerial Accounting Compensation Management
	<b>65 Credits</b>	<b>65 Credits</b>

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from Memorandum of Understanding between NPRC and Gannon University.

Under the agreement, Gannon University provides the instructors and coursework, and awards university credit for the courses taken by NPRC students.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the NPRC assumed responsibilities for student recruitment, admissions, and enrollment from the ECUA, and provides support services to facilitate the delivery of programming. See Exhibit 6 for a list of the NPRC responsibilities under the RRC and Gannon University MOU.

<sup>3</sup> Instructors are jointly identified and vetted by NPRC and Gannon University.

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## **Selected NPRC Responsibilities Under the RRC and Gannon University MOU**

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1. Provide appropriate classroom facilities in all outreach sites for delivery of the program.
2. Coordinate support staff (NPRC employees or employees from partnering organizations) to provide classroom support during programming.
3. Provide access to standard AV equipment (laptop, projector, overhead).
4. Provide access to an ITV Bridge and ITC equipment at sites selected to broadcast or receive programming via ITV.
5. Provide a technical support contact to work with Gannon University technical support to test, troubleshoot, and address issues related to program delivery using ITV.
6. Coordinate and manage marketing, promotion, and recruiting for the programming.
7. Coordinate the application following the procedures developed in partnership with Gannon.
8. Provide payment to Gannon per the invoicing procedures summarized [in the MOU].
9. Provide student advising and counseling services in partnership with Gannon University Staff to prospective and registered students.

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from Memorandum of Understanding between RRC and Gannon University.

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## **NPRC/Gannon University Tuition and Fees - Academic Year 2017-2018**

Under partnership with Gannon University, the tuition rate for the 2017-2018 academic year was set at \$180 per credit hour, with dual enrollment students paying \$60 per credit.<sup>4</sup> Although dual enrollment students are not charged student fees, students enrolled in an associate's degree program are charged student fees of \$18 per credit hour, up to a maximum of \$100 per semester.

As shown in Table 6, the tuition rate at NPRC is higher than Pennsylvania's fourteen community colleges. However, when estimating the average cost of student fees per credit hour, the combined tuition and fee rate of \$198 per credit at NPRC is in line with the other community colleges, ranging from a low of \$136 per credit at Lehigh Carbon Community College to a high of \$216 per credit at the Harrisburg Area Community College. The tuition and fee rate at NPRC is currently tied as the second most expensive community college in Pennsylvania, and exceeds the average tuition and fee rate by \$22 per credit hour.

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<sup>4</sup> Dual Enrollment programs give qualified high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to be simultaneously enrolled at a local institution of higher learning, such as a community college or university. If students pass their college classes, they receive credit that may be applied toward their high school diploma and toward a college degree or certificate.

Table 6

**PA Community College Academic Year 2017-2018  
In-District Tuition and Fee Rates Per Credit Hour**

<b>Community College</b>	<b>Tuition</b>	<b>Fees<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Tuition and Fees</b>
Lehigh Carbon Community College	\$100	\$36	\$136
Northampton Community College	100	41	141
Community College of Allegheny County	110	31	141
Butler County Community College	108	52	160
Delaware County Community College	117	53	170
Luzerne County Community College	127	45	172
Westmoreland County Community College	124	49	173
Pennsylvania Highlands Community College	127	62	189
Reading Area Community College	129	61	190
Montgomery County Community College	144	47	191
Bucks County Community College	145	47	192
Community College of Philadelphia	159	34	193
Community College of Beaver County	156	42	198
<b>Northern Pennsylvania Regional College<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>180</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>198</b>
Harrisburg Area Community College	174	42	216
<b>Average Costs</b>	<b>\$133</b>	<b>\$44</b>	<b>\$177</b>

<sup>a</sup>. Student fee rates may vary dependent on the requirements for each course, such as the need for laboratory time.

<sup>b</sup>. In partnership with Gannon University, NPRC charges student fees of \$18.00 per credit hour, up to a maximum of \$100.00 per semester.

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from our review of Pennsylvania community college websites and data from the Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.

### **NPRC/Gannon University Student Enrollment - Academic Year 2017-2018**

In partnership with Gannon University, the NPRC conducted a “soft launch” for the 2017-2018 academic year, with nine courses offered through twelve college centers and satellite sites for the Fall Semester 2017, and eleven courses through nine sites for the Spring Semester 2018.<sup>5</sup> As shown in Tables 7 and 8, a total of 45 students were enrolled during Fall Semester 2017, and 29 students were enrolled during Spring Semester 2018.<sup>6</sup> During both semesters, 58 percent of the students were enrolled in an Associate’s Degree program, with the remaining 42 percent enrolled in a dual enrollment program. Unfortunately, no additional student demographic data (gender, race, age, income, etc.) was available to the NPRC from Gannon University.

<sup>5</sup> Several of the NPRC satellite sites were not utilized due to the lack of student demand in those areas.

<sup>6</sup> The number of students enrolled includes students enrolled full-time and part-time.

Table 7

**Number of NPRC Students Enrolled – Fall Semester 2017\***

Delivery Site	New Students		Continuing Students		Total Students Enrolled
	Associate Degree	Dual Enrollment	Associate Degree	Dual Enrollment	
Coudersport	0	0	6	2	8
Erie	2	0	0	0	2
Girard	0	0	0	1	1
Kane	0	0	2	0	2
Meadville	2	0	4	0	6
Oswayo Valley	0	1	0	0	1
Saint Marys	0	0	1	3	4
Smethport	0	0	2	0	2
Tidioute	0	2	0	5	7
Tionesta	3	0	0	0	3
Warren	2	3	2	2	9
<b>All Locations</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>45</b>

\* The number of students enrolled includes students enrolled full-time and part-time.

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from data provided by NPRC staff.

Table 8

**Number of NPRC Students Enrolled – Spring Semester 2018\***

Delivery Site	New Students		Continuing Students		Total Students Enrolled
	Associate Degree	Dual Enrollment	Associate Degree	Dual Enrollment	
Coudersport	0	0	2	2	4
Girard	0	0	0	3	3
Kane	0	0	1	0	1
Marienville	0	1	0	0	1
Meadville	1	0	6	0	7
Saint Marys	0	0	1	2	3
Tidioute	0	1	0	0	1
Tionesta	0	0	2	0	2
Warren	1	0	3	3	7
<b>All Locations</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>29</b>

\* The number of students enrolled includes students enrolled full-time and part-time.

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from data provided by NPRC staff.

According to NPRC staff, the number of students declined during the 2017-2018 academic year, because, “NPRC is a highly non-traditional college and students do not always enroll in programs with the intent to complete courses in a linear fashion. ‘Stopping out’ while dealing with personal or work issues is common, as

is non-matriculated study (that is non-degree seeking) among adult learners seeking self-improvement or professional development. Dual enrollment, qualified high school students pursuing classes, is a transient population depending on course availability and schedule. Many dual enrollment students choose not to enroll [during the spring semester] due to athletic or other conflicts.”

## **NPRC Plans to Increase Student Enrollment With Improved Marketing and an Expanded Curriculum**

According to NPRC staff, student enrollment during the 2017-2018 academic year was lower than originally anticipated, because, due to time and budgetary constraints, there was little opportunity for a marketing campaign prior to the College’s “soft-launch.” However, the NPRC anticipates increased student enrollment with an improved marketing strategy and the addition of several non-credit courses and associate degree programs.

Prior to January 2018, NPRC contracted with Red House Communications for purposes of market research, design and implementation of branding, assistance in selecting a new name for the College, and the initial creation of overall marketing strategies. In early 2018, NPRC formally adopted the institution’s new name, completed its contractual agreement with Red House Communications, and took a more active internal role in the development and implementation of marketing strategies. NPRC contracted with WeCreate LLC to develop and implement NPRC’s website, engage in Search Engine Optimization, and develop and implement a digital and social media marketing campaign. Simultaneously, NPRC has been engaging in a marketing campaign that includes traditional print media, billboards, radio and television advertising, and engagement in local events and advertising opportunities. Reportedly, NPRC plans to hire a part-time Director of Marketing and Communications by fall of 2018.

The NPRC has an agreement with the Pennsylvania College of Technology (PCT) to offer three non-credit technical training courses—Industrial Mathematics, Blueprint Reading, and Fundamentals of Geometric Dimensioning and Tolerancing—during the Summer Semester 2018. The courses will be provided in five locations: Erie, Crawford, Warren, St. Marys, and Coudersport, and under the agreement, PCT will provide the content and instructors, and NPRC will provide administration. Although the three technical training courses being offered do not require laboratory time, the NPRC is also seeking to develop partnerships with local career and technical institutes within the region to utilize their unused laboratory space during evenings and weekends. According to NPRC, the opportunity to provide technical laboratory time throughout the region would enable the College to offer Associate Degrees in Applied Science to better meet local workforce development needs, such as manufacturing, industrial, and machining-related technologies.

In a continued partnership with Gannon University during the 2018-2019 academic year, the NPRC plans to offer two additional Associate Degrees in Early Childhood Education / Early Intervention and Criminal Justice. The College is also in discussions with Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) institutions about the possibility of taking over several of their Associate Degree programs, and is considering their options to provide other healthcare-related training and/or Associate Degree programs in the future. NPRC staff have noted that, if there is enough demand for healthcare programs, this would require numerous partnerships with clinical facilities throughout the nine-county region and the initial expenses could be very high.

As a result of the improved marketing campaign and an expanded curriculum, the NPRC anticipates a steady increase in the enrollment of Associate Degree and Dual-Enrollment students over the next five academic years, increasing from a total of 80 students in the 2018-2019 Academic Year to 500 students by the 2022-2023 Academic Year. See Table 9. NPRC staff noted that most of their students are likely to be part-time, especially in the earlier years.

Table 9

<b>Five-Year Projection For the Number of NPRC Students Enrolled*</b>			
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Associate Degree</b>	<b>Dual Enrollment</b>	<b>Total Students Enrolled</b>
2018-2019	40	40	80
2019-2020	80	80	160
2020-2021	180	120	300
2021-2022	200	180	380
2022-2023	250	250	500

\* The number of students enrolled includes students enrolled full-time and part-time.

Source: Student enrollment projections were provided by NPRC staff.

## **Middle States Commission on Higher Education – Accreditation Process**

Pennsylvania institutions of higher education authorized by the PDE are statutorily required to be accredited through an accrediting agency that is approved by the United States Department of Education. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), an approved accrediting agency, “accreditation is the educational community’s means of self-regulation through quality assurance and improvement. The accrediting process is intended to strengthen and sustain quality and integrity of higher education, making it worthy of public confidence.” For this reason, colleges and universities are required to maintain their institutional accreditation, or be recognized as a candidate for accreditation, for their enrolled students to be eligible for state aid provided by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) and Title IV federal financial aid programs.

As shown in Exhibit 7, the MSCHE accreditation process lists several requirements that must be met in order to be eligible to begin the application process, including the requirements for the college to be an independently operating college with its own faculty and curriculum. Although an institution can be recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation in as little as eighteen months, it usually takes two years to qualify. Once the institution is recognized as a Candidate, the college has three years to meet all expectations for full accreditation.

#### Exhibit 7

### Requirements of Affiliation of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

1. The institution awards postsecondary degrees. Institutions that offer only postsecondary certificates, diplomas, or licenses are not eligible for accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.
2. The institution is able to provide written documentation that it is authorized to operate as an educational institution and award postsecondary degrees by an appropriate governmental organization within the Middle States region (Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), as well as by other agencies as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates. It should be noted that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorization to operate as a corporation is different from, and does not necessarily guarantee, authorization to award postsecondary degrees. The latter is required for MSCHE accreditation.</li> <li>• Government licensure requirements often differ significantly from Commission accreditation standards, and government licensure does not guarantee that an institution meets Commission standards.</li> </ul>
3. The institution is operational, with students actively pursuing its degree programs. It will graduate at least one class before the evaluation team visit for initial accreditation takes place (Step 7 of the initial accreditation process), unless the institution can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Commission that the lack of graduates does not compromise its ability to demonstrate appropriate learning outcomes.
4. The institution's representatives are able to communicate with the Commission in English, both orally and in writing.
5. The institution complies with all applicable government (usually federal and state) policies, regulations, and requirements.
6. The institution complies with applicable Commission interregional and inter-institutional policies, such as Separately Accreditable Institutions, Interregionally Operating Institutions, and Related Entities.
7. Institutional planning integrates plans for academic, personnel, information resources and technologies, learning resources, and financial development.
8. The institution has documented financial resources, funding base, and plans for financial development adequate to support its educational purposes and programs and to assure financial stability. The institution devotes a sufficient portion of its income to the support of its educational purposes and programs.
9. The institution's governing body is responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being carried out. It is prepared to declare, in writing, that the institution will make freely available to the Commission accurate, fair, and complete information on all aspects of the institution and its operations.
10. The institution has a core of faculty with sufficient responsibility to the institution to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's programs.

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from MSCHE Handbook for Applicants & Candidates for Accreditation.



To meet the MSCHE accreditation requirements, the NPRC is currently developing their own curriculum, plans to hire their own faculty during the 2018-2019 academic year, and anticipates launching as an independent college at the start of the 2019-2020 academic year. However, without a partnership with Gannon University or another accredited institution, students enrolled at NPRC during the 18- to 24-month accreditation process for candidacy may experience some difficulty transferring college credits to other institutions of higher education and will no longer be eligible for state and federal student financial aid programs.

As an independent college not yet accredited, the NPRC plans to facilitate student transfer by providing an official transcript of credits earned at the NPRC to any institution of higher education which the student may designate. The elements and requirements of the NPRC curriculum will be aligned with the Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC) standards to ensure transferability of NPRC credits.<sup>7</sup> In addition to a transcript sent to another institution, NPRC plans to include an explanation of its status, initially as a new institution, subsequently as a Candidate for Accreditation, and then as a fully accredited institution.

The NPRC also plans to work closely with MSCHE and Gannon University in order to minimize any potential “gap period” during which state and federal financial aid would not be available to NPRC students. The College expects to be able to offer institutional grants to students during any gap period that may occur. 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. Exhibit 8 outlines the current projected timeline for the NPRC to achieve full accreditation.

#### Exhibit 8

##### Projected Timeline for NPRC Full Accreditation

Academic Year	Steps Taken to Complete the Accreditation Process
2019-2020	Full independent operations begin.
2020-2021	Submit the Accreditation Readiness Report regarding establishing Candidate status.
2021-2022	Be recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation.
2024-2025	Achieve full accreditation.

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from information provided by NPRC staff.

<sup>7</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Education coordinates, maintains, and assesses the statewide college credit transfer system through the Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee. TAOC is comprised of representatives from the participating Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center (TRAC) colleges, state-related universities, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Office of the Chancellor, the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges and PDE.

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## **IV. Appendices**

## APPENDIX A

### **Act 2016-86 – 24 P.S. § 1916-G** **Legislative Budget and Finance Committee Report Requirements**

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PUBLIC SCHOOL CODE OF 1949 - OMNIBUS AMENDMENTS

Act of Jul. 13, 2016, P.L. 716, No. 86

Cl. 24

Session of 2016

No. 2016-86

HB 1606

#### ARTICLE XIX-6

#### RURAL REGIONAL COLLEGE FOR UNDERSERVED COUNTIES

#### Section 1916-G. Reports.

The Legislative Budget and Finance Committee shall prepare and submit to the General Assembly written interim and final reports evaluating the operation of this article. The interim report shall be submitted by June 30, 2018, and the final report shall be submitted by June 30, 2022. Each report shall include, but may not be limited to, the following:

(1) A review of the success of the rural regional college established under this article in satisfying the goals set forth in the rural regional college plan approved by the secretary and in satisfying the needs of the multicounty area the rural regional college was established to serve.

(2) Demographic and program data, including the following:

(i) Numbers of full-time and part-time faculty and student enrollments, in total and within curricular areas.

(ii) Dual enrollment participation.

(iii) Credit hours taught by faculty.

(iv) Distance learning courses offered.

(v) Articulation agreements with higher education institutions.

(vi) Lists of courses with fewer than 20 students.

(vii) Lists of courses with more than 50 students.

Where available, student data shall be disaggregated by categories, including gender, race and age.

## Appendix A (Continued)

(3) Student progress and achievement measures, including the following:

- (i) Retention rates related to student goals.
- (ii) Graduation and completion rates after two, three and four years.
- (iii) Passing rates on certification and licensure examinations.
- (iv) Number of students employed within one year of program completion.
- (v) Placement into additional education or employment in the student's field of study.

Where available, data shall be disaggregated by categories, including gender, race and age.

(4) Economic and work force development measures, including:

- (i) Employer satisfaction.
  - (ii) Customized job training offerings.
  - (iii) Employment status.
  - (iv) Numbers of businesses and organizations served.
- (5) Recommendations for future legislation.

# APPENDIX B

## Nonprofit Designation Letter



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

August 1, 2014

Duane A. Vicini, President  
Education Consortium of the Upper Allegheny  
107 Werner Drive  
Russell, PA 16345

Dear President Vicini:

Pursuant to section 1704-E.1(a)(1) of the Fiscal Code, I hereby designate the Education Consortium of the Upper Allegheny (ECUA) to consult with me and assist me in designating the contiguous counties or parts thereof that will be served by establishment of a rural regional college consistent with Article XVII-E.1 of the Fiscal Code. I have made this designation because ECUA is an established nonprofit organization representing a rural multicounty region underserved by a comprehensive community college program.

I must designate the rural regional college service area within 30 days of the date of this designation letter. Therefore, my staff will be in touch with you in the next several days to discuss how ECUA can assist me in this process and how we can accomplish our task.

I thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation and look forward to working together with you, your staff and the ECUA Board in furthering this significant initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolyn Dumaesq".

Carolyn Dumaesq, Ed.D.  
Acting Secretary of Education

cc: Aaron Shenck  
Jordan Gouker  
Jill Hans  
Dale Hamby  
Tim Eller

# APPENDIX C

## Region Designation Letter



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

September 2, 2014

Mr. Duane A. Vicini, President  
Education Consortium of the Upper Allegheny  
107 Werner Drive  
Russell, PA 16345

Dear President Vicini:

Pursuant to section 1704-B, 1(a)(2) of the Fiscal Code, I hereby designate the counties listed below to be served by establishment of a rural regional college. I have carefully considered the counties you requested to be included in the service area in your August 18, 2014, letter to Deputy Secretary Hans. In making this designation I had to weigh the best interests of the citizens of the region and feel that the inclusion of Erie County in the service area is in keeping with the educational and economic development goals of the Northwest region as well as of Pennsylvania.

Service Area Counties

Cameron	McKean
Crawford	Potter
Elk	Venango
Erie	Warren
Forest	

I must appoint a board of trustees, representing the area to be served by the rural regional college, within 60 days of this letter. Therefore, my staff will be in touch with you over the next several days to discuss how ECUA can assist me in this process of identifying individuals.

I thank you for the assistance you have provided in the designation of the service area and look forward to working together to appoint the board of trustees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolyn C. Dumaesq".

Carolyn C. Dumaesq, Ed.D.  
Acting Secretary of Education

cc: Aaron Shenck  
Jordan Gouker  
Jill Hans  
Dale Hamby  
Tim Eller

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
333 Market Street | Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333 | 717.787.5820 | Fax 717.787.7222 | [www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us)

## APPENDIX D

### Rural Regional College Plan Approval Letter



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

May 25, 2017

Honorable Mary Jo White  
Chair  
Rural Regional College of Northern Pennsylvania Board of Trustees  
4 Erie Avenue  
St. Marys, PA 15857

Dear Senator White,

I write to notify you and the Board of Trustees of the Rural Regional College of Northern Pennsylvania, in accordance with Section 1906-G(b) of the Public School Code of 1949, of my approval of the college's revised plan which you resubmitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education on April 9, 2017. This was a resubmission and revision of the plan that was originally filed on December 6, 2016.

The Department undertook a detailed review of the college plan submitted by the Board, and I commend the Board on the time and effort taken to prepare the plan. Per the Department's existing protocol for reviewing new colleges and universities, we convened a team of internal and external subject matter experts with relevant experience and knowledge of postsecondary education, accreditation, policy, law and finance to review the plan and inform my decision.

Department staff will be in contact with you to provide additional information on what will be required to document the establishment of the college. As the Board prepares for the college's opening, it is expected that the college will continue to submit required documentation to the Department as it begins to adopt student and employee policies, adopt curriculum, and set up financial and accounting systems for the operation of the college.

I wish to also take this opportunity to remind the Board, pursuant to 22 Pa. Code §31.52(b), that the college is required to obtain candidacy status for total institutional accreditation within three years of commencing operations. Based upon your plan, your commencement of operations will be the fall of 2018, when the college will admit its first class of students.

I look forward to working with you and your colleagues as well as the administration you select, to ensure a successful launch of the Rural Regional College.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Pedro Rivera".

Pedro A. Rivera  
Secretary of Education

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
333 Market Street | Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333 | 717.787.5820 | Fax 717.787.7222 | [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)



# APPENDIX E

Project #: 2015016002

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING  
BETWEEN THE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
AND THE  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE RURAL REGIONAL COLLEGE

---

This MEMORANDUM is entered into as of this 24th day of March, 2015, between the Pennsylvania Department of Education, hereinafter referred to as PDE,

and

the Board of Trustees of the Rural Regional College, hereinafter referred to as Board.

**WITNESSETH:**

**Whereas**, Sections 501 (71 P.S. §181) and 502 (71 P.S. §182) of the Administrative Code of 1929 require Commonwealth departments, agencies, boards and commissions to coordinate work and activities with each other; and

**WHEREAS**, PDE is responsible for the administration of the Public School Code of 1949, as amended (24 P.S. §1-101, et seq.), for all matters relating to higher education assigned to PDE or its Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education, 71 P.S. §359, and to make certain designations relative to and approve the plan, budget and amendments of the rural regional college to be established pursuant to Article XVII-E.1 of the Fiscal Code; and

**WHEREAS**, in its exercise of the above responsibilities PDE seeks to assist the Board in exercising its planning activities and preparing the college plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board has numerous responsibilities under the law, including the development and submission to the Secretary of PDE of a proposed regional rural college plan, hereinafter referred to as Plan and

**WHEREAS**, the Plan must include a survey of the educational, vocational and occupational needs of the area and the means by which the rural regional college will meet those needs, reengage high school dropouts to earn their postsecondary credentials and further their educations to reduce unemployment and improve the employable skills of area residents, and

**WHEREAS**, the Plan must also include an operating and financial plan for the college and plan for seeking accreditation of the college, and

**WHEREAS**, the college requires assistance in meeting its plan development responsibilities, and

## Appendix E (Continued)

2

**WHEREAS**, \$1,200,000 was appropriated to be distributed to the college in the regional community college services line-item of Act 126 of 2014, and

**WHEREAS**, although the college does not yet exist, it was clearly the intent of the General Assembly that these funds be used by the Board on behalf of the college for pre-formation and college plan development expenses and

**WHEREAS**, PDE wishes to allow the funds appropriated to the college to be used for planning activities,

**NOW, THEREFORE**, the parties to this Memorandum of Understanding set forth the following as the terms and conditions of their understanding.

1. The Board requires plan development assistance for the college, including but not limited to: a project executive, clerical services, legal counsel and consultants.
2. The project executive shall be an individual or agency selected by the Board to manage the college plan development work of the Board, monitor the work of Board consultants and researchers, schedule and attend Board meetings and maintain the Board's files.
3. Board legal counsel shall provide legal advice to the Board regarding its duties and responsibilities, shall draft articles of incorporation, by-laws, standing operating rules and procedures, review drafts of the college plan and attend Board meetings.
4. Board consultants shall have higher education experience and shall advise and assist the Board in developing the components of the college plan and in determining what information is needed for the plan and how best to obtain that information or data.
5. The Board and the project executive shall require clerical assistance to prepare and copy documents, take meeting minutes and assist with meeting planning and preparation.
6. The Board will notify PDE that contractual services are needed and shall work with PDE to prepare statements of work.
7. When the Board has identified a particular candidate for the position, PDE shall assist that candidate in registering with the Commonwealth and qualifying the

## Appendix E (Continued)

Project #: 2015016002

3

vendor for service under the Invitation to Qualify program.

8. PDE shall use the most expeditious method of procurement possible to secure the services sought on behalf of the Board.
9. PDE shall prepare a standard contract format in collaboration with the Board that will specify the work to be performed, reporting requirements and the payment mechanism to be used.
10. The total amount of funding available under this memorandum shall not be less than \$1,200,000.00, which shall be paid out to contracted consultants engaged by PDE on behalf of the Board and to reimburse the Board for expenditures approved by the Board which were incurred prior to the execution of this Memorandum.
11. The term of this Memorandum shall be from March 1, 2015 and continue through approval of the college plan and establishment of the college, unless the board earlier advises PDE in writing that the Memorandum is no longer necessary and provides PDE 30 days to terminate or assign to the Board or the college all contracts entered into under this Memorandum.
12. Upon termination of this memorandum, any unexpended funds remaining from the appropriation shall be transferred as provided for in law.
13. This Memorandum may be amended only by written agreement of the parties.
14. This Memorandum of Understanding is not intended to and does not create any contractual rights or obligations with respect to the signatory agencies or any other parties.
15. Any dispute arising hereunder shall be submitted to the Office of General Counsel for final resolution.

APR 30 2015

# Appendix E (Continued)

4

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[Signature]  
Secretary Date

BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF RURAL REGIONAL  
COLLEGE

Mary Dowhite 4-21-15  
Chairperson Date  
Kate Black 4-21-15  
Secretary Date

OFFICE OF CHIEF COUNSEL

[Signature] 4/28/15  
Asst Chief Counsel Date

COMPTROLLER

Matthew Eng 5-1-15  
Comptroller Date

OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

[Signature] 4/28/15  
Date

OFFICE OF THE BUDGET

N/A  
Date

PDE Office of Chief Counsel

APR 27 2015

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MAY 11 2015

15 MAY -5 AM 1:42

RECEIVED

# APPENDIX F

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

between

RURAL REGIONAL COLLEGE “(RRC)”

and

GANNON UNIVERSITY (“Gannon”)

**Project Name:** Reduced Cost Associate Degree Programming

**Term:**

This MOU shall be in effect from the date of execution of this Agreement through August 31, 2018 and shall apply to the Fall 2017, Spring 2018, and Summer 2018, semesters at Gannon University.

**Gannon University Scope of Work:**

Gannon agrees to provide the services detailed in this MOU and deliver coursework during its Fall 2017, Spring 2018, and Summer 2018 semesters. Gannon will deliver two associate degree programs (Associate of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies and Associate of Science in Business Administration) at a reduced tuition. These courses will be delivered using a combination of face-to-face delivery and interactive TV.

**Key Tasks Assigned to Gannon Included in this Scope of Work Include:**

1. Provide coursework that corresponds with the proposed schedule included in Appendix A.
  - a) A minimum of 85% of the coursework will be provided at the designated RRC locations; up to 15% may be delivered via online courses.
  - b) Coursework will be delivered during Fall 2017, Spring 2018, and Summer 2018 semesters.
2. Provide the instructor and award university credit.
3. Review student transcripts and allow students to transfer credits from other schools and/or to challenge a class through CLEP testing or other means in accordance with their standard transfer and challenge policies.
4. Final course syllabi will be provided to RRC in advance of the start of each course.
5. Provide RRC with the ISBN, Title and Author of the required textbooks at least one (1) month prior to the start of each course.

## Appendix F (Continued)

maintain full-time status or have transfer credits in order to do so). Students entering after that date or choosing to complete their work part-time are not guaranteed to graduate with a Gannon degree.

16. Operate in accordance with its established policies and procedures.

### **Cost:**

Tuition for the 2017-2018 academic year is \$180/per credit with dual enrollment students paying \$60 per credit. Each student shall be responsible for payment of Gannon's \$100 per semester student fees, and any other course fees.

### **RRC Scope of Work:**

RRC agrees to provide the services detailed in this MOU and pay Gannon University as per item 8 above. The total amount that RRC is responsible for in an academic year (including summer) is \$330,480 minus any tuition collected. This total is subject to change if additional courses are requested by RRC or planned courses are cancelled. RRC will provide support services to facilitate the delivery of programming detailed in Appendix A.

### **Key Tasks Assigned to RRC Included in this Scope of Work Include:**

1. Provide appropriate classroom facilities in all outreach sites for the delivery of the program.
2. Coordinate support staff (RRC employees or employees from partnering organizations) to provide classroom support during programming.
3. Provide access to standard AV equipment (laptop, projector, overhead).
4. Provide access to an ITV Bridge and ITV equipment at sites selected to broadcast or receive programming via ITV.
5. Provide a technical support contact to work with Gannon University technical support to test, troubleshoot, and address issues related to program delivery using ITV.
6. Coordinate and manage marketing, promotion and recruiting for the programming.
7. Coordinate the application process following the procedures developed in partnership with Gannon.
8. Provide payment to Gannon per the invoicing procedures summarized above.
9. Provide student advising and counseling services in partnership with Gannon University Staff to prospective and registered students.

## Appendix F (Continued)

Proposed Curriculum for RRC Program 2017-18

	<b>Interdisciplinary Studies</b>	<b>Business Administration</b>
Fall Even	First Year Seminar	First Year Seminar PSYC 101
	English Composition LENG111	College Composition LENG111
	College Algebra Math 111	College Algebra Math 111
	Business Technology CIS 150	Business Technology CIS 150
Spring Odd	Critical Analysis and Comp LENG 112	Critical Analysis and Comp LENG 112
	Intro to Sacred Scriptures LTHE 121	Intro to Sacred Scriptures LTHE 121
	Principles of Microeconomics BCOR 111	Principles of Microeconomics BCOR 111
	Basic Sociology SOCI 110	Financial Accounting BCOR 201
Summer Odd	Intro to Philosophy LPHI 131	Intro to Philosophy LPHI 131
	Environmental Issues BIOL 103	Principles of Macroeconomics BCOR 112
	Intro to Music LFIN 251	Managerial Accounting BCOR 202
Fall Odd	Business and Professional Communication BCOR 231	Business and Professional Communication BCOR 231
	Introduction to Literature LENG 247	Principles of Management BCOR 251
	Philosophy of Knowledge LPHI 235	Principles of Marketing BCOR 241
	US Government and Politics POLI 111	Human Resource Management MGMT 211
Spring Even	Philosophy of Ethical Responsibility PHIL 237	Philosophy of Ethical Responsibility PHIL 237
	Intro to Psychology PSYC 111	Intro to Psychology PSYC 111
	The Protestant Tradition LTHE 225	Legal Environment of Business BCOR 203
	Human Biology BIOL 104	MGMT 213 Labor and Employment Management
Summer Even	History without Borders LHST 111	History without Borders LHST 111
	Speech SPCH 111	Speech SPCH 111
	Psychological Statistics PSYC 211	MGMT 215 Compensation Management
	65 Credits	65 credits

## APPENDIX G

### **Response to This Report**





# NORTHERN PENNSYLVANIA REGIONAL COLLEGE

Patricia A. Berger  
Executive Director  
Legislative Budget & Finance Committee  
Finance Building, Room 400A  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8737

Dear Ms. Berger:

This correspondence will serve as the written response from the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College to the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee Interim Report on the Establishment of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College. The report reflects not only the progress the college has made since its approval, but also some of the challenges the college has faced during that time. I tremendously appreciate the time and work that you and your staff put into this Interim Report. Thank you for efforts in this regard.

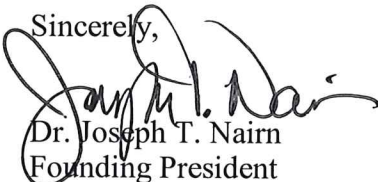
In response to the recommendation made in the Interim Report:

**Recommendation: We recommend that the General Assembly consider extending the final report date from June 30, 2022 to June 30, 2025.** The NPRC was established in May 2017, with NPRC staff anticipating being recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the 2021-2022 academic year and achieving full accreditation by the 2025-2026 academic year. This delay would enable the NPRC to establish itself as an accredited institution of higher education and provide enough time for the NPRC to collect the necessary data for the final report, i.e., student enrollment, student success measurements, etc.

We concur with the recommendation and appreciate the recognition by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee that the process of establishing the college and meeting accreditation standards will take more time than the original timeline provided. The NPRC has begun the process of establishing its own curricula, policies, processes, and procedures, and has made significant progress. The additional time provided by the recommended extension better aligns with our institutional timeframe for independent operations and accreditation.

Again, thank you to your team, especially Mr. Louis Day and Ms. MaryAnn Nardone, whose assistance was invaluable in this process.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph T. Nairn  
Founding President

NORTHERN PENNSYLVANIA REGIONAL COLLEGE

119 Market Street  
Warren, PA 16365  
814-230-9010