

February 2021

Community College System of NH (CCSNH) survey on potential merger between CCSNH and the University System of NH (USNH)

Executive Summary

This short survey was conducted by CCSNH a few weeks after an announcement from Governor Sununu in his budget proposal that would move towards merging USNH and CCSNH, with the initial step of creating a single governing board for both. Very few details were provided at that time. This survey was sent to faculty, staff, trustees and college advisory board members and was open to anyone to participate (although not widely promoted to external audiences). About 91% of the 156 respondents were faculty and staff.

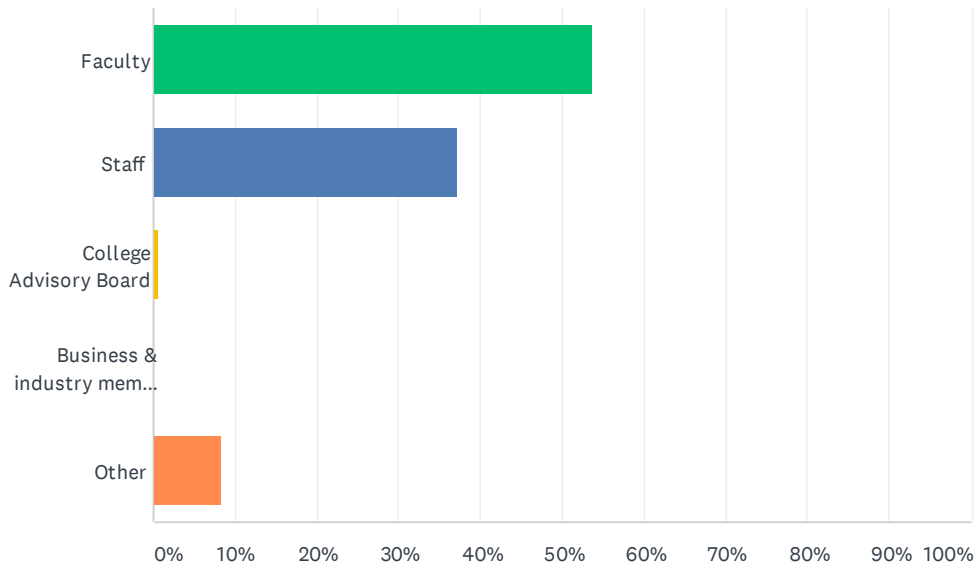
Many of the questions were open-ended. All questions were optional. In order to reflect the sentiment and comments offered by CCNSH faculty and staff in a way that preserves their anonymity and ensures objectivity in how the feedback is curated, CCSNH tasked Cookson Communications to craft this survey summary. The responses to the open-ended questions were grouped based on the substance of the response and then numbers associated with the grouped responses were tallied and then listed, highest to lowest. Those with a singular categorical response are listed under "other." In addition, some of the more detailed responses were included in the report after each of the tallies.

The overarching themes of these findings include the following:

- While more people were opposed to a merger versus being supportive, more said they just don't know enough about it yet to have an opinion.
- Most want to know many more details and posed numerous questions in this survey.
- There are concerns that the missions of the two systems are too different to be a single system.
- Numerous respondents expressed concerns that CCSNH would receive less attention and funding under a merger.
- Many respondents thought a merger could improve transfer options and give CCSNH students access to more resources.
- Many also noted the numerous academic, administrative, logistical, technical and regulatory issues that would have to be resolved for a full merger and questioned why this had the appearance of being rushed.
- Others felt that a merger is inevitable and the time is right to look into it.

QUESTION 1: What is your stakeholder group?

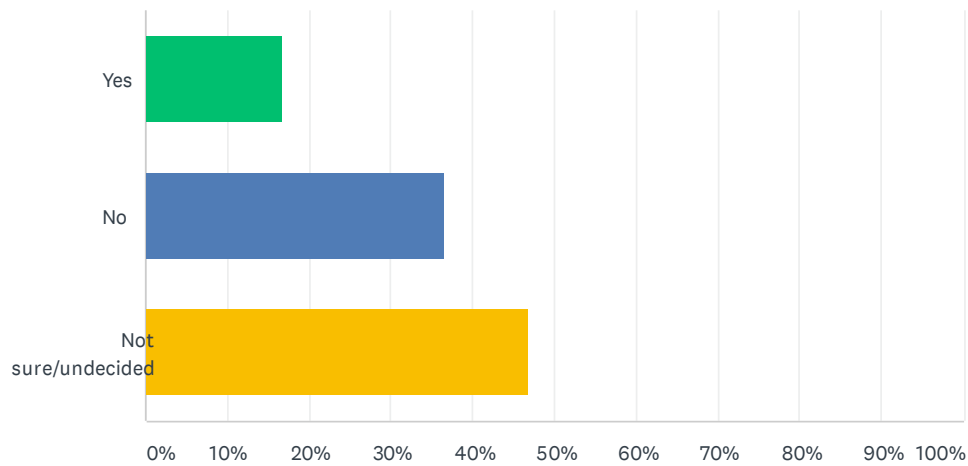
Answered: 156 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Faculty	53.85%	84
Staff	37.18%	58
College Advisory Board	0.64%	1
Business & industry member of the public	0.00%	0
Other	8.33%	13
TOTAL		156

QUESTION 2: Do you support the idea of a merger?

Answered: 156 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	16.67% 26
No	36.54% 57
Not sure/undecided	46.79% 73
TOTAL	156

QUESTION 3: Why do you or don't you support a merger?

Responses that were supportive (open-ended)	# of responses
Will create greater efficiencies	18
More funding and access to shared resources	4
Would be better for students	3
Okay if it is just a merger of the two boards	2
Could improve the reputation of CCSNH	2
Other	4
Total:	33

Responses that were neutral/not supportive (open-ended)	# of responses
Need more details to have an informed opinion	41
Fear of losing CCSNH mission due to system differences	32
Cost cutting is driver, will result in less CCSNH funding	7
Would lose uniqueness	5
Would be worse for students	5
Bad for employees	4
Mergers like this have not been successful elsewhere	4
A merger is not necessary	2
Other	15
Total:	115

Total responses: 148

Sample comments:

"I do not think this is a good idea. The two groups have very different missions and student groups they support. Each group should operate independently to better serve the group they represent. If you are looking for more seamless transfers and more economies of scale for purchasing, there are better ways to accomplish those goals."

"An honest appraisal and alignment of CCSNH and USNH can provide benefits to both. Currently we are in competition with each other. This will be difficult to implement and manage, but can reduce costs and improve higher ed to the state. I am in favor!"

Question 3 comments continued:

“For many reasons, it’s been too long for students to seamlessly transfer from CCSNH to UNH et al. I am of the opinion that the original plan for technical education at the two-year level was not originally meant for transfer. When the technical became community, that is when this should have been worked on. It was not, and therefore this has been building for some time. With the advent of many new administrators on both sides coming from states that do allow for this, thoughts changed. Trends in education along with accreditation requirements make this a necessary move.”

“In every state where this has been attempted (and there are multiple examples), very little money has been saved and the community colleges have ended up being decimated. The missions of the community colleges and the universities are quite different. We have always appreciated being able to make a case to the legislators for our budget based on our priorities and our mission. In a merged system, I fear that our voice will be lost and furthermore, that our mission will be diluted as the universities attempt to divert students who are best served by beginning their journey towards higher education in a community college.”

“The USNH system already seems to be at odds with the CCSNH system, particularly when it comes to transfer of courses, etc. I would like to think combining into one would be beneficial for students to be able to seamlessly transfer; however, based on how other states that have tried this (CT) have fared, I do not have high hopes. Anything that allows the USNH to alienate the CCSNH more under the guise of being “one system” is not a good idea. Separate finances ensure that there is no infighting between the two groups over money.”

QUESTION 4: What are your concerns?

What are your concerns (open-ended)?	# of responses
Impact on jobs and union bargaining concerns	27
Afraid CCSNH will be treated second class/stepchild	26
Negative impact on students	12
Less funding	7
Negative impact on small colleges	7
Will lead to higher tuition/ jeopardize affordability	6
USNH is leveraging CCSNH to attain its goals	6
Negative impact on the trade programs	5
What would the structure look like?	5
Negative impact on workforce development programs	5
Concern about access issues for lower income students	5
May limit educational opportunities at 2-year level	4
There will be much to do in credit transfer work	3
CCSNH is losing our choice/local control	2
Would be good to have less administration	2
Too much politics at USNH	2
Combined system is too big	2
Other	11
Total:	137

Sample comments:

“Concerns are that certificate and 2-year degrees will be reduced, leaving many without educational opportunities. UNH got rid of its 2-year degree program so it is unlikely that they will be supportive of it now. The CCSNH board already is out of touch with what happens at the individual campuses so it will only get worse under this proposal.”

Question 4 comments continued:

“USNH and CCSNH are two valuable and different systems. It is truly unclear what the merger would mean. Where are the cost savings? Would it mean combining system staff, finance, human resources, risk management and decreasing the number of people working in the two systems offices (if so, how does the work get done)? My experience has been at first the staff shrinks but then people are over burdened with work and people are hired. Often more than were laid off. What IT platforms will be used and what is the cost of combining two systems? Will the pay structure for staff and faculty be equitable or different pay structures? What about health and other benefits? What are the unintended consequences of doing this? Who are the people not afraid of upsetting the Governor and legislature and will boldly speak up if this is not the right thing to do or if it is? How will the decision be made who has the final say - educators or those looking at balancing the budget?”

“I am concerned that the plan has not been fleshed out, that a single board will not be able to pivot between the needs of the four-year institutions and those different needs of community college students. I am concerned that it overlooks the abundance of work that has already been done to create pathways between our institutions (and is ongoing). I am concerned about the impact (financially, resource-wise, academically) for our students. I am concerned that neither a 400-person legislature, not a single board of trustees will possess the broad and specialized knowledge needed to address the full scope of higher education, which is already under-supported, in NH.”

“CCSNH has worked hard to improve collaboration within the system which could be compromised should it merge with USNH. While it is important that students have pathways to USNH, CCSNH is also made up of many trade programs and we often prepare students to enter the workforce with a semester, year or two years. Those goals don't necessarily always align with the goals of USNH, and I feel these trade programs would get lost and forgotten since they are not pathway driven.”

“My concerns are that we will not do enough to fully understand (from student and alum perspective), the value of a community college. A large population comes to us because they don't want to go to a larger university, at all or, to start. Or because they are unsure of a plan. Others are looking to only get the training to enter a career. The convenience of a local, smaller campus where they are treated as individuals and supported is at the heart of who we are. How will the larger universities support that population? Layoffs at the community college level as positions are aligned is also a major concern as well as campus closing (particularly because we are so close to UNH).”

Question 4 comments continued:

“My concern is that this, in theory, makes sense. But in reality, there are many pieces to consider which I’m afraid will be overlooked. This reminds me of the 2+2 initiative that was rolled out about five years ago when someone at a high level decided it would work to make transfer easy. Except none of the on-the-ground players were ever consulted, and no details were ever worked out, so in the end it was a nightmare where students thought we had a plan but instead we had a nice publicity campaign and a lot of furious students when they learned that nothing had been worked out between schools. Transfer isn’t as easy as just saying it all transfers or doesn’t - there are many nuances and exceptions to rules. I could see this being part of a long-term plan. I could see the systems working together at all levels to address combining over the course of 10 years or so - but shoving 11 separate schools together without foresight and planning will be disastrous. Easy transfer and matching policies and course numbers doesn’t even happen within the system now, so start there. It makes a lot of sense to start working on these things but in pieces, and with thought and precision and with a reasonable timeline.”

QUESTION 5: What questions do you want answered before this idea proceeds?

What questions do you want answered before this idea proceeds? (Open-ended)	# of responses
What will it look like structurally?	20
How will this impact job benefits and unions?	16
How will it impact our pricing structure?	9
How many jobs will be eliminated?	7
What's involved in this?	7
What's the impact on the students?	6
Is there a vision for the next steps?	5
Why now? What's the rush?	5
What's the benefit or new opportunities?	5
How will funding work?	5
How do we maintain our own identity?	4
What is the impact on credit transfer?	4
Will it be an equal partnership?	4
Where are the projected savings?	4
What is the impact on adjunct teaching loads?	3
What are the long-term effects?	3
Will it bring more dollars to individual colleges?	3
Where did this idea come from?	3
How will it impact the individual student care we provide?	3
What is the impact on departmental budgets?	2
Can we just merge the boards?	2
What new opportunities would it create?	2
What is the impact on technical programs?	2
Will faculty and staff be asked for input?	2
Other	2
Total:	128

Sample comments:

“How will this impact funding for the institutions’ overall budgets? How would it impact department level budgets/purchasing (would we be bound by their policies and procedures)? How does this impact our mission and their mission? How would it impact our day-to-day operations ... again, which policies and procedures would be followed, and how would that be determined? What are the implications on our college-wide accreditation as well as program-specific accreditations? How would we delineate who are “our” students vs. who are “their” students? How does this impact faculty and staff (hiring, promotions, union representation, committee work, discipline, etc.)?”

“This idea must proceed. The question is more around the logistics of how to manage it. Creating uniformity among programs will require the buy-in of the various accrediting bodies. Obviously, there will be layoffs. This is inevitable, but the system cannot survive in its current structure.”

“What exactly and precisely is the problem to which this is the solution? Until this is publicly specified, it will be difficult to accurately address it with an appropriate solution(s). History tells us that pairing the administrations of the community colleges several years ago was not successful in many ways and had to be reversed. What did we learn to apply to this new situation? Conventional wisdom says to ‘think globally but act locally.’ Is this a useful idea?”

QUESTION 6: What are the most important aspects of NH’s community colleges that should not be changed?

What are the most important aspects of NH’s community colleges that should not be changed (open-ended)?	# of responses
Local/community responsiveness	42
Cost, access and ease of entry	18
Immediate workforce participation and business partnerships	16
Focus on the individual student	15
Small class size	8
Ability to serve non-traditional students	8
College individuality and autonomy	7
Certificate programs and trade classes	5
Customer service	4
Leadership/mission	3
Focus on two-year degrees	2
Employee benefits	2
Other	6
Total:	136

Sample comments:

“Our students can go right into the workforce after getting a certificate or an associates’ degree. Will we still meet the needs of the community?”

“Our small size and responsiveness to our communities, businesses and MOST IMPORTANTLY to our students. So many of our students come to us after having had a negative experience at the larger universities in our state. They note the smaller size and dedication of our faculty and staff to their needs as a reason for their success. I would hate to see that disappear.”

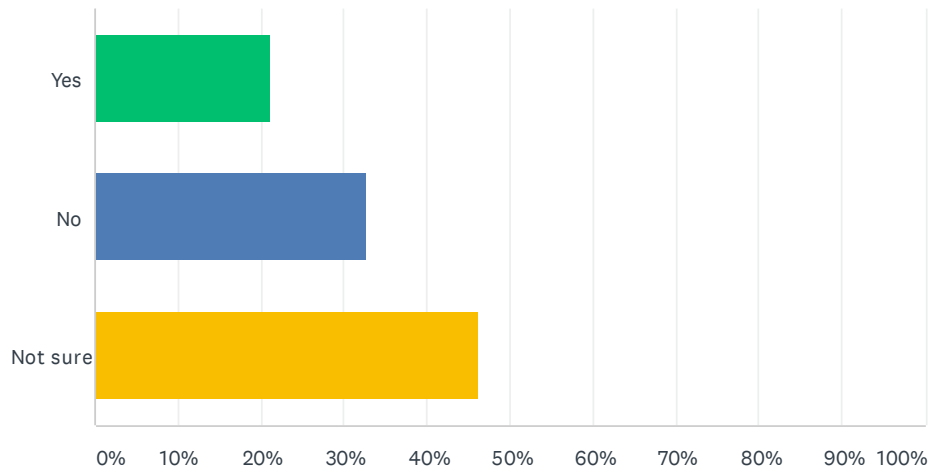
Question 6 comments continued:

“CCSNH serves a very different population of students than USNH. It is important that CCSNH is able to remain focused on access for students who are often older, under-prepared, non-traditional and stop out frequently - CCSNH needs to retain the ability to serve these students well and in a supportive fashion which looks different than a traditional university.”

“We benefit from small class sizes and the ability to provide exemplary “customer service.” Would we lose that high touch aspect of our work by combining forces? Is that even the vision that the Governor is proposing? I’ve heard from more than one student, how difficult it was navigating the large USNH departments and I worry about “siloed” departments and effective communication. We also have the benefit of being agile with programs. We can add a certificate that is needed in our state without too much red tape.”

QUESTION 7:
Do you think the student experience could be improved as a result of combining the two boards?

Answered: 156 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	21.15%	33
No	32.69%	51
Not sure	46.15%	72
TOTAL		156

QUESTION 8: Why or why not?

Why or why not (open-ended)?	# of responses
Lacking details to provide specific comments	17
Better pathways/transferability to four-year degree	15
Loss of mission/individuality	10
Loss of personal student support	9
Improved access through sharing of resources	7
Could be detrimental to non-traditional students	5
Greater class options for students	5
More bureaucracy	5
Transfer articulation agreements already in place	5
Will services be fair and balanced across systems?	3
Affordability concerns for community college students	3
Will create more efficiencies	2
There will be no impact with a board merger	2
Other	22
Total:	120

Sample comments:

"It could improve, or it could deteriorate. CCSNH students would have access to USNH culture (e.g. sports and events such as theater productions) and appropriate level of curriculum that is not offered at the 100- or 200- level at the community college, but it is important to retain the CCSNH college community and its offerings. The single board should maintain objectivity and not lean toward promoting USNH campuses."

"It's just such an unknown. Has it been successful elsewhere (in other states)? There's a need for better acceptance of credit transfer and transfer students at UNH and Keene State. It would be good to see that as one of the first things that is addressed. If this is truly about the students and their pathways, that should be where the leadership starts, not with cutting budgets."

Question 8 comments continued:

“There is not enough information provided for any of us to get a sense of why this is happening now, why it is being proposed or what general outcome is expected. Far more information needs to be provided for all employees involved as to how it would affect their lives and jobs and for the students involved as to how it would affect their education. Answers on benefits, salary, retirement, longevity, part-time/full-time status all need to be addressed for any of the employees to make a rational answer to your question. More information on tuition rates etc. needs to be addressed for the students involved.”

“If sharing of courses could be achieved, the student experience could be improved just by the sheer access they would gain. There are many challenges that come with sharing courses and resources and I think it would need to be done correctly for students to feel the gain from it. For example, if students are taking courses in this merged system, they should be able to receive one transcript that includes all courses they take.”

“I believe a combined board would have the leverage to improve the design of pathways for CCSNH students to enter the university system and at the same time provide exit ramps for students in USNH who might be better off in a trades learning environment. Access to USNH facilities would be a plus for CCSNH as well as increased opportunities for intramural sports.”

“I think that with more information, time and proper planning it could improve the student experience for some students. Not all of our students are interested in a four-year degree, many are being trained for specific industries within our state that don't require more than a professional certificate or two-year degree.”

“If done properly students could benefit tremendously by a merger. They could benefit by: being attracted to the four-year experience versus possibly having to transfer; clearer pathways to transfer which I believe will help to keep more NH students in state to complete their four-year degrees; saving access to a much larger diversity of specialty courses, faculty and programs; being able to plan their pathway from associates' to bachelor's degree with support and confidence; and possibly having better financial aid possibilities. Not sure about this one.”

QUESTION 9: Please add any additional comments you might have.

Please add any additional comments you might have (open-ended).	# of responses
There is a lack of details	10
See economic of scale of a merger	4
More bureaucracy with a merger	4
This seems to be driven by cost cutting	4
CCSNH will lose independence	4
Angry/saddened/see it as a step backwards	4
What's the rush?	3
Process lacks out input and needs transparency	2
Transfer agreements are already in place	2
Merger would cut bureaucracy	2
Other	8
Total:	47

Sample comments:

"Just a lot of questions. How much actual workstream planning/thinking has gone into figuring out 'the details' once you get into combining the systems, such as what will happen with employment elements...pay scales, etc., for current employees and for new hires? What happens with each system's fund-raising? Each system's debt? Reserves? Tuition rates? Union representation/bargaining units? People in the NH retirement system? Benefits programs? Maybe this can't be known until later but do the people pushing this have any idea what this will look like?"

"I think it's a move in the right direction, but also I believe it must be done with careful consideration to how the different schools operate and position themselves in the market."

Question 9 comments continued:

"I think these kinds of surveys should come out to all employees involved and students involved before we read about it in the paper. Transparency needs to happen when making decisions that have a great effect on people's lives. Blindsiding us by finding out about it afterwards does not help our trust in the boards, the college systems or the Governor. Especially in trying times such as these that we are enduring where there is already so much insecurity."

"A strategic plan should be developed showing how this will look and then implement it - not implement and then figure things out. Fundraising and community support will be a challenge as people like to give locally, not to a large organization with uncertainty as to where the money will go. I am a UNH alum and I do not give to them because they are too large and my funds have no impact where I feel is important. Our "small" donors will be shut out as UNH does not place value on their contributions."

"With all of the gains and strong efforts we have made in the past few years, it seems foolhardy to consider taking on the issues and problems of another system. I believe that much of this merger talk is due to politics and not what should be at focus: our students and stakeholders. We should be focusing our efforts to help continue to educate our legislators and help them understand what makes CCSNH unique and important to maintain. Honestly, the talk of a merger is disappointing; I thought we would have learned enough from other states that have tried to do the same."