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**HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

***House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing***  
PASSHE Consolidation

Thursday, May 20, 2021 | 1 p.m.

**Hosted by State Representatives Ryan Bizzarro, Peter Schweyer and Emily Kinkead**

**1 p.m.**

**Panel 1: Association of Pennsylvania State College & University Faculties**

Dr. Sam Claster, Sociology Department Chair  
*Edinboro University*

Lydia Laythe, Washington Township Councilperson  
*Erie*

Mary Jo Campbell, Professor Emeritus  
*Edinboro University*

*Questions and answers with legislators*

**1:30 p.m.**

**Panel 2: Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education**

Dr. Daniel Greenstein, Chancellor  
*Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education*

Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, President  
*Clarion University*

*Questions and answers with legislators*

**2 p.m.**

**Panel 3: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees**

Ross Brumagin, President  
*Local Union 2329, Edinboro*

Shane Clark, Director  
*District Council 85*

*Questions and answers with legislators*

**2:30 p.m.**

**Panel 4: PASSHE Students**

Kyle Hurysz, Edinboro Student Trustee

Majd Al-Halaby, Former Edinboro Student Government Association President

*Questions and answers with legislators*

PA House Democratic Policy Committee Testimony

Dr. Samuel Claster

5.20.21

## Introduction

Chairman Bizzaro, Representative Schweyer, Representative Kinkead, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

As someone who grew up in Lock Haven and a current faculty member as well as an alumni of Edinboro, I am here today to testify in regard to the proposed PASSHE consolidation, and to plead for your help in addressing the true systemic issue hurting our institutions.

There is a crisis narrative regarding enrollment and an impending financial death spiral driving the consolidation efforts. But, the consolidation plan does not propose to solve these issues (issues which are stated as the problems and the reasons consolidation is necessary). In fact, I don't see any major aspects of the plan that actually necessitate consolidation. I believe we are being presented with a false binary choice of consolidate or perish. The Chancellor has listed the following options:

- Dissolving the System,
- Ceasing Operations at Some Universities,
- A Substantial Increase in State Funding (which is not within the power of the State System to deliver)
- Maintaining the Current Path of Sustainability Plan Implementation and Shared Services
- Consolidate

I'll agree that the first four options are not realistic, but that does not mean the current consolidation plan is our only option. This is a false binary; there is another model. I'll try here to outline a starting blueprint to enacting some of the aspects of the current plan, while not endangering our campuses and communities while we give them a pilot run.

Before I discuss the plan, I keep hearing system leaders say that change creates fear. This is not a complete understanding of what is going on through this consolidation effort on our 6 campuses. In fact, many of us look forward to change and transformation. What creates fear, is change without trust. Trust is something that we certainly need to rebuild across PASSHE in order to be successful at system redesign.

As for the plan, for starters, it is not a paradigm shift. It simply turns 14 schools into 10, but keeps them at odds with one another. It keeps us locked into an individualistic competitive model. Where is the systemness?

Make no mistake, the work being done for consolidation is really hard work. Faculty are doing it while we do our day jobs, and on a manufactured and near impossible timeline. While it is hard work, this is the easy path. It is structural contraction; that is why the legislation calls it consolidation. Its overarching design is neither bold nor overly innovative, though some of its components may be. We are already integrated. We just need to re-design to support one another like we never have in PASSHE's history. This current plan does not go far enough to achieve this end -- it just retains the old model for ten schools. Again, this is not a paradigm shift, it is just a consolidation. The real problem we have in PASSHE is that the state has gone from funding 60% of student costs to funding 29% of student costs in recent decades. In addition, and to foreshadow what I will ask of this committee, we have billions of dollars in auxiliary debt service across the system, which the plan does not address.

## **Aspects of the Plan**

### Community Impacts

To start, I would like to discuss community impacts. While the plan lacks a discussion of potential negative community impacts, what is even scarier is that it does not detail any positive community impacts upon implementation. That's a red flag.

If we look at the Georgia mergers, we see some major potential issues for our communities. First, the campuses paired together were all under 60 miles apart except one. Our western consolidating schools are all over 100 miles apart. Georgia consolidated athletics, and while that is not the stated plan here, I just don't understand how the Chancellor's plan can be approved without the NCCA ruling. Perhaps most concerning to me about the Georgia mergers is that the smaller schools lost their identities. I am concerned, as many members of this committee have previously expressed, that through the process of this

consolidation we are going to do severe brand damage to our schools. It's hard to imagine how this brand damage would not translate into lost enrollments. The plan calls for a 2% increase in the West and a 1% increase in the East, without a whole lot to substantiate this claim. The plan also lacks a detailed marketing plan, something absolutely necessary to support increased enrollment after such a huge change to the institutions' identities.

I also have major concerns about the structural and legal transition of three existing entities into one. PA Act 50, Section 2, subsection 1A, explains that:

“The board shall develop policies and procedures which the board may create, expand, consolidate, transfer or affiliate an **institution**, except for an institution with Fall 2019 headcount enrollment greater than 10,000 students. This subsection shall not be construed to include the power to close an **institution**.”

The Middle States Accreditation Complex Substantive Change Preliminary Review Form description explains that California and Bloomsburg will be the main campuses, despite stated and I believe genuine intentions to treat campuses equally. Unfortunately, we and our communities cannot afford to deal in good intentions here. We have to deal in facts, and structural and legal definitions.

In the western accreditation application, Section A.4 states:

“As a public corporation and governmental instrumentality owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the State System and its constituent universities do not possess governance/corporate documents, which are typically required to be completed by nonprofit entities/universities. “Act 188” (**Appendix 8**) as amended (including Act 50) establishes the corporate foundation for the existence and governing structure of the State System and its universities. We do not expect additional specific legal documents to accompany the transaction.”

So, here is the problem as I see it. Act 188 defines 14 Universities into existence, and Act 50 grants the ability to consolidate these institutions. The accreditation document designates one campus within the new institution as a main campus and the two others as branch campuses. I understand that we cannot close

institutions without new legislation. The concern is that once these campuses are one institution, the potential exists to functionally divest of branch campuses and devastate communities.

### Finances

There are many aspects of the plan which demonstrate that consolidation is not necessary. With regard to finances, the plan projects little savings, despite finances being one of the core problems it proposes to address. In fact, the plan clearly states that the Western integration cannot achieve savings because of auxiliary debt. There are marginal potential savings from combining HR, Procurement, Payroll and IT, but again, why is consolidation a precondition for this? Moreover, why are these things not being considered to be shared among all 14 schools? That would transcend the existing paradigm; that would be systemness. The only reasonable savings in the plan comes from cutting upper administrative positions and having Vice Presidents across three campuses. The savings for the plan would be 18 million total annually. That's \$9 million in the west, which translates to \$3 million dollars annually for each school. While I'm not sure that's enough savings to justify consolidation, it is something.

As a Sociologist, I am not convinced that this organization structure would be a functional model to run three campuses. This would effectively abstract the major divisions out of each institution, into an umbrella PASSHE structure. These are the divisions of finance, marketing and communications, admissions, student affairs, and academic affairs. While this may or may not be a functional model, if the system thinks it is worth a shot, ok, but again, this does not necessitate consolidation. We already have Presidents running multiple campuses now. President Hanna in the East has proven that he will need help, as he has already appointed CEOs to Lock Haven and Mansfield to manage the day-to-day operations and to be the forward-facing person for the university. Edinboro will be relying on Clarion's VP for Admissions and is slated to share other upper managerial positions next year. Again, we are already integrated; we simply do not function like a system right now.

## Program Array and Hybrid Learning

We have been told that financial sustainability must be met regardless of consolidation. At Edinboro, we have cut a number of programs to do this. If we consolidate, our students will be able to access hybridized versions of these programs. Again, we can do this now. We can collectively bargain better course sharing and faculty sharing agreements. An example of course sharing would be California or Clarion students taking Edinboro courses. An example of faculty sharing would be an Edinboro faculty member teaching a Clarion or California University course. This speaks to the competitive model between institutions which could be fixed now. If I teach a course for Clarion, Clarion pays Edinboro the lowest rank and step on our pay scale instead of just reimbursing the full amount. The reason we have been given for this is that there needs to be something to incentivize the receiving institution. The incentive is that we are a system! The incentive is our students' experience! Again, we have these barriers in place which pit us against each other that we can remove right now.

## **Financial Strain and a Systemic Solution**

The system claims there will be no job losses due to integration, but that is because they are cutting drastically this year and next. The original five-year plan to achieve financial sustainability was condensed to two years, under the cover of covid, forcing cuts now. Our community members are losing their jobs and our families are being disrupted, at a time when we need institutions to support us the most.

Many of the aspects of the plan which I have discussed can be done right now without risking our institutional identities, nor our communities' futures. There are many other things that I have not mentioned here, like ONESYS, which puts our student data in an a more organized and efficient system, and will be good for our institutions simply as a result of going through this process. By looking seriously at many aspects of our organizational functioning, we can update best practices. Though again, we can do that now.

This brings me to my ask of the committee. I'm sorry it took so long to get to it. What would financially and subsequently culturally help our system the most

right now would be to find a genuine solution to the current auxiliary debt at many of our campuses. This debt ripples negative effects throughout PASSHE. We have an existential problem with what to do with many of our post-industrial rural PASSHE towns. And at the heart of this issue is a lot of empty dorms and other auxiliaries which amount to billions in debt system-wide and cost millions of dollars annually at each campus.

At this point, I'll provide you with a brief history of how poor leadership over the years has created a failed business model for many of our campuses. The dorms and debt on many campuses is a double whammy from the state. While the state was reducing our appropriations, it was also halting construction on campuses. So we turned to our foundations to build new dorms, and despite faculty and staff warnings not to overbuild, we did. Many of the bond agreements require 90% or more occupancy rates, so old buildings sat, demographics shifted (some schools have over 50% vacancy), and the foundations could no longer float the bonds. Then, when the campuses (the state) bought them back, they refinanced with lower interest rates but took on assets well underwater. For example, the auxiliary debt at Edinboro was valued at \$118 million when we bought the dorms from our foundation in 2017, but they have depreciated to around \$82 million. So, the interest rates are low, but the loss is unrecoverable.

Many of the smaller PASSHE schools have auxiliary debt as a larger percentage of their total budget than the larger and more financially sound schools. Edinboro's auxiliary debt is approximately 12% of our annual budget. Edinboro alone pays \$11 million a year in debt service. No wonder we just gutted the workforce in this community, given the new two-year timeline for sustainability. If we could relieve some of this debt, we could provide a structural fix to schools like Edinboro, Lock Haven, Cal, Mansfield, Ship and Kutztown and thus to the whole system. This would save millions annually in interest alone. These smaller schools are paying between \$2 and \$6 million in interest annually.

I know you've heard the argument that the "richer" schools are subsidizing the "poorer" schools. First, this is a perspective which re-enforces the old competitive model, not systemness. Second, we are in fact a system and should support each other through ups and downs. If we all recognize that PASSHE is one big pot of money, then the Presidents of the richer schools like Slippery Rock

and West Chester should be the first to advocate for a plan to absolve the poorer schools of this debt. Likewise, this is a bi-partisan issue and your colleagues across the aisle should be lining up to sign a bill which provides funding to deal with this structural problem. By using this logic, problem of so called “cross-subsidization” can be dealt with by providing debt service relief to the smaller schools. This should be a political slam dunk.

Again, there is a larger existential question about what we do with our post-industrial rural towns, and with these dorms, these “assets on the board” as I think of them. We need to ask ourselves, how can we create constant cash flow? Can we rent space to incubators or tech companies? Can we bring new industry and employment into our rural towns? Can we rent to nursing homes to serve our greying populations, create more work for our AFSCME colleagues, and provide practicum opportunities for our nursing and social majors? Can we consider re-invigorating our towns by using these dorms to provide safe places for some of the displaced immigrant populations at our country’s southern border? Get creative -- build, don’t contract! Stand up for these places; don’t shrink in the face of our challenges.

These are the big questions, but I think dealing with the debt service is something the State System, APSCUF, AFSCME, and our local communities can get behind. It is a policy initiative to get this albatross off our necks. An albatross that kills organizational culture and makes innovation nearly impossible. Chairman Bizzaro and Policy committee members, you have an opportunity to champion a serious effort that we can all get behind. Please take this on. Like the need for student loan relief in this country, I am seeking one time money that would have lasting implications and a positive economic impact through the entire system and through many of our communities. Its impact would be far greater than the mere calculation of its financial impact. You have the power to make relationships and propose solutions to this specific problem. With or without consolidation, we need you with us on this. PASSHE needs you on this, and our students and our towns need you on this. Thank you for your time and consideration.

## Comments from Lydia Laythe

Resident of the Edinboro Community  
Daughter of past Edinboro Professor  
Washington Township Councilperson  
Local Community Organizer

May 20, 2021

My name is Lydia Laythe, I'm an alum of Edinboro's Social Work Master's program and my husband is currently enrolled at Edinboro to get his teacher's certification in middle school science. But my story with Edinboro really starts over two decades ago when my father was offered a job at Edinboro, as a history professor. A degree, which has recently been put into moratorium and incoming freshman will not be able to major in.

With a father as a professor at Edinboro, I attended the Miller School for preschool and kindergarten - which offered Education majors at Edinboro the opportunity to get hands-on experience in the classroom. I grew up on campus, it's where I learned to ride a bike, where my father practiced basketball with me in elementary school, and where I'd spend hours in the university library.

I know the connection professors have with their students. As countless graduates can attest, my father knew his students from the day they walked into his classroom. Students consulted him on academic and professional life choices - but he was also confided in about how to resolve family or peer conflict, relationship advice, or social-emotional struggles. This is the real work of the faculty at state-system schools. And while the administrators at Edinboro University may have great intentions and connections to students, faculty and community members - I can promise you, there is no one that knows students better than faculty. Faculty know their students. So if you want to talk about what students need in the classroom, what students want, what barriers they experience, what strengths they have, what vision they have for the university - the faculty will have the greatest insight into this, outside of the students themselves.

And this brings me to my first point - oftentimes in decision-making, be it national, statewide or local - the people making the decisions don't consult or undervalue the insight and knowledge of the people most affected by their decisions. As a trauma therapist working with previously incarcerated men, I saw this happen at a state level with policy that would increase restrictions on my clients - yet no decision-makers consulted with therapists to these men, probation officers, their family or the previously incarcerated people themselves. When these voices were excluded from the discussion, decisions were almost made that would have, not only negatively impacted my clients, but would have made our communities less safe as a whole. We see this happening in the City of Erie with decisions around Bayfront and downtown development. Sometimes - not for lack of compassion or care - when decision makers are removed from the impact of their decisions they just inherently are at risk for missing something.

On Washington Township Council I've identified this issue around solar farm development. As large corporations based out of Texas plan to develop in our backyards, they mistakenly identified us as part of Crawford County - a minor misstep but indicative of this larger problem of disconnection between developers, decision makers, and the people/community most affected.

All this is to say, I am really concerned - as a local elected official, community organizer, resident and daughter of this community & institution - I don't want to see you all make the same mistakes countless other leaders do when making decisions for someone else. Even with the best intentions, there are so many risks that this institution can encounter in the implementation process - and if we don't have a well-informed team at the table, we could lose so much.

I'm especially invested because I know the Borough of Edinboro's residential properties rely on students from Edinboro University, and one of Washington Township's largest employers is Edinboro University. To say that the success and stability of this community - both the Borough and the Township - hinges on the success and stability of this University is not an overstatement. We all need one another to survive and thrive.

Faculty of Edinboro University need to be included in decision-making in a meaningful way when those decisions will affect their classrooms, their work, and their students - overall, but especially in regards to the forced hybridization of certain courses/departments. As with most decision-making spaces I occupy, I will advocate again: Those with "boots on the ground" need to also be the people with a seat at the table. While many faculty have participated in the consolidation sub-groups and have worked on curriculum in their disciplines, I have heard that they are participating out of fear of losing their jobs, now or in the future, not because they have bought into this process.

As someone who completed my Master's in a hybridized social work program, I can tell you:

1) It wasn't my choice - I wanted fully in-person but at least 2 semesters' worth of classes were online without an alternative, which was frustrating for me - going into a helping profession, "social work," which is inherently based on human interactions and understanding people - a field which I think does tremendously better when taught in-person with hands-on learning opportunities and opportunities to practice skills in-person with professors and peers in a safe, classroom setting.

2) I will say, I see the benefits of online learning - there were some courses that were easily translated into an online platform, where content and engagement was not lost due to the format, and a lot of flexibility for students and faculty was gained as a result. But that's not always the case - and in my limited experience alone, I can tell you there were a handful of classes I would've advocated for in-person instruction only, because of the depth and complexity of the content and work that was required. As anyone whose ever been in a Facebook fight or text message fight knows - tone and context can often get lost or misconstrued online/in text - and teaching/learning is no different. To think we can cut corners and turn courses hybrid without careful consideration and consultation with the experts is - in my humble opinion - short-sighted and narrow-minded. Hybrid education is an art and a science, it is not, nor can it be a one-size-fits-all" model.

I don't think anyone here today has approached this discussion with ill intentions. We all want healthy, thriving communities across our State.

That being said, I have to point out some differences I'm seeing in the investments our leadership is willing to put into our communities. Growing up in Edinboro but working and socializing in the city of Erie, it's become apparent that the way our leadership - both statewide and locally - view our communities is different.

Here's the pattern I'm seeing: Urban hubs, like Erie, are viewed as the epicenters for creativity, innovation, progress, and diversity - meanwhile our rural pockets are, not only sometimes left out of conversations or forgotten, but actively taken from & stripped of existing resources & amenities. Sometimes it seems our rural communities are treated like a dying breed,

to be left behind, discarded - an unwanted carcass of a time forgotten -- but I have something to share - we're still here. We are not withering away, just riding this final wave until we disappear - we are here. We are creative and innovative and energized. Look at the work happening in Edinboro, Waterford, Union City, and Corry - these communities are doing great things, revitalizing, building connections and supporting local entrepreneurs, artists, and local workers - and they're doing it without the same level of public-private partnerships, investments, and attention that the city of Erie seems to get in this County.

We have capacity in the 8 Highlands dormitories on Edinboro's campus to bring creative ideas to utilizing those spaces. We can create mixed-income or intergenerational housing. We could establish innovative co-working spaces. I know the future of this town and PASSHE towns matter to you, so I urge you to please consider ways to leverage these assets to strengthen our communities, to bring in new students, business and revenue.

I hope decision makers and leaders, like yourselves, can take the time to assess the biases, prejudices, or assumptions you may be making about our community and its capacity for change, creativity, growth, innovation, and vision. Our community has vision. We have energy and ideas - we just need your help and openness to see us for that capacity...

So, all this is to say:

1. Don't forget us - we're here, and we don't want to disappear, but if leaders keep defunding and taking away our opportunities for growth and development, we won't have the foundation we need. We need your allyship and support to become the best versions of ourselves. We need your help.
2. Please include our local experts. No one knows better about this community than the boots on the ground - the faculty and students of Edinboro (both past and present) know what the community needs, we know what risks lie ahead of us on this path towards consolidation. If you want a successful consolidation, one that has the support of the community, you have to include the community in the process.

Thank you.

I have been with Edinboro University since 1989 as a faculty member, union leader, graduate student, and Foundation member. Before I came to Edinboro, I taught in a small suburban school district for eight years before it was merged with four other districts for the purpose of desegregating. For the first year of the merger, we kept the buildings open, grandfathered in all employees and had five homecomings! The very next year all individual identities were merged into one district. All identities were lost.

Even though the reason for the merger (integration) was different, I fear for the strong identity of Edinboro and the other two campuses.

I am also concerned about the "savings" that the integration will provide. As I understand it, we will have one president, three provosts, three deans of programs, three admissions departments, and three development departments. I don't see any reduction in the administration unless someone chooses to leave for another position. I cannot forget how all financial decisions were made by the administration pre pandemic. The administration at Edinboro was told to construct four buildings rather than the eight we have at the Highlands. They built onto the President's house with an addition that cost more than the house itself. One president wanted a run for their dog. These funds came from the Foundation which manages the university money. My point: all the poor financial decisions were made by the administration over the 20 years I worked as a faculty member and was aware of the issues.

Programs are being cut, despite academic programs and extra-curriculars being the main reason why students choose a university. The faculty and staff are enduring the worst of these bad decisions.

Edinboro is needed because it is the focus of a borough of 8,000 and township of 4,400. The majority of the fourteen universities are the mainstay of their town.

Merging (integrating) the schools will invariably reduce the importance or close two out of the three. I listened to the Chancellor's presentation. I still don't know what his plan is. I am concerned that committees that include 400 people in total are spinning their wheels.

Please urge the Board of Governors and the Chancellor to revisit this decision.

Thank you for your time. I have two degrees and a principal's certification from three universities in the State System. I care for it deeply as many alumni do.

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PENNSYLVANIA'S STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION



# House Democratic Policy Committee

# State System Panel Materials

## May 20, 2021

## Flow of Opening Remarks

- Dan Greenstein, Chancellor — Introduction
- Dale Pehrsson— President, Clarion University and Interim President, Edinboro University
- Kyle Hurysz— Edinboro Student Trustee
- Majd Al-Halaby— Former Edinboro SGA president, May 2021 graduate
- Questions/Discussion

# At Cheyney, Assessment Produced a Task Force Report (May 2017) Provided a Turnaround Roadmap (1 of 2)

## Key Task Force Recommendations

## Status

- |    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| #1 | Establish permanent leadership for key roles   | ✓ <b>Complete</b> —President, Provost, CFO, and Enrollment Management positions and other key roles are now permanent                    |
| #2 | Rationalize academic program offerings based on student interest, workforce demand, faculty capacity and facility availability | ✓ <b>Complete</b> —Eliminated all 3 graduate programs; reduced from undergraduate programs from 18 to 10, now centered around 4 clusters |
| #3 | Develop new student enrollment approach  | ✓ <b>Complete</b> —New enrollment strategy being executed by new Executive Director Jeff Jones   |
| #4 | Expand Keystone Honors student support services to all Cheyney students  | ✓ <b>Complete</b> —New Student Support Framework to be rolled out in Fall 2018   |

# At Cheyney, Assessment Produced a Task Force Report (May 2017) Provided a Turnaround Roadmap (2 of 2)

## Key Task Force Recommendations

## Status

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| #5 | Reduce cost structure to balance expenditures with revenues  | ✓ <b>Complete</b> —Furloughed admin staff; retrenched faculty; consolidating campus; renegotiated contracts, etc. |
| #6 | Eliminate costly NCAA Division II sports   | ✓ <b>Complete</b> —Withdrew from NCAA in 2018; eliminated all but 3 sports; currently independent                 |
| #7 | Monetize campus assets   | ➤ <b>Ongoing</b> —Five businesses leasing space on campus; 2 contracts and 1 LOI for future tenants               |
| #8 | Create the Institute for the Contemporary African American Experience to reposition Cheyney University | ➤ <b>Ongoing</b> —Launched with initial partners in July 2018; additional partners being added                    |

# Lessons Learned from Cheyney

## A university's financial decline:

- is not linear, risks accreditation impacts, and requires extraordinary efforts once university reserves are exhausted
- is the greatest threat to the system overall

## Reversing financial decline requires:

- a detailed action plan focusing on measurable student outcomes and financial outcomes
- clear accountabilities to the Board and to other universities
- attention to the academic program array and administrative cost structures

## Transformation:

- is a phased, data-driven process with feedback loops
- is hard but not impossible
- requires institutional restructuring **and** state investment

# Influence on System Redesign

**Assess position** (NCHEMS review 2017)

**Identify future direction** (System Redesign – Sharing System 2019)

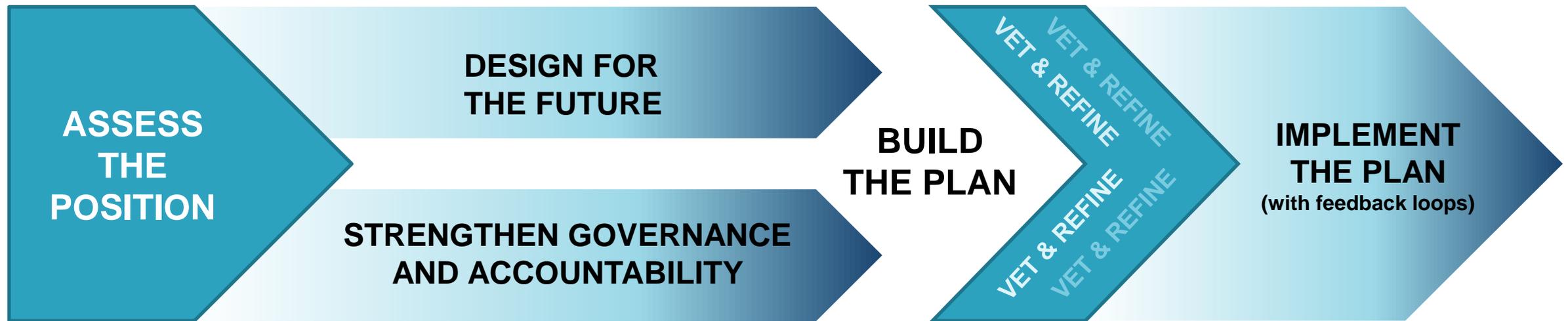
## **Strengthen governance and accountabilities**

- Align around and “publish” progress with key student and financial outcomes
- Strengthen strategy and budget planning and reporting processes
- Introduce horizontal as well as vertical accountabilities

**Prioritize halt of universities’ financial decline** (sustainability policy, ESLP, etc.)

**Find a path for low-enrolled access-oriented schools whose students and regions require comprehensive programming** (integration)

# Diagram of the phased approach to transformation used by Cheyney and the State System



## Integrations Plans available online at:

- Northeast Plan

<https://www.passhe.edu/SystemRedesign/Documents/Northeast%20Integration%20Plan%204.23.21.pdf>

- West Plan

<https://www.passhe.edu/SystemRedesign/Documents/West%20Integration%20Plan%204.23.2021.pdf>



# Testimony

PA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING ON  
PASSHE CONSOLIDATION  
MAJD AL HALABY

Honorable Chair, Distinguished Members, Attentive Public,

Good afternoon!

My name is Majd Al Halaby. I am an international student at Edinboro University from Lebanon, and I come before you today to speak truth as a student who was extensively involved in Edinboro University in general and integration discussions, in particular. My testimony today is not only a recitation of the facts and events leading up to this moment, but also a preface of a success story and a unique experience that started four years ago between the buildings of the Edinboro campus. Coming from a country which most people cannot place on a map, the challenges were unique and extended beyond what could be put into words. There were moments of despair, homesickness, loss and confusion, all of which led to wishful thinking of turning around and going back home. There was something however, that held me back. Whether it was the cheerful smiles of the students, the unyielding support of the faculty or the comforting nature of the staff, Edinboro intrigued me in many ways. The first week passed, then the first month and the first year. I started to notice myself being embraced into a hospitable culture with opportunities that extended beyond academic achievements. I found myself in New York and D.C representing Edinboro in Model NATO and Model UN. I found myself applying to a job through dinning services that put me in close contact with my peers. Serving food became a major event in my college career as “behind the counter” conversations with customers turned into long-term friendships and the sense of service became a sense of belonging. Knowing that I had the chance to grow outside of a classroom was the turning point in my college career, and it led me to seek and attain multiple positions on the executive board of the Student Government Association. Serving the students of EU created a sense of pride and humility inside me. I saw such opportunity as a window to give back to those who embraced me and to a campus which nurtured me every step of the way. I was never the likeliest candidate to sit before you today. I

did not graduate with honors or have an outstanding GPA. I am here because Edinboro gave me a chance four years ago to explore my potential and my abilities. It showed me a different path to stand out and be recognized. When I reflect on my first year here, I wonder how different it would have been if someone whispered in my ear that I will have an unforgettable experience to tell a story about. How different would it have been if I hadn't held on against the thoughts of going back home. I learned that what is more important than making a decision was having the courage to have faith in the decision made. This story is not mine alone. It is the story of first-generation students who looked beyond their family's history and found a few blank pages to fill here at Edinboro. It is the story of non-traditional students who found that the steps of the Admissions office are not so far out of reach, who believed that "for those who strive" is not only a slogan, but a phrase of wisdom and way of life. It is the story of the students with disabilities, who inspired a sense of pride in each and everyone of us and found a path of hope around every corner of this campus. It is the story of the international students who dreamed of a place that doesn't define them by a scarce talent or an impossible skill, but by their eager souls and formidable will to achieve a different kind of success. It is the story of the 700 graduates this past semester and the thousands and thousands over the past 16 decades. That is who we are at Edinboro. We do not pride ourselves with the number of applications we deny each year, but with the number of stories we bring to life. Our legacy is not a fancy name with an expensive portfolio, but a commitment to all and a preference to none. We are not only an educational institution with a curriculum and a faculty, but a dreamwork that bridges today's talents with tomorrow's aspirations. We are a promise to those who questioned their abilities and wondered about their chances. We are pioneers of a philosophy that believes in the power of imagination. When asked about our origins, we respond with the creed that is innate to this campus that we

come from a long line of those who strive. We are who we are, and we shall never give up on who we are, because the way we are is the great way, the Edinboro way. We are story tellers, stories of success that are passed down from one generation to the next, and as our experiences might be different, our story is the same and we owe it a debt to those who will come after us to ensure that their story is told as well. That is why I believe in Edinboro University and as we move forward with integration my belief is unwavering. At this momentous time, we need to have the courage to have faith in the journey we are about to embark on. This university has a lot to offer and if my experience taught me anything, it was that selecting the perfect university might lead to the perfect experience but not the right one. Edinboro was not perfect, but my experience was just right. Right enough, to see myself sitting before you today, privileged and honored to recognize the incredible work we have accomplished alongside people like Dr. Dale and Chancellor Greenstein and the larger integration team. As president of the Student Government, I served on multiple committees pertaining to integration, and I can attest to the fact that beneath the numerical data, objective assessments, and analytical reasoning, there was a common belief in student success and empowerment. We shall not be threatened by integration, because neither the brick and mortar nor the letterhead defines our identity. As a student it is my right to exhaust the full benefits I receive in college, as is my duty to acknowledge those who showed me the way. We might not have all the answers to ease the concerns of those affected by integration, but the story of Edinboro, its mission, vision and purpose will remain alive after we depart this campus, and as we depart, faculty staff and students, we shall take comfort in the fact that our legacy will shine a path for those who will come after us.

Thank you.



**PA House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing:**

*Impact of the State System of Higher Education Redesign Plan*

Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson  
President, Clarion University of Pennsylvania  
Interim President, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania  
Presidential Lead, Western Integration

May 20, 2021

Good afternoon Rep. Bizzarro, policy committee members, colleagues and guests.

I am Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, president of Clarion University, interim president of Edinboro University and presidential lead for the State System's proposed Western Integration.

You are aware that the proposed integration would bring together Edinboro in Northwestern Pennsylvania, Clarion University about 80 miles southeast of here, and California University in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

### **Rich histories, proud traditions**

All three schools offer rich histories and proud traditions that span more than 150 years. Founded as institutions to prepare much-needed teachers for their respective regions, each of the three campuses has evolved over time to meet the changing needs of students, employers, the Commonwealth and beyond. While each change over the course of our long histories no doubt brought some reservations, all proved to be necessary pivots, allowing us to continue to provide the greatest possible educational experiences for tens of thousands of students. We see integration as a next step in this evolution – one that brings inevitable uncertainties, but is also necessary to ensure that we can continue to serve our mission and the students who are at its heart.

### **Transformative experiences**

Many of the students we serve as regional comprehensive public institutions come from families of modest means and are often the first in their families to go to college. Edinboro, Clarion and California have provided access to opportunity and entry to socio-economic mobility.

The transformative experiences we provide through dedicated faculty members and a supportive infrastructure help to fuel students' passions, grow their confidence, and put them on trajectories they often could never have imagined.

An alumna who grew up in a dying steel town, came to Edinboro following high school graduation, and found a faculty member who changed the course of her life is just one example. Her faculty mentor sparked her interest in using photography for advocacy and opened the door to a MacArthur genius grant, awarded to those who show exceptional creativity in their work. That alumna now exhibits her work in galleries around the globe and in renowned publications such as the New York Times and Vanity Fair. She is using her talents to make the world a better place.

Another example is a Cal U alumnus, a son of immigrants who grew up in a coal-mining town. Through the generosity of then-California State Teacher College administrators, he earned a degree, becoming first a teacher and then entering the medical field. Today, he pays it forward as a philanthropist.

There is also a Clarion alumna, who was raised by her grandmother until she passed away. For the four years following her grandmother's death, the alumna was homeless until she was awarded the W.S. Tippin Scholarship to attend and play basketball for Clarion. She now shares her passion by teaching art, attempting to end the cycle of poverty by ensuring that others will always have a way to make a living.

These three alumni reflect the grit and determination so common among Edinboro, Clarion and Cal U students. They are passionate, purposeful and persistent, despite the challenges many of them face, often juggling their studies with jobs and sometimes family responsibilities. When Commencement day arrives, it is truly a cause for celebration for them and for us.

### **Student stories mirror my own**

The stories of our students resonate with me. I am a product of regional comprehensive universities, so I can tell you from first-hand experience that there is a ripple effect to education. Faculty and staff members, and even college presidents, are stewards who have the privilege of touching the future.

The mission we serve is so important. We transform the lives of students who then go on to improve their communities, the Commonwealth and the broader world. That's what gets me out of bed in the morning and why I am with you here today.

### **Conversations/engagement with stakeholders**

Over the past several months, I've had many conversations with various stakeholder groups, both internal and external. I've had regular "tea times" with faculty, staff and students at both Clarion and Edinboro, providing updates and answering questions about integration. I meet monthly with the faculty Senate and have met with APSCUF leadership. Moreover, I've interacted regularly with our student trustees and SGA presidents. I've also shared news of integration with our alumni association and foundation boards. Externally, I've met with public officials, local community and business leaders, and other important stakeholders that serve our regions. More specifically, we surveyed students at our three sister institutions involved in the Western Integration and received more than 1,500 responses. Mostly, we were interested in knowing their views on our Student Government Associations going forward; if they felt they were receiving enough information about integration; and how they most wanted to receive integration-related updates. The proposed academic program array was shared electronically with faculty and staff on March 25 and 181 of them provided feedback electronically before our March 31 deadline. The electronic feedback was in addition to those who reached out directly to our provosts at Edinboro, Clarion and Cal U to offer their input on the proposed array. The array was refined based on the input and a communication regarding the changes made was shared via email with all faculty and staff.

The message we have heard has been loud and clear – our campuses are critical anchors in our communities and our regions. They evoke loyalty and commitment that is impressive and inspiring.

And while there is some uncertainty about what the future holds for our three campuses, there is a passion about ensuring they not only endure, but thrive.

### **What integration will make possible**

Integration will better position us to ensure student success through 1) decreasing the time to degree completion by providing support through wholistic advising and supplemental instruction; 2) offering a more robust first-year experience as students transition to college life. 3) leveraging externally-funded microgrants, something our individual institutions cannot do at scale.

Integration will allow these three sister institutions in Western Pennsylvania to harness their collective strengths and provide students with a wealth of opportunities not found at any single institution. Indeed, not only will we expand opportunities and support services, integration will allow us to hold down costs for students at all three campuses.

Integration will financially strengthen institutions to ensure all three will continue to serve. We will continue to invest in and maintain our brick-and-mortar buildings, while creating a more robust virtual campus. Our plan is to increase online enrollment, growing resources that will support the on-campus experience, while simultaneously serving new student populations – especially working adults who are looking to add or complete a degree.

Integration will enable us to share services and to work together to recruit, retain and graduate students, rather than compete with each other in a crowded higher education market.

### **An inclusive and transparent process**

The Western Integration planning has been both inclusive – involving 425 students, faculty, staff, alumni and other volunteers – and transparent. Updates have been provided to faculty, staff and students, and beyond campus to alumni, friends and donors, in an ongoing way via a multitude of communications channels, from websites to social media to email, as well as via virtual gathering.

### **A historic and significant move**

The proposed integration is a historic and significant move, one that will no doubt be replicated by other public systems across the country and even some private institutions as the higher education sector continues to confront challenges and a dramatically changed landscape.

It has been a complex planning process and will no doubt bring change to our institutions. Here are some key takeaways from the integration plan:

- **Large-scale layoffs are NOT part of the plan.** Workforce reductions will occur gradually, over time, many through retirement incentives, normal attrition and non-replacement of positions. Regardless of integration, we are committed to financial sustainability; this includes aligning costs with revenues.
- **Edinboro, Clarion and California are not closing.** Students will continue to live on our campuses and in our communities, and they will participate in a traditional on-campus experience.
- Edinboro, Clarion and California **are not moving totally online.**
- Athletics will continue. **We will remain the Edinboro Fighting Scots, Clarion Golden Eagles and California Vulcans.**

Finally, if the proposed integration is approved in July, Edinboro, Clarion and California will work together to build **a strong and sustainable future** that will serve students for decades to come.

**PA House Democratic Policy Committee – PASSHE hearing**  
**Ross Brumagin, President, AFSCME Local 2329**  
**May 20, 2021**

Members of the Committee, my name is Ross Brumagin, and I am the President of AFSCME Local 2329, which represents workers at Edinboro University. Thank you for your time today.

I am a High Voltage Electrician at Edinboro and have worked there for 24 years. Our union represents custodians, groundskeepers, maintenance workers, equipment operators, laborers, clerical employees, administrative assistants, management techs, and IT staff at the university.

These are hardworking people who keep the campus operating safely and efficiently – even throughout a pandemic. Now their jobs are at risk. And we’ve been steadily losing AFSCME-represented positions for a decade now. We had 231 positions in 2011, 217 in 2015, and now we have just 125.

We just went through layoffs in November 2020 because of PASSHE’s so-called “financial sustainability” policy. Then on top of that, they are proposing to integrate Edinboro with the Universities of Clarion and California under the umbrella of one accredited university – and eliminate even more jobs.

One of my biggest issues with PASSHE’s integration plan is that it’s not really much of a plan at all. There’s conjecture. There are ideas. There are proposals. But I don’t see much of a plan. It seems like they just want to ram this thing through and figure it out later. It leaves a lot of uncertainty in a time when we have more than enough of that. It also does not give us the opportunity to present alternatives prior to the integration, because we don’t even know what exactly integration is going to look like.

Not only will the proposed job cuts harm the furloughed workers and their families; it spells trouble for the campuses’ surrounding communities. A recent report shows that the consolidation of six universities into two, and job cuts at all 14 of the campuses, will hurt local economies in a way similar to the ongoing experiences in Pennsylvania with factory closures and job losses. Our commonwealth simply cannot afford the economic strain this proposal would bring.

And while much has been said about stakeholder input, I have seen nothing come of our meetings with the chancellor and other PASSHE officials. The people I represent are once again suffering the consequences of decisions they had no input in.

When I had the opportunity to speak with Chancellor Greenstein, I pointed out to him that the State System used to receive about 75 percent of its funding from appropriations by the state government. Now, it's only about 20 to 25 percent, leaving the burden on tuition and fees, which is a real problem with dwindling enrollments.

It seems to me that the chancellor needs to do more to avoid layoffs and fight for adequate funding of the State System rather than proposing these drastic cuts. He is supposed to be our voice. Instead, he is proposing to eliminate some of the lowest paid jobs in the system while degrading the quality of education and service on our campuses. On top of that, he threatened to dissolve the entire system if he didn't get his way. The students, faculty, and staff at our state universities deserve better.

I urge you to please stand with us in this fight to save jobs and the quality of higher education in Pennsylvania. Again, thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have to the best of my ability.

**PA House Democratic Policy Committee – PASSHE hearing**  
**Shane Clark, Director, AFSCME District Council 85**  
**May 20, 2021**

Members of the Committee, my name is Shane Clark. I am the Director of AFSCME District Council 85, which represents nearly 9,000 public employees in northwestern Pennsylvania, including 312 workers on the campuses of Edinboro and Clarion University.

I sit before you as a representative of the campus employees and as an alum of Edinboro, and in both of those capacities, I am very concerned about the proposed integration of our universities.

The proposal is a threat to the quality of education for students, the job security of the campus workforces and the economic viability of the surrounding communities.

By consolidating the universities of Edinboro, Clarion, and California, into one university with three subsidiary campuses, you leave countless alumni like myself holding degrees from universities that stand to one day lose their accreditation. Beyond that, with the extreme reduction of employees and increased reliance on virtual learning, PASSHE's proposal threatens the quality of service and education on these campuses. That is not a recipe for success for current students – nor is it a plan that will increase future enrollments.

This proposal would also be detrimental for the workers who keep campuses safe, clean, and operational for the students – even during a pandemic. Our union represents those workers – custodians, groundskeepers, maintenance workers, clerical employees, and a wide array of support staff at all 14 State System campuses. They are among the lowest paid jobs in the system, yet they are vital to life on campus, and now they are on the chopping block.

PASSHE's proposal seeks to reduce the system's workforce by 14 percent. In the case of Edinboro, Clarion, and California, personnel cuts make up 85% of the overall budget cuts. It is clear that not nearly enough effort was made to avoid such extreme layoffs. It's an all-too-familiar story of the hardest working, lowest paid individuals being made to pay for the decisions of those wealthier and more

powerful – decisions they had no say in no matter how much the chancellor speaks of stakeholder input.

In the cases where university leadership took a step back and looked at the situation, they realized it is not worth it to eliminate and outsource the jobs of custodians. We were thankful to be able to stop such an outsourcing attempt at Edinboro, and similar cases have been seen at IUP and Lock Haven University.

Nonetheless, many jobs of staff and faculty alike remain at risk, and many of these campuses can't take any more job losses. They have been seeing their workforce get decimated for years now. We already saw 120 layoffs in 2020 as part of the so-called "financial sustainability" plan, and now we're bracing for more.

My brother Ross will tell you more about his perspective from Edinboro, but at Clarion University, I can tell you that they have been taking hits since 2013. Through attrition, their campus workforce has been reduced to bare bones. When employees retire or leave for any reason, they simply do not fill the positions, and they double or triple the workload of the remaining workers.

This has been the experience at many campuses, and now they could face more job losses. And even though they are some of the lowest paying jobs on campus, they are still good, unionized, family-sustaining jobs. This is going to inflict major financial harm on furloughed workers and their families, and for that reason alone, we find PASSHE's proposal unacceptable.

On top of that, the economic impact on the campuses' surrounding communities will be deep and painful. Clarion University is the largest employer in Clarion County. That is the case for many PASSHE universities in our commonwealth's more rural areas. To eliminate so many jobs across these campuses will hurt already-struggling local economies as well as the overall state economy.

A recent report from the University of Massachusetts shows that the job cuts embodied in PASSHE's consolidation proposal are "of a magnitude equivalent to the largest private-sector plant closings and mass layoffs of the previous decade in Pennsylvania."

The report goes on to say, "the cuts and their spillover effects will have a substantial negative impact on the Pennsylvania economy. The largest negative

impacts in terms of job loss and revenue decline will be in the economic regions near each university that is facing job cuts.”

And because women constitute large majorities of both the student body of the PASSHE universities and of the untenured faculty on staff, the proposed job cuts would have their most severe impact on women.

While we are not opposed to any and all changes to the system to address its fiscal problems, we are strongly opposed to this current job-killing proposal.

We demand the PASSHE Chancellor, the Board of Governors, and university leadership, do more to fight for adequate state funding and seek alternative solutions to avoid such destructive job cuts.

To the members of this committee, please join us in our efforts to save our members’ jobs. It is clear that the chancellor is dead set on forcing this plan down our throats, so we need all the help we can get.

Thank you for your time today and for your attention to this crucial matter. I will now answer any questions you may have to the best of my ability.

**P.A.S.S.H.E. Consolidation Testimony**

Kyle Hurysz

*Former Student Trustee, Edinboro University Council of Trustees*

Good afternoon, members of the House Democratic Policy Committee and Edinboro University community. My name is Kyle Hurysz. A couple of weekends ago, I had the honor of receiving my Bachelor of Science degree in Economics and Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Edinboro University.

Being that I am originally from upstate New York, I am often asked why I decided to move 400 miles into a different state to attend college. The answer is, when I was beginning to look at post-secondary schools, Edinboro University was one of a very small handful in the country which offered robust programs and services for students with disabilities. While these programs originally put Edinboro on my radar, I ultimately attended, persisted, and graduated because of the University's commitment to providing the highest-quality education at a reasonable cost. However, as I am sure we are all aware, this commitment has been increasingly strained by low enrolment and increased expenses.

As Chancellor Greenstein has noted numerous times, our State System of Higher Education is nearing, or possibly is at, an inflection point. Without bold, substantive action, the implicit promise that we have made to ourselves and our posterity, to sustain a system which enables social mobility for all Pennsylvanians and Americans, would soon become null and void. Fortunately, leaders within the Commonwealth, State System, and university communities readily accepted the challenge.

Integrating California, Clarion, and Edinboro universities was quite possibly the only viable option for us to put our institutions on a sustainable path forward. However, nobody thought it would be easy. I do not think there is a single person involved in this process who does not have an appreciation for the difficulties involved and the sacrifices that have been made for the good of our communities and future students.

Of course, the integration of our universities is not simply a sustainability measure. In fact, myriad opportunities have arisen which would not be possible without the economies of scale offered by the resources of our combined institutions. A wider breadth of services, enhanced accessibility, and greater academic program offerings will enable graduates of the new university to enter the regional economy with the knowledge and experience that employers in all manners of industry look for in recruits.

Naturally, repositioning ourselves to better serve our current and future students, as well as our local economies, requires an incredible investment of resources, including time. To ensure every member of the integration teams keeps the true purpose, benefiting students, in the forefront of their minds, as well as to provide critical insights and perspectives on a range of integration-related topics, students have been involved in the process every step of the way.

For the past several months, my dear friend who is with me today, Mr. Majd Al Halaby, and I have had the pleasure of representing our fellow students while working through the challenges presented by integration with many dedicated public servants from around the Commonwealth. As the Edinboro University Student Government Association President and Student Trustee, respectively, Majd and I served on several committees and working groups, some separately and others together, alongside our counterparts from California University and Clarion University. Throughout the process, I was frequently and pleasantly surprised by the degree of inclusivity we were shown by all of the professionals with whom we worked. It was truly a collaborative process, not simply a half-hearted attempt to feign student representation without genuinely seeking our collective input. In fact, there were many occasions in which our voices were not only welcomed during a meeting but were also actively sought out This

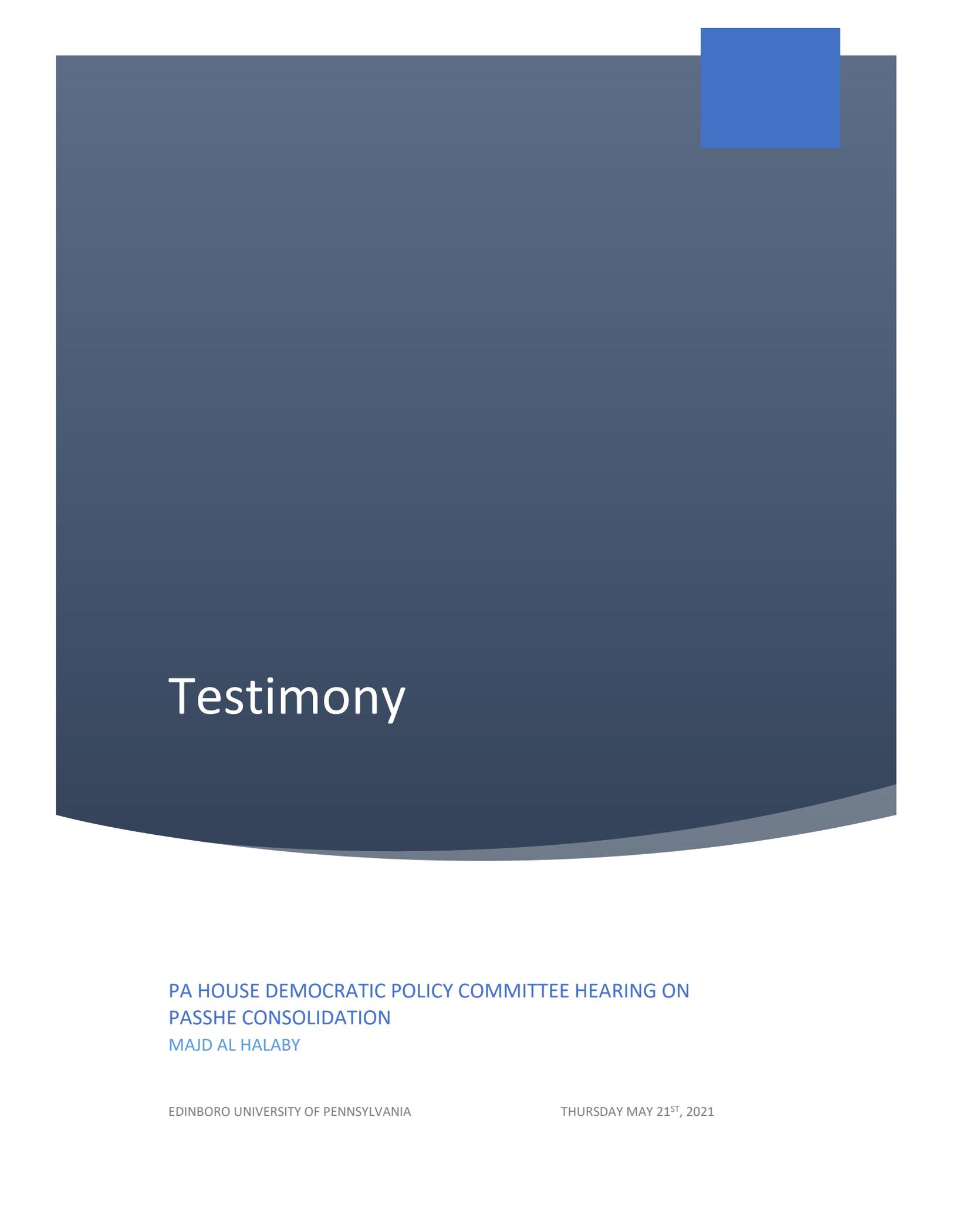
Pennsylvania House Democratic Policy Committee Integration Testimony

Kyle Hurysz

May 10, 2021

consistently exemplified the principle that I mentioned a few moments ago, that everyone involved understands students often know best what they need to be successful.

With that, I would like to introduce my good friend and colleague, Mr. Majd Al Halaby. Following Majd's remarks, we would be more than happy to answer any questions which you may have. Thank you.



# Testimony

PA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING ON  
PASSHE CONSOLIDATION  
MAJD AL HALABY

Honorable Chair, Distinguished Members, Attentive Public,

Good afternoon!

My name is Majd Al Halaby. I am an international student at Edinboro University from Lebanon, and I come before you today to speak truth as a student who was extensively involved in Edinboro University in general and integration discussions, in particular. My testimony today is not only a recitation of the facts and events leading up to this moment, but also a preface of a success story and a unique experience that started four years ago between the buildings of the Edinboro campus. Coming from a country which most people cannot place on a map, the challenges were unique and extended beyond what could be put into words. There were moments of despair, homesickness, loss and confusion, all of which led to wishful thinking of turning around and going back home. There was something however, that held me back. Whether it was the cheerful smiles of the students, the unyielding support of the faculty or the comforting nature of the staff, Edinboro intrigued me in many ways. The first week passed, then the first month and the first year. I started to notice myself being embraced into a hospitable culture with opportunities that extended beyond academic achievements. I found myself in New York and D.C representing Edinboro in Model NATO and Model UN. I found myself applying to a job through dinning services that put me in close contact with my peers. Serving food became a major event in my college career as “behind the counter” conversations with customers turned into long-term friendships and the sense of service became a sense of belonging. Knowing that I had the chance to grow outside of a classroom was the turning point in my college career, and it led me to seek and attain multiple positions on the executive board of the Student Government Association. Serving the students of EU created a sense of pride and humility inside me. I saw such opportunity as a window to give back to those who embraced me and to a campus which nurtured me every step of the way. I was never the likeliest candidate to sit before you today. I

did not graduate with honors or have an outstanding GPA. I am here because Edinboro gave me a chance four years ago to explore my potential and my abilities. It showed me a different path to stand out and be recognized. When I reflect on my first year here, I wonder how different it would have been if someone whispered in my ear that I will have an unforgettable experience to tell a story about. How different would it have been if I hadn't held on against the thoughts of going back home. I learned that what is more important than making a decision was having the courage to have faith in the decision made. This story is not mine alone. It is the story of first-generation students who looked beyond their family's history and found a few blank pages to fill here at Edinboro. It is the story of non - traditional students who found that the steps of the Admissions office are not so far out of reach, who believed that "for those who strive" is not only a slogan, but a phrase of wisdom and way of life. It is the story of the students with disabilities, who inspired a sense of pride in each and everyone of us and found a path of hope around every corner of this campus. It is the story of the international students who dreamed of a place that doesn't define them by a scarce talent or an impossible skill, but by their eager souls and formidable will to achieve a different kind of success. It is the story of the 700 graduates this past semester and the thousands and thousands over the past 16 decades. That is who we are at Edinboro. We do not pride ourselves with the number of applications we deny each year, but with the number of stories we bring to life. Our legacy is not a fancy name with an expensive portfolio, but a commitment to all and a preference to none. We are not only an educational institution with a curriculum and a faculty, but a dreamwork that bridges today's talents with tomorrow's aspirations. We are a promise to those who questioned their abilities and wondered about their chances. We are pioneers of a philosophy that believes in the power of imagination. When asked about our origins, we respond with the creed that is innate to this campus that we

come from a long line of those who strive. We are who we are, and we shall never give up on who we are, because the way we are is the great way, the Edinboro way. We are story tellers, stories of success that are passed down from one generation to the next, and as our experiences might be different, our story is the same and we owe it a debt to those who will come after us to ensure that their story is told as well. That is why I believe in Edinboro University and as we move forward with integration my belief is unwavering. At this momentous time, we need to have the courage to have faith in the journey we are about to embark on. This university has a lot to offer and if my experience taught me anything, it was that selecting the perfect university might lead to the perfect experience but not the right one. Edinboro was not perfect, but my experience was just right. Right enough, to see myself sitting before you today, privileged and honored to recognize the incredible work we have accomplished alongside people like Dr. Dale and Chancellor Greenstein and the larger integration team. As president of the Student Government, I served on multiple committees pertaining to integration, and I can attest to the fact that beneath the numerical data, objective assessments, and analytical reasoning, there was a common belief in student success and empowerment. We shall not be threatened by integration, because neither the brick and mortar nor the letterhead defines our identity. As a student it is my right to exhaust the full benefits I receive in college, as is my duty to acknowledge those who showed me the way. We might not have all the answers to ease the concerns of those affected by integration, but the story of Edinboro, its mission, vision and purpose will remain alive after we depart this campus, and as we depart, faculty staff and students, we shall take comfort in the fact that our legacy will shine a path for those who will come after us.

Thank you.