Some Conclusions

1. The “merging” of the Community Colleges and the four state CSU state universities has resulted in a succession of presidents (five in seven years), and a bloated system office bureaucracy (averaging 150 in any given year, currently 144), for an annual cost of app. $35 million and more than $¼ billion over its brief lifetime – an unstable leadership (5 Presidents in 7 years) combined with excessive costs.

2. One of the major reasons for the merging – efficient and transparent student transfer of credits from the CCs to the CSUs – has resulted in Transfer Articulation Policies (TAPs) – developed largely by two faculty assigned to the System Office, at a fraction of the overall cost of the BOR. Moreover, the efficacy of this program has yet to be fully demonstrated.

3. The BOR has almost entirely failed to uphold the legislative mandate of distinguishing between the distinct mandates of the CCs and that of the CSUs and has focused instead on “merging” the two distinct areas of public higher education.

4. Faculty serving on Faculty Advisory Committee have closely followed the work of the BOR and acted as a principled opposition to misguided projects that the BOR has developed, along with suggestions for improvements to existing operations. The Board, despite advice to the contrary, has persisted in failed or failing projects which put in jeopardy academic excellence, institutional autonomy and shared governance.

5. Transform 2020, the first major initiative of the BOR was a failure, misspending nearly $2 million on an out-sourced plan which failed to incorporate faculty input, which was unrealistic and rejected by faculty, resulting in system-wide votes of non-confidence and the resignation of the President.

6. The second major initiative of the BOR “Students First” suffers from many of the same problems as the preceding Transform 2020 – with no faculty input at its inception, out-sourcing of finance plans to third parties, increased hiring for the System Office and attempts to centralize campus support staff along with possible “position sharing” across campuses; non-respect of the collective agreement for administrative faculty, non-respect of teaching faculty governance over curriculum, concerns expressed by the NEASC accrediting agency, and planning team reports which fail to account for the projected $41 million in annual savings.

7. The consolidation of community colleges into a single institution does not significantly reduce the number of executive positions, and so does not produce its expected major part of the $28 million per year savings; moreover, it does not take into account the role of community colleges as local institutions with local stakeholder financial and civic support.

8. The planned consolidation of “back office” operations of the four CSU universities will not produce the expected $13 million in savings, and is detrimental to the autonomy of the institutions, in particular local control over financial operations in order to implement campus policies, and local offering of information technology services and support.

9. The system office is unwilling to consider cost-saving measures such as a significant reduction in its own IT staff, many if not most of whom would be better employed filling vacancies and
needs at the campus level. Additional and substantial savings could be achieved through the use of open-source software which is inexpensive, scalable and secure.

10. The System Office is cut off from the academic reality of the constituent institutions, as evidenced by the ill-conceived “Design Thinking”, and dubious outsourcing of development of teaching skills proposed in “Student Success Through Quality Instruction”.

11. Overall, the CONNCSU/CSCU “experiment” has cost ¼ of a billion dollars just for System Office operations, and within a short time will reach 1/3 of a billion, with very few positive results (other than the TAPS, with application still to be seen).

12. The BOR has generated controversy and after controversy with little or no progress towards real accomplishments that substantially improve public higher education; it has wasted tens and indeed hundreds of millions of dollars, along with the time spent developing failed or failing projects, indicating that the decision to establish it needs to be reviewed, and simpler, more responsive and less expensive structures developed to replace it.

A simplified Alternative

What might this look like? Here is a simplified initial proposal:

1. Eliminate the merged System Office and Board of Regents, and restore Board of Trustees, one each for the Community Colleges and the State Universities (Some would argue for individual Boards for each university). Reduce administrative bloat at all levels.

2. Limit the number of support staff to a fraction of those currently employed and impose a maximum size and budget for each of the two System Offices, taking into account only needed functions which do not duplicate already existing ones at the campus level. Rather than centralizing with resultant bureaucratic bloat, decentralize to produce real savings.

3. The University System office would only require a small team of IT personnel to serve the needs of the Board and its staff; the rest could be offered positions at the campus level as these become available through retirements or resignations.

4. The Community College System office would require a larger IT staff as some community colleges do not have their own email servers or other IT services; but the grossly inflated 67 member IT department would be considerably reduced.

5. Replace costly and burdensome proprietary software in areas where comparable open-source software is available which is scalable and secure.

6. Eliminate all out-sourcing of planning and project management by consulting groups and third parties; there are sufficient resources within the systems to accomplish these tasks if these tasks are conducted with real, not sham consultation of all stakeholders.

7. The Transfer Articulation process should be maintained as a working group established between the State University and the Community College systems, with (as at present) a small number of
teaching faculty assigned to the task, with some support staff for technical needs, all of which
would be under the supervision of the Chancellors of the two systems.

8. Savings in the millions, and more likely the tens of millions per year could thereby be achieved
without consolidating or closing any campuses, consolidating “back offices” at universities or
diverting needed campus funds to system operations.