



# Office of Higher Education

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**January 2023**

**Timothy D. Larson**  
Executive Director





Thanks to Governor Lamont's strong leadership and support of higher education, students *of all ages and economic status* are now more informed about the many learning opportunities available to them once they've completed high school.

And with new statewide initiatives that include universal FAFSA participation, a newly established, far more secure financial aid software system, and a comprehensive credential registry, Connecticut will have the tools to ensure its future workforce is smarter and stronger than ever.



**The Office of Higher Education, which became an executive agency in 2012, was reorganized into three programmatic divisions in 2019: Academic Affairs, Finance and Human Resources, and Programs and Student Services.**

**Academic Affairs – Authorization for the state’s independent colleges and universities, private career school authorization, State Approving Agency for the U.S. Department of Veterans and maintenance of the state's newly updated Credential Registry**

**Finance and Human Resources - Finance and Business Services, agency Human Resources, Student Financial Aid – Roberta B. Willis Scholarship, Minority Teacher Incentive Program, etc., data collection and evaluation, and grant administration**

**Programs and Student Services - National Service Initiative (AmeriCorps), Minority Advancement Program, and Alternate Route to Certification**

# **Agency Organization**

# Executive Office

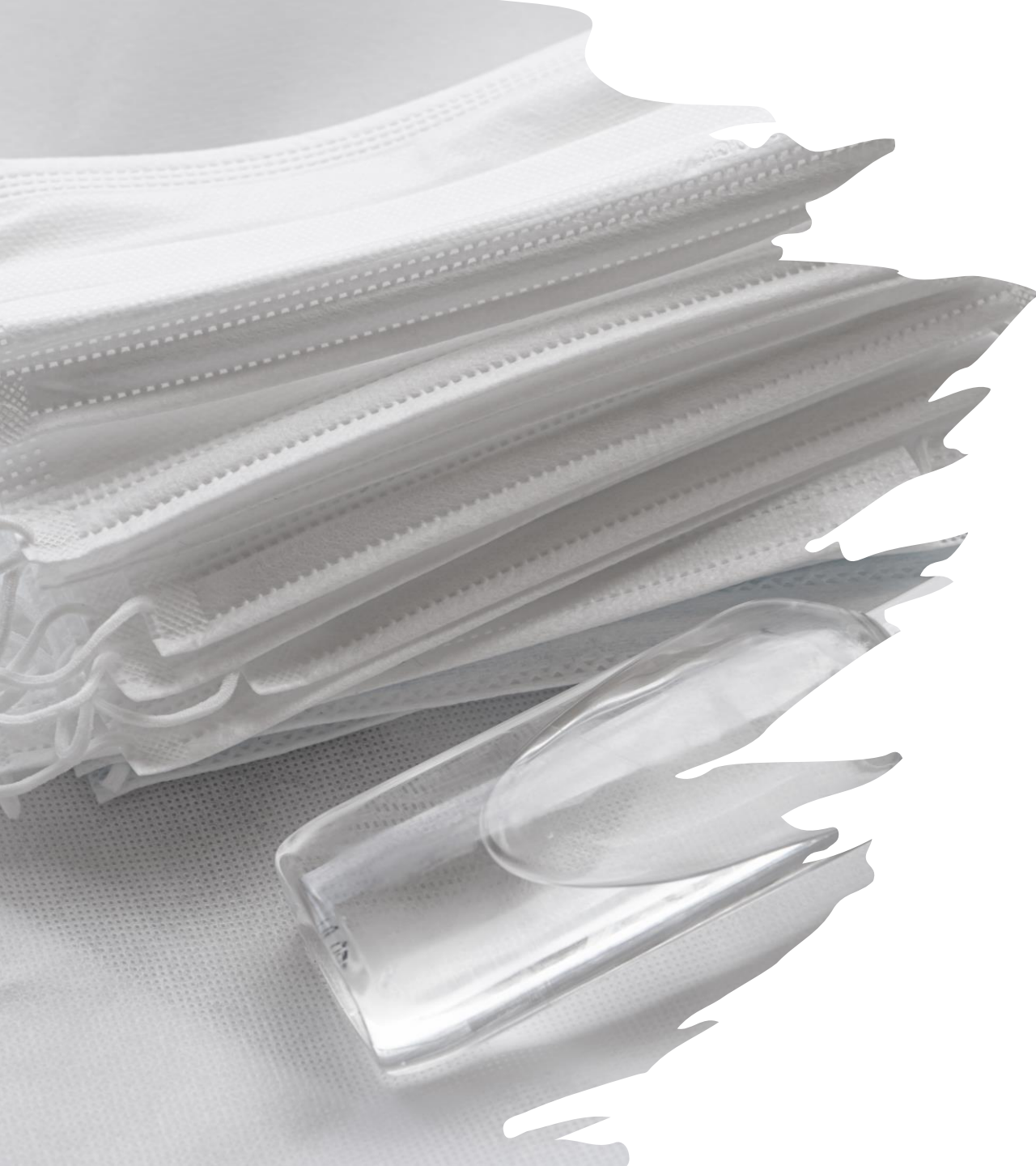
**Leadership Engagement - Executive Director has served as an active member of nine working state committees**

- **Commission on Community Service (Chair)**
- **COWAG Education and STEAM (Co-chair)**
- **Remote Learning Commission**
- **P20WIN**
- **SHIP Advisory Council**
- **CHET Advisory**
- **Online Abuse Prevention Grant**
- **Training and Apprenticeship Programs for Building Code Officials**
- **Cyber Security and Governor's Workforce Council (Ex-Officio member)**

**State Higher Education Executive Officers Association - active member of SHEEO with OHE staff presenting at its 2022 Policy Conference.**

**Legislation – successfully advocated on behalf of numerous agency proposals and Governor initiatives aimed at supporting Connecticut students. Also began the long-overdue process of updating Connecticut's higher education regulations in 2021.**

**State Ethics Commission - 100% score from the State Ethics Commission for on-time submissions from required reporting staff.**



# **Pandemic Response**

**Forwarded all Governor communications and daily updates to leadership and key personnel at independent institutes of higher education to keep them informed.**

**Administered relief funds to institutes of higher education to assist with the cost of testing students.**

**Quickly transitioned staff from in-person to remote work when pandemic hit state in March 2020. Equipment was purchased and distributed since remote work had until then not been an option for OHE staff.**

**Developed a rotating office schedule for staff who were required to come into the office to handle administrative and finance functions to ensure proper social distancing and employee safety.**

# Academic Affairs

**CareerCONN** – an event developed and hosted by OHE to connect Connecticut's high school students and counselors, veterans and adult learners with career school professionals.

- *2020 ~ 1,600 registered but event canceled due to pandemic*
- *2021 ~ 500 registered for virtual event*
- *2022 ~ 1,700 students attended the event held at Mohegan Sun*

**Statute and Regulation Update** – current regulations for academic affairs are more than 20 years old. OHE has begun updating these regulations (and associated statute changes) in partnership with leading higher education policy consultants, NCHEMS.

*Passage of PA 22-123 began this process*

**Comparative Training Initiative** – OHE initiated a collaborative effort with the Police Officer Standards Training Council, CT Department of Veterans Affairs, CT Army National Guard, and the Marine Corps Military Police School to identify overlapping training requirements resulting to the elimination of up to 400 clock hours of training without compromising preparation nor public safety.





# Programs & Student Services

**Modernization** - ARC implemented a fully integrated cloud-based student data profile system – Empower. Empower manages admissions, student records, registration, student billing, degree audit and job placement. This one-time investment improved process flow of applications and enhanced record retention and data collection capabilities.

**Grant Administration** - The Programs & Student Services Division awarded more than \$8.9M to 60 individual grant recipients (community-based nonprofits and institutions of higher education) in administering ARPA, CFR, GEER and AmeriCorps federal funds.

**ConnectiCorps** - Since the "stay at home orders" issued in March 2020, Connecticut's nonprofits that provide essential services in the areas of food security, housing, anti-poverty assistance and more have experienced reductions in capacity and critical resources even as the demand for their services increased. ConnectiCorps stands in the gap. ConnectiCorps AmeriCorps members provide capacity-building support to service sites in healthcare, food distribution, youth engagement and more. ConnectiCorps has received national recognition for its volunteer generation innovation.



# Finance & Human Resources

In July 2022, OHE implemented a new student financial aid processing system known as CT Scholars. The NELNET Financial Aid Software brought about significant improvements to the State's ability to manage, administer and analyze all student financial aid programs offered through the Office of Higher Education.

The new system replaces five separate Access databases that were developed decades ago and has significantly increased user data integrity. This modernization effort took several years and was the result of focused work by the dedicated staff of our Student Financial Aid division.

Roberta B. Willis Scholarship and ARPA funds awarded by OHE to students:

- 2020 RSWP ~ \$32,642,000
- 2021 RSWP ~ \$32,270,000
- 2022 RSWP ~ \$33,161,078    ARPA \$20,000,000
- 2023 RSWP ~ \$33,619,259    ARPA \$40,000,000

Maintained the RSWP program review schedule and completed 53 institutional reviews despite disruptions caused by COVID.



# Finance & Human Resources *continued*

**FAFSA Completions** - worked collaboratively with SDE in support of the Governor's initiative to increase the completion rate of students finishing their FASFA, thus raising awareness of program eligibility for individuals who may need financial support.

**ARPA Funds Tracking** - in conjunction with an outside vendor developed a case management system to track the awarding of \$60 million of ARPA dollars for FY 22 & FY 23 providing thousands of CT students additional financial aid when attending college.

**Covid Relief Funds** - pass-thru agency for \$4.3 million dollars in Covid Relief funds - successfully reimbursed eleven CT private colleges and universities that provided tens of thousands of tests keeping CT students and faculty safe.

**Agency Manager Job Class Normalization** – after 11 years of being an executive agency, managers were normalized under DAS classifications.

**Employee Evaluations** – agency staff received performance evaluations for the first time in over a decade.

**Union transition** – worked with OLR and the 1588 Union to successfully transition staff to the P-2 (Social & Human Services) bargaining unit.

# Finance & Human Resources

**Full Job Class Normalization** - in collaboration with DAS, OLR, and the P-2 Union, OHE will continue to move forward in addressing the reclassification of bargaining unit staff.

**Grant Opportunities** – submitted for \$1 million dollar grant to analyze the success of the RWSP.

**P20WIN** - continue to expand awareness in P20WIN, measured by the increased demand in data usage by state leadership.

**Partnerships** - continue collaboration with the 2GEN and Working Cities Boards to provide awareness of the OHE Programs to creating economic opportunities for the residents of CT.

