

DATE: Feb. 13, 2026
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
FROM: MCCS President David Daigler & UMS Chancellor Dannel P. Malloy
RE: **2026 Public Higher Education System Coordinating Committee Report**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs:

The Maine Community College System (MCCS) and the University of Maine System (UMS) submit this 2026 report of the Public Higher Education Systems Coordinating Committee (HECC) pursuant to [Title 20-A, Section 9](#) of the Maine Revised Statutes.

HECC was established by the Legislature in 2015 to foster greater collaboration between the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System. The committee consists of the Chancellor of UMS, the President of MCCS, and the Chairs of their respective Boards of Trustees. The statute directs Maine's two public postsecondary systems to work through HECC to advance cooperation and report annually on shared efforts related to:

- Improving college affordability;
- Minimizing barriers to student transfer;
- Reducing unnecessary program duplication;
- Identifying opportunities for shared services and economies of scale;
- Recommending statutory or policy changes to improve system effectiveness; and
- Strengthening alignment from secondary education through postsecondary completion.

In 2025, this reporting requirement was fulfilled by the System leaders' respective addresses to the Joint Convention of the Legislature, which had not occurred since 2019.

HECC meets regularly to review progress, align priorities, and ensure that Maine's public postsecondary systems operate as complementary — and not competing — assets in service to the state's students, employers, and taxpayers.

Our work together occurs at a critical moment for Maine. Maine faces persistent demographic and workforce challenges, including an aging population, a declining

number of high school graduates, and growing employer demand for workers with postsecondary education and credentials. Specifically, only 57% of Maine high school graduates now enroll in college. Meanwhile, Maine's 60% statutory attainment goal remains central to the State's 10-year economic strategy, and because of the education and workforce pathways we are strengthening together, Maine is well on its way with 57% of working-aged adults now holding a postsecondary degree or credential of value, according to the most recent Educate Maine [education indicators report](#).

MCCS and UMS play distinct but interconnected roles along Maine's education-to-workforce continuum. Maine's community colleges provide short-term workforce training and associate degrees aligned with immediate labor market needs, while Maine's public universities offer bachelor's, graduate, and professional degrees, as well as research and innovation capacity essential to long-term economic growth.

Together, **the two Systems enroll the overwhelming majority of postsecondary students in the state, with 51,119 degree-seeking students in the 2024–25 academic year**, as well as tens of thousands of Mainers participating in free early college, short-term workforce training, and non-credit programs. Thanks to our own cost-containment efforts and public investment supported by the Legislature and Governor Mills, **Maine's public community colleges and universities are the most affordable in New England**.

TransferME: Guaranteed UMS Admission for MCCS Graduates

Ensuring that students can move easily between these large Systems — without unnecessary cost, delay, or credit loss — is essential to meeting Maine's attainment and workforce goals. Since the last written report was submitted, HECC marked **a historic milestone with the signing of the Transfer ME agreement** by UMS Chancellor Dannel Malloy and MCCS President David Daigler. Transfer ME is the first System-to-System guaranteed admission program of its kind in Maine.

Under Transfer ME:

- MCCS will proactively notify students who have earned at least 30 credits in eligible associate degree programs of their transfer options to Maine's public universities.
- Community college students who opt-in will receive coordinated advising from MCCS and UMS.
- Graduates of transfer-aligned associate degree programs are directly admitted to participating UMS universities.
- Students transfer without submitting applications and related fees, essays, recommendation letters, or transcripts.

While widespread implementation of Transfer ME has been delayed by the modernization of MCCC's student information system, notification to eligible students is underway in high-demand fields, including behavioral health, biotechnology, business, education, hospitality, human services, psychology, and pre-engineering. Early opt-in data indicate strong student interest in Transfer ME, positioning the program to further increase bachelor's degree attainment and upward mobility in the state. Outreach and advising capacity will continue to expand in the coming year, and HECC looks forward to sharing outcomes in a future report.

Transfer ME builds on more than 150 existing articulation agreements between MCCC and UMS institutions, **allowing MCCC graduates to transfer to Maine's public universities and have all their community college credits count**, with additional pathways being formalized.

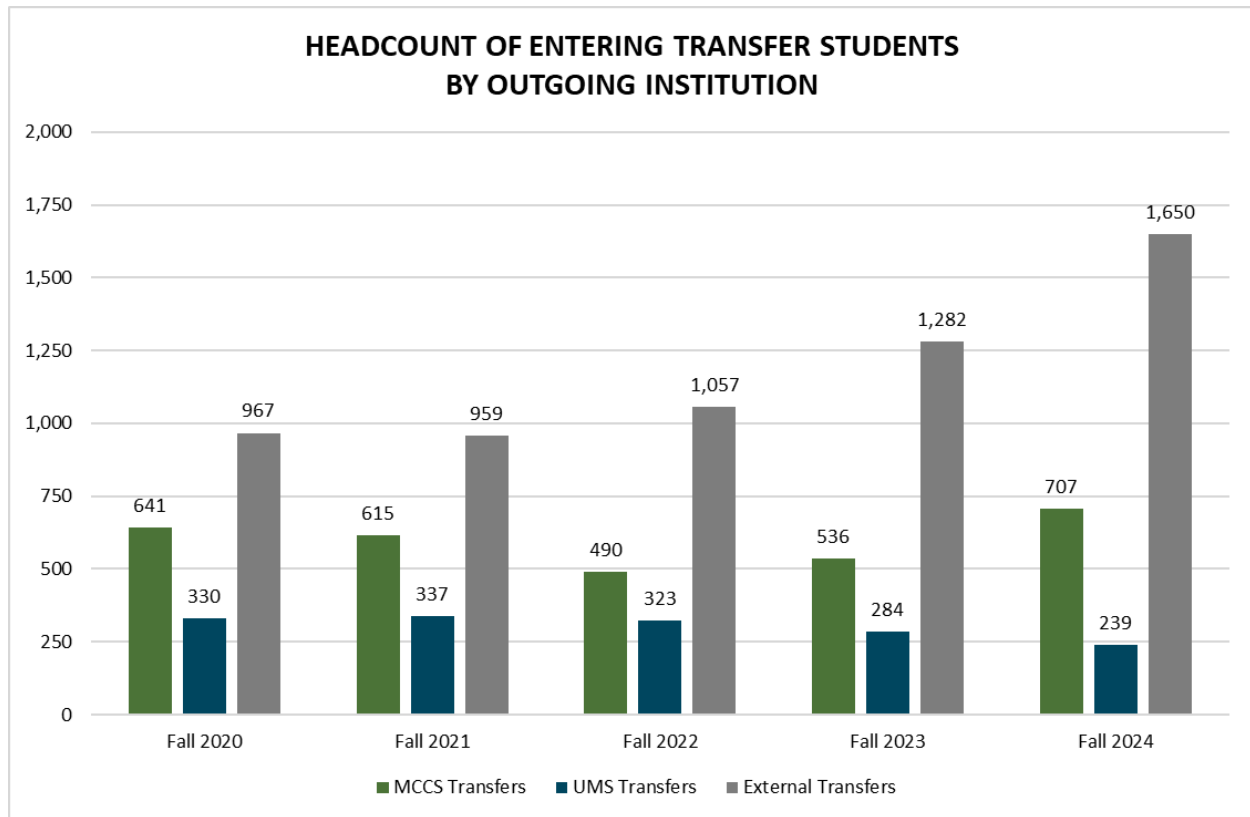
MCCC-to-UMS Transfer Data

Maine's community colleges are the largest single source of transfer students to UMS. In Fall 2025, 707 MCCC students transferred to UMS — an increase from the prior year.

As part of its commitment to transparency, UMS produces and makes publicly available an annual report on transfer students. MCCC-related trends from [the Fall 2025 report](#) include:

- Transfer students are arriving at UMS with more credits and more complex pathways. MCCC transfers remained the most credentialed (50.5%, mainly associate degrees).
- **MCCC transfers show the strongest outcomes of those transferring into UMS.** In Fall 2024, they passed 88.5% of attempted credits, the highest among transfer groups.
- **MCCC transfers also post the highest return rate (75.8%)** among other transfer groups and first-time students.
- The top academic plans for MCCC transfers include RN-to-BSN nursing, psychology, liberal studies, mental health and human services, and accounting.

The following chart summarizes the prior institutions of students transferring into Maine's public universities over the last five years:



Other MCCS and UMS Collaborations

Guided Pathways and Advising Reform

To support student momentum and completion, MCCS and UMS continue to collaborate on Guided Pathways — highly structured program maps that align coursework with career and transfer goals. Guided Pathways provide students with:

- Early career exploration and program selection;
- Clear, term-by-term academic plans;
- Consistent advising and progress monitoring; and
- Reduced excess credits and time to degree.

In addition, MCCS and UMS jointly participate in the Maine Math Collaborative with the Maine Department of Education to align mathematics pathways from high school through postsecondary education and into the workforce.

National Institute for Student Success (NISS)

Four MCCS institutions and four UMS institutions participate jointly in the National Institute for Student Success. Through this initiative, Maine's public postsecondary

institutions are implementing evidence-based practices in advising, first-year experience design, and policy review to remove institutional barriers to completion.

Common Course Codes and Math Pathways

UMS recently implemented common course coding (distinct from common numbering) and a unified catalog to support the seamless flow of data across our universities. MCCS is also advancing an initiative to implement common course codes across its seven colleges, with testing underway and full implementation planned for Fall 2027 registration. Where appropriate, MCCS alignment with UMS course codes is prioritized to further simplify transfer and advising.

Co-Enrollment and Place-Based Partnerships

The Black Bear Advantage program, formalized during the evaluation period, allows students enrolled at MCCS to co-enroll with the University of Maine and its regional campus, the University of Maine at Machias, access university resources and receive coordinated advising while benefiting from free community college tuition.

Other place-based collaborations include:

- The University of Southern Maine houses more than 100 Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) students at its new Portland residence hall;
- Delivery of the University of Maine at Farmington's early childhood education bachelor's program at SMCC;
- Co-located facilities at Brunswick Landing; and
- Reciprocal access to libraries, student activities, and support services.

Manufacturing Training Innovation Centers

UMS and MCCS continue to collaborate on major federal workforce initiatives. A notable example is the Industry 4.0 training initiative, led by UMaine, funded through a \$7 million federal award secured by UMS, and inclusive of industry partners and MCCS.

This initiative expands advanced manufacturing training innovation centers across the state, including at UMaine's campus in Orono and at SMCC campuses in Brunswick and South Portland, strengthening talent pipelines for Maine and the nation's defense, aerospace, and manufacturing employers. Leveraging this one-time federal funding, the BOT (Build, Optimize, Train) Loft opened at UMaine in August 2025 and is a state-of-the-art robotics and automation training facility offering factory-authorized training, micro-credentials, and PK-12 programs. Meanwhile, in November 2025, SMCC opened its complementary Maine Advanced Technology & Engineering Center on

SMCC's Midcoast Campus in Brunswick, which has the latest equipment for hands-on training in robotics, hydraulics, pneumatics, and electrical simulation. The second SMCC lab at the South Portland campus will come online soon, expanding advanced manufacturing tools, additive systems, and applied learning opportunities for both students and industry partners.

The launch of the advanced manufacturing training innovation centers is aligned with the efforts of [the Maine Defense Industry Alliance](#) (MDIA), of which both Systems are founding members. MDIA is a collaborative effort between government agencies, educational institutions such as MCCC and UMS, and industry partners to address the workforce needs of Maine's defense industry. The alliance aims to build a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development system to address the Maine defense industry's two immediate needs: acquiring skilled workers and upgrading its current workforce.

Shared Planning, Services, and Capital Needs

For the first time, MCCC and UMS submitted a coordinated appropriations request as part of the State's FY26-27 biennial budget process, reflecting shared strategic priorities to best serve students, the two Systems, and the state of Maine.

In addition to ongoing and increasing operating and affordability appropriations — such as free two-year college — the two Systems identified State funding for capital improvements as a common need. Specifically, as MCCC and UMS have maintained region-leading affordability, their physical plants have suffered from underinvestment. **The condition of Maine's public campuses is now at a crisis level, with nearly \$2 billion in imminent need — \$1.8 billion of which is at UMS** — as determined by independent third-party Gordian, used by both Systems, Maine Maritime Academy (MMA), and the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services.

MCCC and UMS have not had a general obligation bond since 2018, making this **the longest period in at least three decades that Maine has not bonded to improve the infrastructure of its public colleges and universities**. By comparison, though they enroll fewer students than we do in Maine, Rhode Island's public higher education institutions received more than four times the State support for capital improvements in 2023, according to data from the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. Bold and sustained State investment is essential to ensure the public Systems can meet basic health, life safety, and accessibility standards; provide affordable 21st-century education and workforce training; and compete for talented students and faculty.

Beyond the academic and innovation collaborations already detailed in this report, to further maximize public investment, MCCC and UMS, as well as MMA, maintain shared

procurement and contracting authority, allowing each System to “piggyback” on contracts negotiated by the other, including for capital benchmarking as noted above. The Systems also collaborate on sharing staff, professional development, and facilities utilization, reducing duplication and expanding access for students.

Recommendations and Next Steps

HECC affirms that **collaboration between Maine’s public postsecondary systems is stronger and more consequential than at any point in recent history**. It is likely unmatched by similarly independent two- and four-year public postsecondary systems in any other state. Transfer ME represents a structural shift toward a student-centered, statewide approach to educational attainment.

Looking ahead, HECC identifies the following priorities:

- Continued expansion of Transfer ME, including to additional programs;
- Sustained State investment in the Systems’ operating and capital budgets, and proven access and affordability initiatives, such as free community college.
- Alignment of [UMS](#) and MCCS strategic plans and performance metrics;
- Exploration of further shared services and contracting; and
- Continued coordination with MMA, the Maine Department of Education, and workforce partners.

This report highlights real progress made through HECC in the areas of seamless transfer, student success initiatives, and stewardship of public resources. **Together, the Maine Community College System and University of Maine System remain committed to ensuring that every Mainer can access, persist in, and complete postsecondary education that leads to opportunity, upward mobility, and a stronger Maine economy and communities.**