

# Senate Education Committee

*Ava Hawkes 271-3266*

**HB 1218-FN**, relative to the merger of Granite State college with the university of New Hampshire.

**Hearing Date:** March 8, 2022

**Time Opened:** 9:26 a.m.

**Time Closed:** 9:54 a.m.

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Ward, Hennessey, Ricciardi, Kahn and Prentiss

**Members of the Committee Absent :** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill merges Granite state college into the university of New Hampshire.

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**Sponsors:**

Rep. Ladd  
Rep. Moffett  
Sen. Gray  
Sen. Ward

Rep. Hobson  
Rep. Cordelli  
Sen. D'Allesandro  
Sen. Kahn

Rep. Umberger  
Rep. Mullen  
Sen. Reagan

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**Who supports the bill:** Senator Ruth Ward, Senator John Reagan, Senator James Gray, Representative Rick Ladd, Catherine Provencher (USNH), Mike Decelle (USNH)

**Who opposes the bill:** None

**Who is neutral on the bill:** None

**Summary of testimony presented:**

**Senator Jay Kahn - Senate District 10**

- Senator Kahn introduced HB 1218-FN on behalf of Representative Ladd.
- He cosponsored this bill.
- This bill passed the House Education Committee unanimously.
- Last fall, the university system presented to a legislative oversight committee which preceded the introduction of this bill. That presentation was about the university systems request for support of this merger.
- The legislative oversight committee did provide a recommendation of support of this merger. Senator Ward chaired this oversight committee.

**Catherine Provencher - Chief Administrative Officer, University System of New Hampshire**

**Mike Decelle - Dean, UNH Manchester and Granite State College**

- The former President of Granite State College, Mark Rubinstein, left last fall to become the Chancellor of the Community College System of NH (CCSNH.)
- The question is how we can think differently about the structure and delivery of higher education.
- We are facing demographic challenges in the future.
- We must ask how students want their education delivered by rethinking about the way they operate today.
- Following President Rubinstein's departure, all parties supported the idea of merging Granite State College within the university system.
- This bill preserves the name and mission of Granite State College.
- USNH is working with CCSNH as well on this merger.
- The bill, as written, would provide by July 2023,
- Degrees will not be awarded by Granite State College but by the University of New Hampshire (UNH.)
- If this bill is to pass, they need to start planning.
- This merger is not just about students at Granite State College or UNH Manchester. It is more about online infrastructure through impactful online delivery. That resource will be shared across the university system.
- This merger is motivated by the headwinds we face, the opportunity to better serve NH students and the broader market for online education.
- Granite State College has relatively low name recognition within the state. This merger will offer a collective benefit and solidify Granite State College's performance.
- Senator Prentiss asked Ms. Provencher and Mr. Decelle about the composition of the board of trustees and if this bill would change the structure.
  - Ms. Provencher said they've maintained a student representative in the rotation on the board of trustees. Granite State College students are not traditional, residential students. While this college will be under UNH, that population will maintain a student trustee.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle what his title is.

- Mr. Decelle said he has been the Dean of UNH Manchester for the last six years. Now, he is the Chief Administrative Officer at Granite State College following Chancellor Rubinstein's departure.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle if this bill is to pass, what his title will be and what the college's title become.
  - Mr. Decelle said while Granite State College will maintain its name as a division under UNH, they will be calling it the UNH College of Professional Studies, of which he will lead. This college will serve non-traditional adult learners advancing their careers. They would absorb Granite State College personnel, where some personnel will start to serve online tech needs.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle about degree titles and how they visualize these degrees. Does UNH Manchester already have a designation on a degree.
  - Mr. Decelle said yes, the degree is signed by the college dean and the name of the college is identified specifically on the diploma. UNH Manchester would be renamed as the College of Professional Studies with Granite State as a discrete division in that college.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle what degrees this college will offer.
  - Mr. Decelle said they will offer the same degrees as offered today, i.e. associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. All of which will be offered online. UNH Manchester confers a small number of associate's degrees, however, they have been trying to scale those back in favor of those degrees being issued by the CCSNH.
  - The bulk of UNH Manchester's undergraduate degrees are offered in a residential, face-to-face learning format. Their graduate degrees are a mix of face-to-face and online. They will have a much broader, richer list of offered programs. The degrees they issue will remain the same.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle for clarity on what those degrees will be as the legislature grants them the ability to issue degrees.
  - Mr. Decelle said the inclusion of colleges on the diploma is more stylistic on at this point. On a student's transcript, they are issued from UNH only.
  - Ms. Provencher added that this legislation provides the authority for UNH to award the degree, not the College of Professional Studies.
- Senator Kahn asked for clarity on whether or not Granite State College will be identified on the degree.

- Mr. Decelle not as such, UNH will issue the credential. Ms. Provencher added that this will begin in 2023. Mr. Decelle said they would continue to issue Granite State College degrees through July 1, 2023 only, if this bill were to pass. Granite State College, as a body politic, would be eliminated as of July 1, 2023.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle about enrollment in Granite State College and it running ahead of the curve for a while. He asked if the merger has had a positive effect or has enrollment gone down.
  - Mr. Decelle said it is too early to know what effect the merger has had. They operate as a completely financially stable and independent organization right now.
  - All personnel remain in place, finance and HR organizations are the only organizations that have been integrated thus far. This made sense for the merger to look at financial analysis.
  - They ran positive margins for many years. It has seen a shallow decline in credit hour demand, which is a proxy for enrollment. However, they have been able to manage their cost structure to stay net positive. There is great opportunity in online learning market.
- Senator Kahn asked Mr. Decelle about the financial disclosure for Granite State College. He wonders how this will be envisioned in the future, if it will be visible to a legislator to see the net positive margin or if it will be dissolved in FY24.
  - Ms. Provencher said in the audited financial statements, Granite State College will not be broken out. Financial activity by college can always be provided upon request. It will become part of the breakout for UNH after the merger. All colleges have internal financial statements that are not subject to external financial audit.
  - Ms. Provencher said there is a real commitment to continue with the open-enrollment access and lower tuition rates seen at Granite State College.
  - Mr. Decelle said while UNH retails at upwards of \$700 per credit hour, Granite State College's credit rate for in-state students is \$314 per credit hour, of which they plan to maintain. That is the price point you need to be at.
- Senator Kahn asked Ms. Provencher about Keene State and ongoing conversations about governance. He has concerns about the role of the legislature staying present in this progress and change. It is important that communication stay open between the system and the legislature. The legislature should not be blindsided by decisions, however, the legislature should be partners in those decisions.

- Ms. Provencher said Representative Rick Ladd and Senator James Gray sit on their board. Both Representative Ladd and Senator Gray provide healthy and informed dialogue on the board. Last week, the board unanimously named Jim Dean as Interim Chancellor for the university system. The motivation behind this decision was to acknowledge the state of transition we are currently in. The next wave of work will be evaluating and accessing student-based services. The temporariness of Jim Dean being chancellor acknowledges the constantly changing dialogue taking place.

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Date Hearing Report completed: March 9, 2022