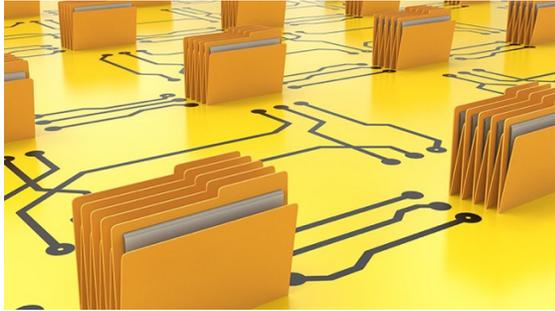


## CHES prepares move toward one, shared system



BY JIM PATERSON JUNE 27, 2022 PRINT

A unique collaboration by community colleges and four-year institutions in New Mexico linking key internal functions and student services is offering participants a new perspective on their operations, officials say, and a look at how the project – first dreamed of four years ago – will pay off.

“We are now beginning to see even more clearly how this will benefit each institution, each department and the group as a whole,” said Matthew Wright, associate director talent management at [Central New Mexico Community College](#) (CNM), one of the six colleges participating in the non-profit [Collaborative for Higher Education Shared Services](#) (CHES).

Formed in early 2021, CHES is expected to take a major step forward in December when, after months of testing, the shared enterprise resource planning (ERP) portion of the platform will go live for the first four of the six schools involved: CNM, [Clovis Community College](#), [Northern New Mexico College](#) and [Santa Fe Community College](#). The other part of the platform with student information will go live soon. After that, the CHES Wave 2 institutions, [San Juan College](#) and [Mesalands Community College](#), will shift to the platform at a later date.

Other state higher education institutions have expressed an interest, CHES officials say, noting they expect more will join the collaborative.

The system is designed to standardize and sync student and employee records and other data along with key institutional systems across the collaborative, according to officials. It will bring the colleges into a single, shared system for student information continuing education, finance and human resources.

It also will streamline admissions and financial aid processes, including standard, applications to the participating schools, and allow students to plan their college pathway more easily with a standardized course numbering and structuring system throughout. Planners expect it will improve advising with simpler, standard, efficient student record-handling, freeing up counselors to provide more personal support.

### Early steps

Wright, who heads the human capital management (HCM) workstream for the ERP portion of the project, said extensive work was needed to upgrade the diverse legacy platforms among the colleges.

However, decision-making about the thousands of connected functions and establishment of a framework for the system went smoothly, and the extensive testing has gone better than expected. The work has been underway in four workstreams: HCM, finance, technical and change management.

“There was a lot of clean-up with the systems at each school initially, and I would advise anyone considering such collaboration to allow plenty of time for it,” he said. “But other than that, the development process has involved a lot of work, but has proceeded pretty smoothly.”

According to Amy Pell, associate vice president of finance and controller for Santa Fe Community College and the CHESS lead for the finance workstream, representatives of all the schools in the four workstreams carefully considered how their functions would operate on the platform. It utilizes the Workday suite of applications for enterprise planning, financial management, human capital management and student services. How those functions then interface with other areas had to be fine-tuned, she said.

“So much of finance is driven by other areas of operations. The colleges started early to create a common chart of accounts, which is the base for alignment of other functional finance areas. It was very time-consuming but well worth the effort,” Pell said, noting that the 15 different “work tags” in finance alone can be combined to create thousands of different data transactions.

### **Added benefits**

Pell noted that the system is primarily designed to streamline the student experience at every step – from the application process and registration for classes at any of the participating institutions, to the alignment of credits and transfer process.

“The ultimate goal is for students to have the ability to apply once and be admitted to all the participating colleges and be able to take courses at any of the institutions,” she said.

Wright pointed out that other benefits have surfaced, including overdue upgrades to school functions where the best practices of the participating schools will become the standard. He noted, for instance, that employee evaluations were done on paper at his and other schools. The CHESS structure will automate that process and other key functions in the human resources arena and make them uniform for the institutions.

Also, for example, the best practices of the participating colleges when it comes to financial aid applications and management will be an upgrade for some institutions and allow for student aid data to flow between them. Student and staff records will be uniform and accessible by each, while purchasing can be coordinated around the best practices discovered.

“The alignment of payroll will be very valuable, for example,” Pell said. “The goal is to have a payroll director at the CHESS level to oversee and assist with payroll processing at each college. Previously, each college completed an entire payroll process bi-weekly with limited staff. After the alignment and identification of best practices, we’ll be able to assist each other, cover for staff on leave and troubleshoot issues. We will also have experts in specific payroll functions who could perform that function across all institutions.”

### **Looking back**

Along with creating the time for system research and refinements necessary to prepare institutional legacy systems for the change, human resource officials found various collective bargaining agreements had to be considered, Wright said. In the new aligned personnel platform, they required more detailed and complex discussions and planning.

He said colleges considering collaboration should think ahead regarding areas where structures in participating schools differ significantly.

Pell, meanwhile, noted that the work on CHESS has often been consuming for those involved in the transition, and that backfilling staff to fill the gaps is important.

Buy-in was also important. In a baseline survey of faculty and staff at the Wave 1 colleges (CNM, Clovis Community College, Northern New Mexico College, Santa Fe Community College) in February, CHESS officials found that 63% understood the need for the platform and 62% believed the change was being done for good reasons, while 41% said they were “ready for the change.”