

## **University Business, CHESS: 5 colleges team on unique shared services model**

A new collaborative of New Mexico institutions is creating a nonprofit that it says will better serve students.

By: [Chris Burt](#) | March 29, 2021

Students often share the same frustrations over inefficiencies that institutions of higher education do, processes that can become barriers to starting or completing tasks.

Through the years, colleges and universities have turned to a variety of different shared services models to function more cohesively. By streamlining operations and often saving space on campus, they have reduced costs, eliminated red tape and become more nimble in serving faculty, staff and students.

The idea sounds pretty good to five public New Mexico institutions, who have decided to start their own nonprofit that will combine decision-making and technology under one name: the Collaborative for Higher Education Shared Services. For acronym fans, that's CHESS ... just not as complicated.

"This integrated approach will have numerous benefits, including increasing efficiencies in the application and financial aid processes and providing students with increased flexibility to take courses at multiple colleges," said San Juan College President Toni Hopper Pendergrass. "We are excited to be a part of an effort that will have such a positive impact on our students' futures."

Pendergrass joins presidents Charles Nwankwo, Tracy Hartzler, Richard Bailey and Becky Rowley from four other institutions – Clovis Community College, Central New Mexico Community College, Northern New Mexico College and Santa Fe Community College, respectively – on the initial Board of Directors of CHESS, which will aim to reduce "outdated administrative" tasks.

"Northern New Mexico College is honored to be a part of this truly revolutionary partnership," Bailey said. "The key to success for higher education institutions in the 21st century is collaboration, and we are excited about the doors of opportunity that CHESS will open not only for our colleges, but for students across the state and beyond."

### **The power of CHESS**

The goal of CHESS not only will be to improve operations across its campuses – shared services functions mean a more centralized approach to the mission of each institution while breaking down silos – but also make life easier for students when going through tasks such as registration or transfers on the new mobile-friendly Enterprise Resource Planning system. Pooling resources while still fostering independence at each college will be a best-of-both-worlds scenarios for the stakeholders involved, but most especially students, who may struggle to navigate higher education's maze of departments and paperwork.

"Collaboration is key to ensuring the success of our students and the future of higher education in our state," New Mexico Cabinet Secretary of Higher Education Stephanie Rodriguez said. "This initiative is aligned with the New Mexico Higher Education Department's vision to streamline and improve the student experience at our public colleges and universities across the state. I look forward to seeing its success."

Part of the benefit of the shared services model is that the additional cost savings enjoyed by each institution can be put back into supporting students on more critical initiatives that get them enrolled, boost persistence and forge stronger career pathways. That is especially important, the coalition says, to properly and easily serve the many underserved students in their state.

"Attaining nonprofit status will help to advance this collaborative effort by allowing us to streamline processes for students so they can achieve their educational goals," Pendergrass said.