COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

June 13, 2018

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street- Fourth Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

> RE: **Request to contract with Hobson to continue college-wide rollout of the early alert software system known as Starfish**
> **IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION REQUESTED**

Dear Honorable Members:

Attached is a proposed resolution and accompanying documentation including a memorandum from the Erie Community College Vice President of Institutional Research, Assessment, Accreditation and Planning requesting the Erie County Legislative authorization to enter into a software agreement to provide services to help facilitate communications between faculty and staff concerning at-risk students. The software is one of several tools that will assist college efforts to increase student persistence (semester to semester), retention (year to year), and graduation rates. The college's Board of Trustees approved signing this contract on April 26, 2018 and a Board of Trustees' resolution reflecting this support is included today.

Should your Honorable Body require further information I encourage you to contact Dr. Fabio Escobar.

Sincerely yours,

Mark C. Poloncarz, Esq.
Erie County Executive

MCP/cw
Enclosure

cc: Dr. Dan Hocoy, President, SUNY Erie

MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Members of the Erie County Legislature
From: SUNY Erie
Re: Request to contract with Hobson to continue college-wide rollout of the early alert software system (Starfish)
Date: June 13, 2018

SUMMARY

It is respectfully requested by Erie Community College that the Erie County Legislature authorize a renewal of a contract with Hobsons for Starfish software in order to continue the college-wide rollout of its early warning system. The agreement with Hobson will utilize the SUNY Master Services Agreement T002817.

This Starfish software is designed to help facilitate communications between faculty and staff concerning at-risk students. Faculty and staff are able to raise concerns and understand a student's level of risk based upon a formula of the number and types of flags generated, a non-cognitive assessment and observable behaviors exhibited. This ensures a more timely and tailored response to the students who need it the most. The software will assist in the persistence (semester to semester), retention (year to year), and graduation rates of students.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The vendor expense will be no more than $63,500; and the college has adequate funds available in its operating budget to fund this expense. The total package cost includes features: Starfish Early Alert, Connect, Starfish Exporter, File Attachment, Prospective Student Advising and twenty consulting hours. The college's Board of Trustees approved signing this contract on April 26, 2018 and prior agreements were Board approved on March 30, 2017, March 23, 2016 and February 26, 2015.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Starfish has become the college's pre-eminent communication tool with students and is the only electronic case management/retention tool being utilized. Continuation is essential to maintaining progress on the college's completion agenda which is part of its SUNY Excels Strategic Plan 2016-2021. Enhanced software features will help to facilitate referrals to support services, foster the development of individual success plans, track student needs, and create appointments for students to receive essential student and academic support services. Starfish's Connect feature will facilitate student meeting and task management such as referrals to support services, the development of individualized success plans, and appointment scheduling. Starfish's Exporter feature will enhance reporting analytics within Early Alert.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

To address the on-going issue of student retention and success, the institution is in the midst of a college-wide implementation of the early alert and case management/retention tool known as Starfish. The goals of Starfish software are as follows: (1) To assist the faculty in clearly articulating problem behaviors that interfere with the academic performance of their students; (2) To assist support staff with the tools and information necessary to provide effective interventions for flagged students; (3) To increase faculty, staff, and student engagement with the tool; (4) To evaluate Starfish's impact upon student persistence and retention.

Students have the opportunity to initiate communications with faculty and staff surrounding any issue of concern that may affect their success at ECC by "Raising their Hand" and requesting assistance. Students are advised of these tools during START orientation and throughout the academic year. Plans are underway for a college-wide institutional branding and marketing plan as well as student on-boarding initiatives in the fall of 2018.

Engagement with Starfish is evaluated in the following ways: use of the Attendance Tool Feature, the number of students who manually raise their hand, the number of manual tracking items raised by faculty and staff(i.e. Flags and Kudos), the number of progress surveys completed, the number of tutoring referrals made to the academic skills centers, the types of student outreach conducted via the student support service offices, and targeted communications sent to students via Starfish emails.

The chart below outlines survey participation to date. The encouraged use of the Never Attended Survey by upper administration resulted in the highest completion rate of all four semesters since Starfish's inception. The increased use of the Never Attended Survey not only increases faculty engagement with the tool but also protects students from academic and financial liability. The Early Term Progress Survey also yielded its highest participation rate since fall 2016. The Early Term Survey focuses on both attendance concerns and poor performance. Early interventions on the part of academic and student support services can promote successful course completion. The Starfish Team is highly anticipating the results of the Mid-term Progress Survey to see if this trend continues.

Semester	Never Attended Survey	Early Term Progress Survey	Mid-term Progress Survey	Overall
Fall 2016	34.82%	38.57%	37%	36.81%
Spring 2017	40%	27.17%	30.79%	32.57%
Fall 2017	38.17%	22.82%	35.44%	32.26%
Spring 2018	71.2%	30.97%	TBD	

Faculty engagement is at its highest in four semesters. Increases in faculty engagement lead to earlier identification of at-risk students and more effective outreach via college support offices.

Term	Percentage
Fall 2016	54.14%
Spring 2017	47.40%
Fall 2017	55.45%
Spring 2018	74.03%

Since the incorporation of Starfish and evaluating fall to fall retention rates, it appears that there was a slight increase in retention with the following groups; first-time, full-time and returning students. Although the increase in retention cannot solely be attributed to Starfish, these groups have been receiving the bulk of Starfish's intervention efforts. Other strategies need to be utilized within Starfish as well as partnering with other potential retention initiatives in order to yield positive results among all represented groups.

Group	2014-2015 Retention	2015-2016 Retention	2016-2017 Retention
Continuing	37.64%	37.20%	36.35%
First-Time	52.77%	53.07%	53.91%
Returning	38.09%	41.12%	41.69%
Transfers	51.28%	53.06%	51.43%
Grand Total	42.97%	43.58%	43.27%

Data generated supports the premise that those students who received flags were in fact more likely to be retained than those who were not. The table below outlines these percentages. Please note, this table is limited to full-time students and included data from fall 2016 through the spring 2017 academic year.

	Not Retained	Retained	Grand Total
Flagged	55.46%	44.54%	100.00%
Not Flagged	64.00%	36.00%	100.00%
Grand Total	**56.73%**	**43.27%**	**100.00%**

Data supports a significant positive correlation between departmental engagement and retention. Dividing the engagement by quartiles (the upper quartile being the most engaged and the lower quartile being the least engaged) there is a significant difference between the upper and lower quartiles such that the more engaged group has significantly better retention (48.73%) compared to the less engaged group (32.49%).

Quartile	Proportion Retained
1	.324917001
2	.462592278
3	.397043853
4	.487302552
Grand Total	**.381461909**

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

Student success efforts would suffer a setback due to lack of a case management and student communications solution.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

Certified copies of this resolution shall be forwarded by the Erie County Legislature to the County Executive, President of Erie Community College, and the Chair of the ECC Board of Trustees.

A RESOLUTION SUBMITTED BY:
SUNY ERIE

RE: Request to contract with Hobson to continue college-wide rollout of the early alert software system known as Starfish

WHEREAS, professional services or specialized products in excess of $50,000 in addition to being subject to the formal RFP process and requiring the approval of the college's Board of Trustees, also require the approval of the Erie County Legislature. These approvals are required prior to the hiring of the professional or purchase of the product; and

WHEREAS, the determination of whether the professional service or specialized product exemption for bidding is applicable must be made on a case-by-case basis, examining the particular services or goods needed. Generally professional services include the specialized expertise of interpreters, consultants, lawyers, doctors, engineers and so forth. Specialized products include but are not limited to software and other technology related products; and

WHEREAS, Erie Community College Board of Trustees approved at their April 26, 2018 Board Meeting the vendor Hobsons for a Starfish software agreement not to exceed $63,500 that will utilize the State University of New York (SUNY) Master Services Agreement T002817; and

WHEREAS, Starfish by Hobsons has become the pre-eminent communication tool with Erie Community College students since 2015 and is the only case management tool currently in use at Erie Community College. Starfish is an early alert system for students. Continuation is essential to maintaining progress on the college's ECC Excels 2016-2021 Strategic Plan - Completion agenda as well as to increase the persistence, retention, and graduation rates of Erie Community College students; and

WHEREAS, the goals of the Starfish Early Alert, Connect, Starfish Exporter, File Attachment Prospective Student Advising, and Consulting Hours programs are to assist the faculty in clearly articulating problem behaviors that interfere with the academic performance of their students, assist support staff with the tools and information necessary to provide effective interventions for flagged students, increase faculty, staff, and student engagement with the tool, and to evaluate Starfish's impact upon student persistence and retention; and

WHEREAS, Erie Community College has funds available in its operating budget to cover the cost of this software. This initiative is in collaboration with Erie Community College's faculty, staff, and students; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Erie County Legislature hereby approves awarding a contract to Starfish by Hobsons for the purpose of continuing the implementation of Erie Community College's early alert system at a cost to the college not to exceed $63,500; and

RESOLVED, Erie Community College's President is authorized to enter a contract with Hobson for the above-mentioned services; and

RESOLVED, that copies of the resolution be forwarded to the Erie County Executive, the President of Erie Community College, and the Chairman of the SUNY Erie Board of Trustees.