

Strategic Affiliation Monthly Newsletter

July 2024

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC AFFILIATION - Peter Laipson, PH.D.

Higher Learning Commission approves historic education affiliation

June 27, 2024, marked a significant milestone for higher education in rural Kansas, as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) officially approved the Change of Control application filed jointly by Fort Hays State University, North Central Kansas Technical College, and Northwest Kansas Technical College. This approval will result in the strategic affiliation of these three institutions, allowing them to come together under the Fort Hays banner to better serve the region's people, businesses, and communities. FHSU President Mason expressed her gratitude for the support received from various stakeholders in finalizing this affiliation plan.

Under this new affiliation, North Central Kansas Technical College will become Fort Hays Tech | North Central. Northwest Kansas Technical College will be renamed Fort Hays Tech | Northwest. The Higher Learning Commission's comprehensive assessment process included a thorough evaluation of academic offerings, governance, mission, finances, resources, and all degree levels offered by the institutions.

The vision of an affiliation between the three institutions emerged from discussions between President Mason, Fort Hays Tech | North Central President Eric Burks, and Fort Hays Tech | Northwest President Ben Schears. Each of these leaders recognized the urgent need for higher education in rural Kansas to address significant and growing threats to the future prosperity of their shared service region. These threats include an aging population, an expected 15 percent decline in college-bound students by 2029, and a 33 percent decline in Kansas's rural population by 2064.

"What an exciting time for our region and state! We know for rural Kansas to prosper, every individual must have the opportunity to develop their talents, skills, and interests," Burks said. "By our three institutions working more closely together, we will be able to enhance our current offerings, simplify our process, and create new opportunities to prepare students and generate workforce for our area businesses and communities."

With the HLC's approval in place, over 20 affiliation implementation teams are now tasked with integrating and optimizing various aspects of the institutions to serve students, businesses, and communities better.

"Our work in the days ahead will focus on integrating our academic programs and student services and on expanding our already robust industry and community connections to increase opportunities for our students, fueling entrepreneurship in rural Kansas, and meeting the workforce needs of the businesses and communities we serve," Schears said.

For more information about this transformative affiliation partnership, please visit <https://www.fhsu.edu/president/affiliation/>.

Strategic affiliation partners secure major grant funding

Fort Hays State University, North Central Kansas Technical College, and Northwest Kansas Technical College recently secured a \$461,840 grant from Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) to help fund start-up costs associated with the implementation of the three institutions' strategic affiliation. Grant funding will be distributed over the next two years.

FHSU President Tisa Mason sees this grant as a major boost for the affiliation partnership as it transitions from concept to implementation.

“We are incredibly grateful for the investment the ECMC Foundation has made in our affiliation initiative,” Mason said. “Our collective dedication to serving the students, communities, and businesses of Western Kansas is unwavering. This shared commitment is our guiding 'North Star,' mirroring the ECMC Foundation's focus on closing equity gaps in higher education.”

Northwest Kansas Technical College President Ben Schears, who crafted the grant proposal, stated that the timeliness of this grant will help the three institutions keep to a very aggressive plan and timeline to implement our affiliation plan.

“Upon our initial submission, it became rapidly apparent there was considerable interest by ECMC in the broader goals and outcomes detailed in our strategic affiliation plan,” Schears said.

The ECMC grant will help the three institutions pursue the stated goals of the affiliation, including:

- Developing ways to better meet students where they are in their academic journey.
- Identifying innovative and flexible educational pathways between the three institutions.
- Creating new programs and degrees that help students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to advance their careers.
- Expanding relationships with regional employers that allow students to acquire real-world experience and cultivate opportunities in the local job market.
- Honoring a shared commitment to providing unparalleled access and affordability.

ECMC President Jacob Fraire saw in this grant proposal an outstanding opportunity to support these three institutions and move this historic affiliation forward.

“This collaboration supports three institutions in realizing their goal of uniting under an integrated governance structure to better serve the postsecondary education needs of rural students in Western Kansas,” Fraire said.

The strategic affiliation initiative created by the presidents of FHSU, North Central Kansas Technical College, and Northwest Kansas Technical College is a powerful step toward addressing an ongoing exodus of professionals from rural Western Kansas.

“For rural Kansas to prosper into the future, every individual needs the opportunity to develop their skills and interests. It is through education that talent and grit connect with professional opportunities to build the workforce needed for economic growth,” said NCK Tech President Eric Burks. “We are honored that ECMC has invested in our affiliation, which ultimately is an investment in our students and our region.”

Learn more about the strategic affiliation initiative at <https://www.fhsu.edu/president/affiliation/>

Help Us Celebrate Our Affiliation Partnership

Tiger Nation United

Three celebrations. **Three locations.**



Community Affiliation celebrations coming to rural Kansas

A series of “Affiliation Launch” events are scheduled in the hometowns of each of the three campuses. These events will celebrate the historic partnership and allow the community to learn more about the future of higher education in rural Kansas.

Goodland

Tuesday, September 10, 5:00 p.m. Lutters Field - Southeast corner of the campus of Fort Hays Tech | Northwest

Hays

Thursday, September 12, 4:30 p.m. at the Downtown Pavilion in Hays

Beloit

Saturday, September 14, 5:00 p.m., in downtown Beloit