



Affiliation plans announced for FHSU, Northwest Tech, and NCK Tech

Expanded opportunities for students, employers and rural communities is the goal of a recently announced affiliation plan between Fort Hays State University, Northwest Kansas Technical School and North Central Technical School.

Higher education institutions have long been beacons of opportunity and drivers of economic prosperity in rural Kansas. To continue successfully serving our communities in this vital role, each institution must address significant and increasing demographic and economic challenges, including:

- **A decline in the number of college-bound students in rural Kansas:** According to a 2018 report entitled Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education, Kansas will see a 15% drop in college-going students by 2029 and a matching drop in two-year college-bound students.
- **A shrinking rural population:** Experts from the Center for Economic Development and Business Research at Wichita State forecast a 33% decline in rural populations in Kansas by 2064.
- **An aging workforce:** According to the Administration on Aging, more than one-half-million people in Kansas are over 60. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts nearly 25% of the state's population will be 60 or older by 2030.

Progress to date

FHSU President Tisa Mason, North Central Tech President Eric Burks, and Northwest Tech President Ben Schears recognized the challenges each institution will face in the years ahead and initiated a conversation. Working closely together, they developed a shared vision for creating an institutional affiliation to deliver solutions for the students, employers, and communities in rural Kansas.

The first steps were to secure the approval of the governing boards for the two technical schools supporting the affiliation. This process is complete. The affiliation proposal was next brought to the Kansas Board of Regents for consideration at the January meeting. Pending KBOR's approval of the initiative, a bill will be introduced in the Kansas Legislature within the next few weeks.

An affiliation to better serve students

As the three institutions work to implement this initiative, the primary focus will be on delivering solutions for students, businesses, and communities. For students, the affiliation effort will focus on increasing access and creating new pathways for students to achieve their educational goals. These include opportunities to earn a certificate, secure stackable credentials, or earn an associate, bachelor, or graduate degree. The institutions will also create new experiential learning opportunities and career networks and deliver integrated professional advising services that help students navigate an expanding range of choices and options.

An affiliation to promote workforce development

For employers, the partnership will help address workforce concerns by bolstering the talent pipeline, expanding or creating more experiential learning partnerships, and allowing employers to shape how those programs are developed and delivered. Employers will also benefit from expanding access to employee professional/workforce development programs and services ranging from training and consulting programs to continuing education opportunities. The affiliation will also provide opportunities for employers to engage with and assess prospective employees through micro internships and “earn as you learn” programs that recruit and train future employees who are job and work-culture-ready on day one.

An affiliation to better build more prosperous communities

The affiliation will contribute to the growth of stronger communities by addressing critical demographic and workforce challenges. Our efforts will help keep students who complete our programs in their local community so they can contribute to the vitality of the region through the careers they build and through their many contributions to the economic, social, and civic health of their hometowns.

Next steps

During the week of January 10, the three presidents hosted virtual and in-person meetings to introduce the affiliation to faculty and staff. In the coming weeks, the three institutions will begin hosting a series of community meetings to solicit input that will ultimately inform the final affiliation plan. The final step will be to secure the approval of the Higher Learning Commission, the accrediting body for all three schools.

FAQs

Q: Why can't our goals be met without affiliating?
A formalized affiliation and the infrastructure it authorizes lays the groundwork for the institutions to collaborate more deeply – at both the strategic and operational levels. An affiliation allows us to develop coordinated and comprehensive strategic plans. It also allows us to make tactical decisions and investments,

sure in the knowledge that long-term goals, policies, processes, and programs align. Finally, this affiliation will allow us to efficiently pursue integrated academic and administrative solutions to the challenges faced by the three institutions.

Q: How does this affiliation initiative compare to the Wichita State University/Wichita Tech model?

While the proposed general structure (e.g., changing the names and governance while maintaining the separate legal identity of the technical colleges) is the same model utilized for the WSU-WST Tech affiliation, every affiliation is different.

Our three institutions are linked by a shared history, mission, and a distinguished record of service to our local communities. Guided by a new shared vision and framework, the three institutions look forward to working with local communities and stakeholders to make the particulars of this affiliation our own.

Q: Funding - Will this cost the state more?

The proposed legislation will not seek to change the current funding model, nor will it include a request for additional funding.

Q: Is this new or unique in Kansas?

Approximately three decades ago, almost twice as many technical colleges operated in Kansas. All but the seven technical colleges that exist today merged over time with nearby community colleges. Of that seven, two recently merged or affiliated with a Kansas university. This affiliation initiative is nothing new or unique. It is a natural progression in a strategic integration process that has been going on for decades.



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