

Subject: Information on a new institutional affiliation initiative

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to share with you that FHSU has begun a process that will ultimately lead to an affiliation agreement with North Central Kansas Technical College (NCK Tech) and Northwest Kansas Technical College (Northwest Tech).

You may ask why this affiliation and why now? Simply put, each of our institutions exists to serve our students and communities. This is the true north that guides all of our endeavors. For our communities to thrive, every individual needs a chance to fully develop their talents, skills, and interests. It is our shared responsibility to recognize and embrace our role in creating opportunities for rural Kansans and their communities to prosper.

Higher education institutions have long been beacons of opportunity and drivers of economic prosperity in rural Kansas. Today, and even more so in the days ahead, our ability to continue to serve our communities effectively faces significant demographic and economic challenges, including:

- **A decline in the number of college-bound students in rural Kansas:** According to a 2018 report titled *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 statistics from the Administration on Aging, more than one-half-million people in Kansas are over 60. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that nearly 25% of the state's population will be 60 or older by 2030.

Despite these dire forecasts, our three institutions are prepared to pursue this initiative from a position of strength and at a time when the shared challenges we face in the years ahead can be proactively addressed. In the long run, we believe this affiliation will forge stronger connections between our three institutions, our students, and the communities, businesses, and industries we serve.

As we work to implement this initiative, our primary focus will be to deliver better and more effective solutions for the students, businesses, and communities we serve. For students, our efforts will focus on increasing access and creating new pathways to achieve our students' educational goals. These include opportunities to earn a certificate, secure stackable credentials, or earn an associate, bachelor, or graduate degree. We also will create new experiential learning opportunities and career networks and deliver integrated professional advising services that help students navigate what we expect to be an expanding range of choices and options.

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.

For the communities we serve, the affiliation will contribute to the growth of stronger communities by addressing our demographic and workforce challenges. In addition, our efforts will help keep our graduates local so they can contribute to the vitality of our region through the careers they build and through their many contributions to the economic, social, and civic health of our communities.

The immediate next steps in this process will be in the hands of the various governing bodies of our three institutions. The Area Board of Control, the governing body for Northwest Tech, will consider the proposal on Wednesday, January 11. The NCK Tech Board of Trustees will do the same on January 16. Fort Hays State University’s governing body, the Kansas Board of Regents, will consider the proposal on January 18.

We have identified several academic and administrative programs and services pilots, which we will use as proof of concept and from which we will identify best practices before moving to full implementation. Our first academic pilots will focus on agriculture, construction, and nursing programs. Our first administrative pilots will focus on admissions, marketing, advising, Gen Ed, transfer processes, and inter-institutional registrar functions. Additional first administrative pilots will be in the areas of procurement and the creation of an IT Study Group to begin to think about data governance and identify early opportunities for operational alignment. While we have set up a basic structure for these pilot initiatives, we will depend on the professionals on our campuses, those who work closest to their work, to determine how to best reach our desired outcomes.

We expect that several structural changes will be made as a result of this affiliation. The two technical college presidents will report to the FHSU president under the authority of the Kansas Board of Regents. All other employees will remain with their respective institutions. The two governing bodies of the tech colleges will become primarily advisory. And we will introduce a new naming convention for the two technical colleges. NWKTC will become Fort Hays State University-Northwest Tech, and NCKTC will become Fort Hays State University-NCK Tech.

Several things will not change as part of this affiliation. All three institutional presidents will continue to lead their institutions. We will not seek to close any campus or reduce funding eligibility. We will not negatively disrupt the core mission of any one institution, and we have no intention of moving forward in a manner that disadvantages any institution. NJCAA athletics will continue at NWKTC. Each institution will retain its respective Department of Education ID and related funding structure. HLC accreditations will remain separate for each institution.

Our communities need bold solutions that address the very real challenges we face today. We firmly believe this initiative will forge stronger connections between our three institutions, our students, and the communities, businesses, and industries we serve. As our affiliation plan moves forward, we will have many opportunities to work together to shape the initiative and make it stronger.