

### **Three rural Kansas higher education institutions announce new affiliation initiative**

HAYS, Kan – Today, Fort Hays State University (FHSU), North Central Kansas Technical College (NCK Tech), and Northwest Kansas Technical College (Northwest Tech) announced a new affiliation initiative to address demographic and economic challenges in rural Kansas. This affiliation initiative will focus on developing solutions in three key areas:

- Developing academic programs and integrated student services that meet the educational and professional needs of today's and tomorrow's students
- Aligning and optimizing inter-institutional operations to remove unnecessary bureaucratic barriers to student success
- Creating a coalition with regional businesses, industries, and communities focused on increasing opportunities for students, expanding entrepreneurship, and meeting workforce development needs in rural Kansas.

FHSU President Tisa Mason, NCK Tech President Eric Burks, and Northwest Tech President Ben Schears released this statement regarding the affiliation initiative:

Our institutions exist to serve students and communities. This is the true north that will guide our focus in this endeavor. Higher education institutions have long been beacons of opportunity and drivers of economic prosperity. For our communities to thrive, every individual needs a chance to fully develop their talents, skills, and interests. We look forward to working together, and aligning our efforts and resources to deliver enhanced opportunities for rural Kansas.

Kansas Board of Regents Chair Jon Rolph released this statement in support of the initiative:

Fort Hays State, NCK Tech, and Northwest Tech are working diligently to serve families and businesses in their communities and increase prosperity for rural Kansas and our entire state. The Board appreciates the leadership of Presidents Mason, Burks, and Schears in proposing this affiliation to help meet Kansas' workforce needs. The Regents are eager to review the proposal during our meeting next week, and we look forward to working alongside the boards of NCK Tech and Northwest Tech throughout this process.

The Area of Board Control, the governing body for Northwest Tech, will consider the plan 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 plan on January 18.