



# Strategic Affiliation Initiative

## FHSU, NCKTC, AND NWKTC DRAFT AFFILIATION FRAMEWORK - 1/6/23

Fort Hays State University, North Central Kansas Technical College, and Northwest Kansas Technical College are beginning a new partnership to provide stronger, forward-looking educational programs and services to our people, businesses and communities.

Kansas is home to strong, hardworking communities grounded in rich agricultural, manufacturing, and natural resource extraction traditions. It has all the ingredients to thrive. Yet like much of rural America, it faces a severe and growing demographic threat. The population of the First Congressional District, for example, has declined by 1.6% between 2010 and 2020, a time when the state's overall population increased by 6%. This decline is particularly acute in the number of young people who will be passing through our schools. Moreover, Kansas is among the least successful states in retaining its college graduates, a sure inhibitor to economic growth.

For rural Kansas to thrive, every individual must have the opportunity to develop their talents, skills and interests. It is education that makes this development possible. It is education that develops talent and connects it with opportunities that in turn builds a workforce ready to support investment and growth. It is education that will ensure rural Kansas thrives.

Our three institutional missions with their common emphasis on preparing students to become skilled, productive members of their professions and communities already speak to this outcome. Each of our three institutions already does its job well. Yet Kansas's future requires we do more. The best way for us to do more is to work together, forging a highly-collaborative partnership aligned in its practical commitment to rural Kansas. Working together, we will provide stronger, more accessible programs and services that take maximum advantage of our joint resources and varied locations while breaking down the increasingly artificial bureaucratic barriers that limit educational opportunities. We will provide an unprecedented level of student services, ensuring everyone has a place, wherever they are and whatever their educational goals may be. Working together furthermore ensures that our institutions become stronger, more efficient, and more cost-effective.

Working together also means working more closely with our businesses and communities. We will expand our already robust industry and community connections to increase opportunities for our students, increase entrepreneurship, and to make sure we are meeting workforce needs. Therefore, as we see it, working together means uniting our educational institutions, industries and communities in common cause to make certain rural Kansas thrives.

### **PARTNERSHIP GOALS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Our partnership goal is straightforward: increase student and community success for rural Kansas. This outcome is the singular 'north star' by which we will measure partnership success, guided by two core principles:

1. Always putting students first, we will meet students where they are by measuring each student's success in terms of their individual goals and aspirations. This requires state-of-the-art advising that navigates each student through the entire range of enterprise-wide options and opportunities, including multiple delivery modalities and a completion-to-purpose model offering an array of certifications from stackable or modular credentials through traditional undergraduate and graduate degrees. It means serving learners of every age and in every

circumstance: a working bookkeeper with years of credit-earning prior experience who is looking to become an accountant with evening classes delivered at a distance; a secondary school teacher who wishes to obtain a masters so she can teach early college courses in her own classroom; a plumber seeking professional certification; and the traditional student just starting out on their career pathway.

2. We catalyze success by creating active engagements that put each student at the center of a multi-party partnership that includes not only their academic program but related business, professional, and community-based groups as well. These engagements will give students the opportunity for paid, credit-earning professional experiential learning opportunities while still enrolled, positioning them for a productive and rewarding Kansas career. These partnerships will also provide Kansas employers the ability to influence workforce development programs and give them the opportunity to engage productively with prospective employees. Examples include registered apprenticeship programs, or working with professional associations to tailor programs to meet upcoming workforce and civic needs. In many instances these relationships already exist. Our goal is to make them more accessible and more successful. In other areas, there are partnerships waiting to be developed.

## PILOT INITIATIVES

The partnership's first stage involves a number of pilot initiatives chosen to deliver tangible results that clearly meet the partnership goal while providing proof of concept and learnings for next steps. The following list of initiatives is provisional. The nine initiatives (nos. 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 12) marked with a ^ are priority initiatives to be started immediately, reflecting importance, impact, available resources, and likelihood of early success. The others will follow in stages.

Academic Pilots. Each of the listed academic areas will undertake a major initiative that:

- Satisfies the first guiding principle of meeting students where they are by
  - coordinating the relevant academic and technical resources from all three institutions, delivering an expanded and comprehensive set of courses, programs, and services that meet student needs and outcomes;
  - delivering these courses and programs in a variety of locations and models (cohort, etc) that maximize accessibility;

Satisfies the second guiding principle of creating formal active engagements with relevant external partners to ensure the academic programs are informed by, and delivering to, industry needs in a way that addresses workforce needs while optimizing student opportunities. A key outcome will be keeping our graduates local.

The priority academic areas are:

1. ^Nursing / Allied Health. As with all of rural America, western and central Kansas face a critical shortage of nurses and related health care professionals. Consistent with KBOR priorities, the partnership will broaden access and increase the number of qualified nursing and allied health graduates. A dedicated advising staff will ensure all students who wish to work in health care find a career pathway commensurate with their skills and interests.
2. ^Agriculture. As the Fort Hays Department of Agriculture rightly notes, no business is more critical than our food supply. Worldwide need and competition demands our agricultural industry be the best. Each of our three institutions enjoys strong connections in ag economy of Kansas, but working collaboratively with our industry partners, we can do more. Programs and courses in fields including ag tech, machine maintenance, precision agriculture, animal science, ag business, together with a range of certifications from individual course certificates to masters degrees, ensures our level of service extends across every educational aspect of the industry.

3. ^Construction / Construction Management. There are few areas where the demographic challenges facing rural America are more acute than in the building trades. There are fewer people entering the industry at a time when many of the most skilled and knowledgeable workers are retiring. Growth is simply impossible without this expertise. By integrating our technical construction programs with construction management and related business courses, we will expand access, ensuring we serve the industry at all levels and at whatever point each individual finds themselves in their career pathway.

Following the successful launch of the initial academic priority pilots, the following academic initiatives have been identified to be included in phase two:

4. Education. As education is key to our region's success, then educating our educators must be a priority. Building on our traditional strength in teacher education, we will work to ensure that teachers are well prepared and professionally mentored so as to have great career starts, reducing what is now an unacceptably high early teacher dropout rate, a win-win for teachers and their schools. We will expand easy access for teachers throughout the region for their continuing education requirements and support those who seek additional credentialing such as earning Masters degrees which are essential for successful early college programs. We will also ensure there are opportunities for our own faculty to advance their credentialing.
5. IT / Computer Science. Professionals with IT and computer skills are essential in a modern economy. By coordinating resources and expanding access, we will increase the number of qualified professionals in every IT/CS area and related disciplines such as informatics and cybersecurity. Following national industry trends, we will place particular emphasis on increasing the availability of alternative certifications, stackable credentials, and focused specialized training that will allow individuals to step in and out of programs as their work and career advancement requires.

In addition, the following general academic area has been identified as a pilot initiative to begin on a schedule to be determined:

6. Secondary / Post-Secondary Partnerships. This initiative will focus on breaking down educational barriers that make the transition from high school to higher education difficult. Students able to access early college programs are more likely to pursue post-secondary education and to complete their programs more quickly with less debt. We will expand access, engaging more students while they are in high school and then help them navigate their way directly to the right college program.

Related Administrative Functions. Successful implementation of the pilot academic programs will require immediate inter-institutional changes in certain administrative areas, including the following four priority administrative areas:

7. ^ Gen-Ed and Transferability. Integrating academic programs in the ways described in the academic pilots requires frictionless transfer of credits as well as enrollments. While a great deal of progress has been made in this area with more than 100 system-wide transferable courses already in place, more needs to be done to allow qualified students to move seamlessly across our institutions with their earned credits especially those involving Gen-Ed courses. There are few tangible administrative steps an institution can take to accelerate student success than this one.
8. ^ Advising. Empowering students to take full advantage of the opportunities our partnership offers is key to their success and to ours. A comprehensive, first-class advising service that engages with every student wherever they are and which helps them design and navigate a pathway across all our programs and services is a game-changer. It is a signature initiative that will drive student success and give our institutions unique complete advantage.

9. ^ Marketing, Recruitment, and Admissions. Meeting students where they are – whether they are traditional students just beginning post-secondary education or adult learners looking to advance or change their careers – involves a comprehensive marketing, admissions and enrollment process. Prospective students must be made aware of the various educational opportunities available to them, to enroll where it makes the most sense for them, and, when necessary, to move seamlessly between programs or even institutions.
10. ^ Office of the Registrar. The effective and efficient cross-institutional handling of student records is a necessary component of students being able to take full advantage of our partnership and is a natural correlate of the expanded advising and admissions services. Work under this initiative includes creating a cross-institutional transcription exchange to create a simplified crosswalk between institutions.

Administrative Pilots. Integrating the following administrative services using Service Level Agreements (SLAs) across institutions will create more seamless functioning, operational efficiencies, enhanced services, and long-term cost reductions. The two priority pilot areas are:

11. ^ Procurement, to include research, RFPs, all purchasing over a set minimum (tbd).
12. ^ IT, to include data governance, planning, purchasing, and operations across all institutions.

The following five administrative areas will begin on a schedule to be determined.

13. HR, including benefits, employee relations.
14. Payroll, to include a single function for all employees across all institutions.
15. Legal, to include all legal services across all institutions.
16. Grants and Contracts, to include a single resource serving all institutions.
17. IR (Institutional Research), to include initiating, aggregating, analyzing in all related data fields.

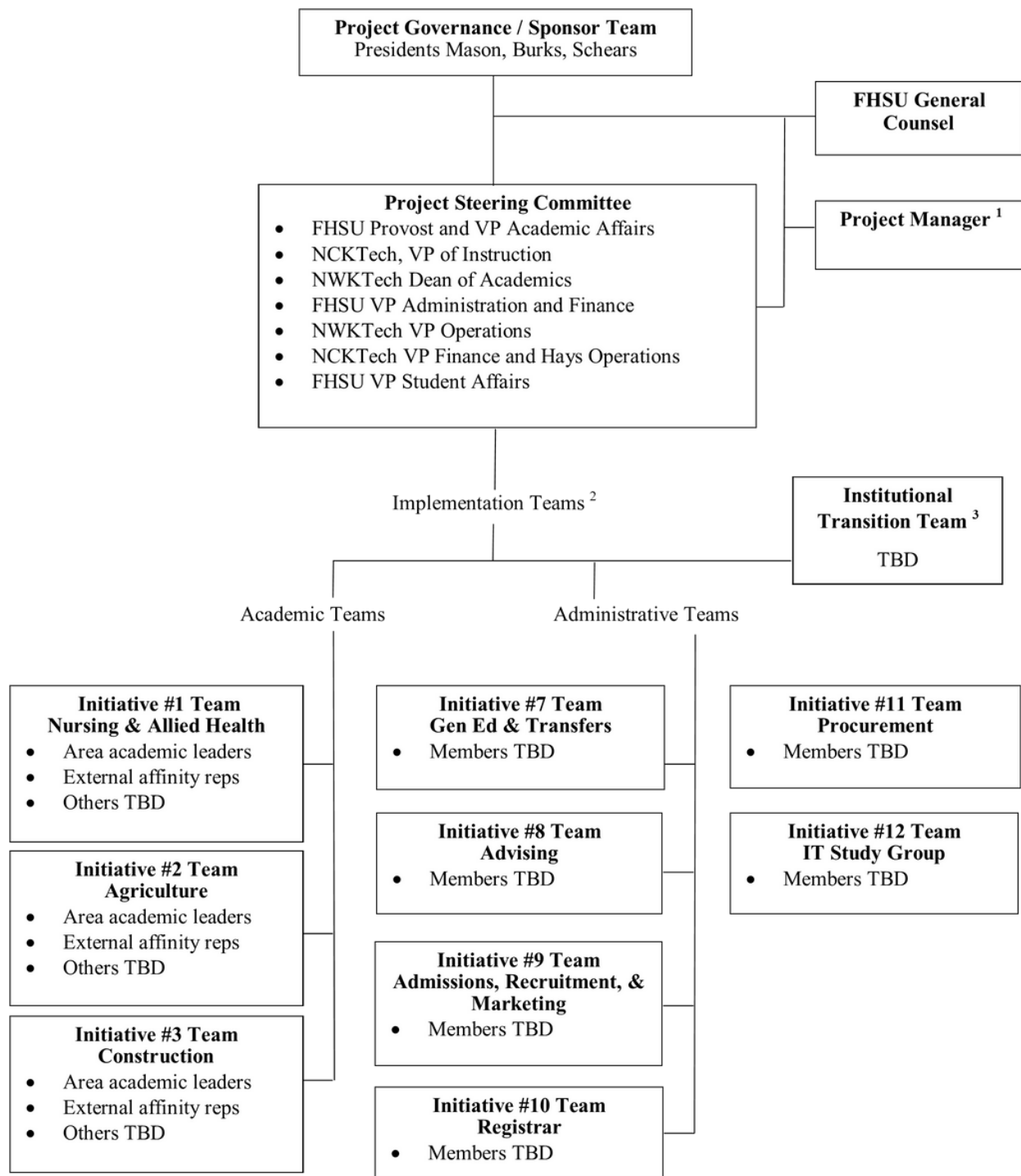
Other areas, most notably finance, may eventually be considered but are not part of this initial list.

## **INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**

Structure follows strategy. The presidents have concluded that an initial “affiliation” structure with a specific focus on rural issues will best meet the partnership goal of increasing student and community success. This will involve:

- Completing a critical mass of pilot initiatives sufficient to establish proof of concept. As noted above, in some cases this will require expanding existing programs and services; in other cases it will involve reconceptualizing and implementing new systems and processes.
- Reflecting the partnership goals and guiding principles, the current preferred nomenclatures are: Fort Hays State University; Fort Hays State University – Northwest Tech; Fort Hays State University – NCKTech.
- All three institutions will retain their individual accreditations and federal DOE id, as well as responsibility for labor relations.
- The presidents of the Technical Colleges will report directly to the FHSU president.
- Shared administrative and other services will integrate using service level agreements (SLAs).
- Academic courses, programs and services will collaborate using MOUs.
- The three institutions anticipate that the new structure will be under the authority of the KBOR, with the current Technical College boards transitioning to a regional capacity supported by institutional bylaws. Representatives of the three boards will meet not less than annually to review progress and assess matters of common interest.

# DRAFT IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE WITH PRIORITY INITIATIVES



Every Committee and Team is chartered. The Governance Team authors and monitors the Steering Committee Charter. The Steering Committee approves and monitors all the other Teams. Project authority, responsibility and accountability begins with the Governance Team and cascades through the entire Implementation Structure.

1. The PM works primarily as staff to the Steering Committee but works for, and has independent access to, the Governance Team.
2. Team membership is determined by the Steering Committee with final approval by the Governance Team. It is each Team's responsibility to develop and implement the plan specific to their initiative, subject to review and approval by the Steering Committee. In addition to its academic membership, following Guiding Principle 2 each Academic Team will have external representation to establish the full partnerships.
3. The Institutional Transition Team is responsible for, e.g., implementing naming changes and similar issues.