

**A Vocational Educational Comprehensive Plan  
for  
Alaska**

New Strategies for New Times

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development  
Division of Business Partnerships  
February 27, 2004

## **Bottom Line First**

Recommendations for: Consolidation, Investment, and Integration to create an interconnected system of excellence for meeting current workforce and economic development needs.

## **I. Background**

### **Current Overall Status**

Alaska's current vocational programs exhibit islands of excellence, but could not be called a "system" of education and training. Many providers focus on traditional offerings or local or perhaps regional needs with little effort spent coordinating their program(s) with others in the state. There is no systemic mechanism to assure students that the training they master is appropriate to the needs of their potential employers. There is no effective way of closing outdated or duplicate programs, nor an effective mechanism to identify, open or expand needed programs. These conditions exist because of a combination of factors, including tradition, budget challenges that have reduced coordination/leadership positions, and growth fostered by local political effectiveness rather than statewide vision, planning, and performance.

### **Funding**

While some programs may be adequately funded, the system as a whole is severely underfunded. Funding has declined because of constant dollars lost to inflation and the competing demands of funds for special education, high stakes testing and No Child Left Behind requirements. (Voc Ed Status Report, pp. 57-60; Perkins Position Paper p. 6) The amount of the decline in state funding of secondary vocational education is hidden in a blended fund. Postsecondary funding has seen an increase through grants and earmarks, while stable funding (formula or general fund) has declined. As a result, system growth, stimulated by legislative earmarks, is not tied to demand, quality, or building a statewide system and institutional growth is not tied to sustainability or quality assurance.

### **Need for Skilled Workers**

Vocational and technical education is increasingly vital to the state's economy while the funding for preparing skilled workers is declining; Alaska faces a shortage of technically trained workers for many occupations vital to the state economy. (Skilled Worker Shortage White Paper)

- Demographics: Alaska Baby Boomers are approaching retirement, fewer workers are behind them, while jobs are projected to grow.
  - Population aged 35-54 = 33.3% of total state population
  - Population aged 20-34 = 20.7% of total state population
- 34.4% of Alaska's "Best Bet" occupations (high growth, high wage) require postsecondary education less than a bachelor's degree (examples: computer support specialist, dental hygienist, licensed practical nurse).

## Vocational Education Comprehensive Plan

- Vocational Technical Education provides a means for secondary students to attain success in academic achievement and in career preparation.
- Non-resident workers hold 30% of private sector jobs that would provide good support for Alaskan families.

### **Need for System Change**

This disconnect between industry's and the economy's needs and the decline in vocational technical education funding has led to widespread recognition of the need for system change:

- The Alaska Workforce Investment Board's (AWIB) recommendations (December, 2000) developed from its publication "Alaska's Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint" (Blueprint) pointed out the need for increased funding and the development of a statewide system
- Two separate organizations, Commonwealth North and the Vocational Technical Education Providers group issued reports in June, 2003, calling for the development of a modern interconnected statewide vocational technical education system.

### **Resources**

1. Values. The values for building a system are already in place. The AWIB's Blueprint espouses building a system that is:

- Needs Driven
- Accessible
- Interconnected
- Accountable
- Collaborative Governance
- Sustainable

There is wide agreement on these principles which were derived through an intensive process involving all stakeholders.

2. Infrastructure. An infrastructure of facilities and equipment exists, although it is eroding as funding declines.
3. Desire for a system. Vocational Technical Education Providers (VTEP) organized on their own initiative to facilitate cooperation and push for a more integrated system. The Commonwealth North organization issued a report calling for a more integrated system. The AWIB publications and resolutions support developing a system of vocational technical education in the state.
4. Collaboration and Cooperation. The Voc Ed Status Report points out that much consolidation has already occurred and that an increase in cooperation and collaboration has resulted.

## **Questions, Cautions and Challenges in Approaching Change**

On the secondary level, will the High School Qualifying Exam and the No Child Left Behind Act result in starving vocational technical education – or will vocational technical education be embraced as a method to meet rigorous standards?

The current secondary funding system, which mixes funding for vocational technical education with bilingual and special ed, does not provide a stable funding base.

On the postsecondary level, systems need to be connected to provide seamless education. There are good examples of seamless education in the state, but they are not system-wide. As a whole, the system is not connected. (Seamless Education; Commonwealth North Report, pp. 9-10)

Any plans to develop, expand, and/or improve institutions, especially new ones, must consider the need for long-term operating costs and assure that resources used will not starve other successful centers. We should not rob Peter to pay Paul based upon effectiveness of political influence; in fact, this is part of why we need a system.

## **II. Recommendations**

### **Recommendation I. Consolidation.**

Step 1. Create a College of Applied Technology. To build a system, it makes sense to consolidate vocational technical education into a single system. As a first step, three educational institutions could be merged immediately. These are the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center, the Alaska Technical Center, and the Southwest Alaska Vocational Educational Center.

The first two depend primarily upon state funding, while the third seeks state funds. None are part of the University of Alaska system, although they have partnerships with UA. For these reasons, consolidation could proceed quickly.

Such consolidation would allow alignment of curriculum, increased cooperation and sharing of resources, and elimination of unnecessary duplication.

Step 2. Study Further Consolidation. Assess the merits of developing a unified statewide College of Applied Technology. It would include the Step 1 consolidation and also include the vocational technical education programs of the University of Alaska. It would be organizationally distinct and independent from the current University system however.

Both Utah and Minnesota have created successful independent statewide systems of career and technical education. Their systems include one-year technical schools as well as two and four year vocational and technical programs. In some localities they have combined

community colleges and technical colleges. In both states, the system unification occurred through legislative mandate.

A task force appointed by the governor should investigate these state's systems in light of what exists in our state and what could exist here, as well as best practices recommended by the National Governor's Association, and make recommendations based upon thorough investigation and discussion regarding consolidation options for Alaska. A reasonable timeframe for forming the task force, performing the research, gathering input and discussion, and developing options and recommendations is somewhere between 12 and 18 months.

Step 3. Create Incentives for operating within the system. The system should be accountable, and funding should be tied to performance measures regarding student outcomes and to assessment regarding alignment with the values specified in the Blueprint. Consequently, an inter-tied accountability and incentive process needs to be developed.

For this incentivization to occur, stable funding must be available. Consequently, Step 3 of this first Recommendation is dependent upon fulfillment of Recommendation II for investing in the system.

With incentives, it is conceivable that other (non-state) institutions may wish to align with the state system. Examples of such institutions include the Delta Mine Training Center, Charter College, Ilisagvik College, the Tlingit Haida Central Council's Vocational Training and Resource Center, Wayland Baptist University and Sheldon Jackson College.

### **Recommendation II. Investment.**

1. Develop stable funding for ongoing operations and infrastructure. This could occur through a variety of mechanisms.
  - a. The AWIB is supportive of the VTEP's request to Alaska's Congressional delegation for federal assistance in securing sustainable funding for the state's vocational technical education system. (VTEP Funding Initiative, draft). The AWIB has also put forward its own request, through the state DOL, for a federal appropriation to support vocational technical education. (Fiscal Year 2005 Project Request Form, Senator Ted Stevens).
  - b. The Voc Ed Status Report puts forth the concept of instituting a tax on non-resident workers as a means to provide stable funding for vocational technical education. (Voc Ed Status Report, pp. 78). While revenue funds cannot be dedicated, the passage of such a tax could be predicated on the legislative intent that vocational technical education, secondary and postsecondary, be adequately funded.
  - c. Re-visit the funding of secondary vocational technical education in order to mitigate the negative effects of the current block grant funding. A more logical blocking of funds would include career guidance, employability skills, and

## Vocational Education Comprehensive Plan

vocational technical education. Vocational Education should not be blocked together with Special and Bilingual Education.

- d. Continue the Technical Vocational Education Program (TVEP; SB289) but revise so as to fund the state system, not particular specified entities.

Given the number of options and approaches being used, an effort should be made to obtain consensus on the one or two single best approaches to obtain adequate increased operational funding for a statewide vocational technical education system. Some of the stakeholders for such consensus include the UA, DOL, EED, and, to the extent possible, VTEP and the industry consortiums. Direction from the Governor's office on this issue is needed.

2. Tie investment to performance. Funding to institutions will be connected to performance in several dimensions.
  - a. One form of performance measures are those contained in the annual Training Provider Performance report, counting attainment of measures such as completion, placement, retention, and earnings change. These will be reviewed when evaluating proposals for funding and are considered for maintaining placement on the Eligible Training Provider List.
  - b. A second aspect of performance will show how well institutions/programs are adhering to the principles espoused in the Blueprint. An assessment on this measure will also be connected to funding distributions throughout the system. This will ensure alignment of the system to the state's economic development and workforce development needs.
  - c. Investment also must be made in capacity building so that institutions/ programs can improve and meet standards.
  - d. Recommend that the TVEP funding be re-authorized but distributed according to performance based on the common measures of the above assessments. All institutions within the system should be eligible for funding.

### **Recommendation 3. Integration**

1. Develop an assessment tool for vocational education based upon the Blueprint. A method of assessing whether an institution and/or program is in line with the principles of the Blueprint needs to be developed. The guiding principles call for a system that is:
  - a. Needs Driven
  - b. Accessible
  - c. Interconnected
  - d. Accountable
  - e. Collaboratively governed
  - f. Sustainable

This tool would be used to tie investment to performance as recommended above.

2. Use common measures to establish clear accountability and reporting expectations.

## Vocational Education Comprehensive Plan

- a. The National Governors Association's "Ready for Tomorrow" report recommends establishing common measures and a common database within the state for K-16 education and workforce development programs.
  - b. The requirements under state law for the State Training and Employment Program and for the Training Provider Performance report should be aligned to the federal performance measures that are required under the Workforce Investment Act and the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Currently these state and federal reporting requirements all require different measures. These could be aligned in state law and we can continue to request alignment on the federal level between the federal departments.
3. The consolidation of vocational technical education into a College of Applied Technology will enable alignment of programs within the system, such as uniform curriculum course numbering, content, and sequencing, which will allow smoother linkages across the system.
4. This in turn will allow the secondary vocational technical education system to more easily align to a unified postsecondary system. For example, a high school linkage with a local branch campus would be honored throughout the entire postsecondary system. It now must align to a mixture of postsecondary campuses' programs.
5. The on-going process of aligning programs to nationally recognized industry skill certifications will facilitate the ability of learners to move seamlessly through the various levels and locations of vocational technical education throughout the state.

### **III. Summary**

The above narrative explains in some detail the summary recommendation made at its beginning:

"Consolidation, Investment, and Integration to create an interconnected system of excellence for meeting current workforce and economic development needs."

If these recommendations are accepted as a framework, a number of tactical steps will be more thoroughly planned to implement the recommendations.

## Vocational Education Comprehensive Plan

### **IV. References and Resources**

#### References Legend:

*Short Title in Narrative* → *Complete Title, Publisher/source, publication date*

#### References Listed:

Best Bet Occupations → “Ten Year Occupational Forecast”, pp 9-10, Alaska Economic Trends, May, 2003.

Blueprint → “Alaska’s Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint”, AWIB, December, 2000.

Commonwealth North report → “Alaska’s Jobs for Alaska’s People”, Commonwealth North, June, 2003

Perkins Position Paper → “Reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998; A Position Paper”, AWIB, September, 2003

Ready for Tomorrow → “Ready for Tomorrow: Helping All Students Achieve Secondary and Postsecondary Success, A Guide for Governors”, National Governors Association, 2003

“Seamless Education for Alaskans”, VTEP and AWIB, December, 2003

Skilled Worker Shortage White Paper → “Alaska’s Skilled Worker Shortage: Crisis or Opportunity?”, AWIB, August, 2001

Voc Ed Status Report → “Vocational Education Status Report 2003 Update”, AWIB, December 2003

Vocational Technical Education Provider’s group report → “VTEP Working Group; Building a Statewide System; Progress Report”, VTEP, June, 2003

#### Acronyms

AWIB → Alaska Workforce Investment Board

DOL → Department of Labor and Workforce Development

EED → Department of Education and Early Development

TVEP → Technical Vocational Education Program

UA → University of Alaska

VTEP → Vocational Technical Education Providers group

#### Internet Sites

Utah College of Applied Technology System: <http://www.ucats.org/about.html>

Minnesota State Colleges and University System:  
<http://www.mnscu.edu/System/MnSCUSystem.html>