**Date:** May 8, 2020

**To:** Dr. Jay Golden

**From:** Dr. Sheree Utash

**Re:** Access to Higher Education Task Force – A Systems/Partnership/Network Approach Taskforce Report

Overview:

The task force met once in person and twice via Zoom to discuss the university’s ability to enhance and expand our affiliation(s) in a manner that will significantly increase opportunities for all Kansans to have access to higher education. The focus for the taskforce was to explore the development of new programs, partnerships, new alliances and investing in systems to support the student experience. Given the wide array of professional experience represented on the task force, a decision was quickly made that the group’s charge was to determine the feasibility of future discussions on these topics and not whether any or all of these topics were/are viable. Moreover, members of the task force voiced reservations about being able to make any recommendations in isolation of the many initiatives being discussed on campus at present. Additionally, this taskforce began Pre-COVID and is ending as we make plans to re-integrate back to campus. The enrollment and economic conditions as a result of this pandemic makes this initiative more critical as we seek to remove barriers and provide opportunities for students.

1. **A national, state, and local overview of higher education affiliations**

We reviewed this topic from a national level with better understanding the consolidations, mergers and affiliations in Connecticut, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Minnesota, Arkansas, Maine, Kentucky and New Mexico.

Then we took a state look at this topic and reviewed the merger of Washburn and Washburn Tech with a final overview of the affiliation between WSU and WSU Tech.

Studies that were shared:

* + TIAA Institute Study – Mergers in Higher Education, a proactive study to a better future
	+ Inside Higher Ed – Growing Role of Mergers in Higher Ed
	+ Boston University – Introduction: A Tale of Two Mergers
	+ Arkansas System Design – started with 1 community college now have 7 in their system

**Recommendation: Continue Exploration and discovery on this Initiative.**

The University is concerned with increasing access to higher education opportunities and providing an appropriate response to the need for expanded higher education opportunities for all citizens of the state. Community colleges are expressing similar concern for providing more accessible quality higher education opportunities suitable to the economic and cultural development of their service areas.

Statements of Exploration should include:

* Could an expanded multi campus model for WSU enhance educational opportunities for the citizens in South Central Kansas by providing the benefits of a WSU system, while retaining the community/local commitment of the community college, as well as the loyalty, support, and contribution of alumni and supporters of the community college?
* Could this type of plan underscore and enhance the work contributions, and aspirations of all who with justified pride, are responsible for the community college?
* Could it achieve economic growth for the region and for the state of Kansas as it meets increasing enrollments and educational demands without the capital outlay required to start a new institution by incorporating an established institution into WSU?
1. **Ideas to improve, expand and scale Wichita State University’s role to create greater access for higher education for all Kansans.**

The task force identified opportunities and challenges for the University, with a new model. Additionally, more immediate ideas of ways we could begin to meet the objective of creating greater access for students were discussed.

**Recommendation: Continue to explore, expand and prioritize the opportunities, challenges and more immediate actionable items identified.**

Priorities and guiding principles for continued work on this project may include the following:

* Relationship building and common respect for all involved in conversations focusing on providing greater access to higher education and more affordability
* Continuation of the efforts to improve the % of FASFA completions within USD259
* Focus on the recruitment of high school students dually enrolled at WSU Tech to WSU
* Provide educational and academic progression to where you live, creating greater access across Kansas
* Host a statewide meeting of superintendents and KDOE administrators
* Create opportunity for seamless dual branding between WSU Tech/WSU, high schools and other educational institutions
* Create more educational pathways with rural high schools
* Partner on educational advanced degree pathways for career technical students
* Be more entrepreneurial in our approach to expand applied learning, creating opportunities with employers across South Central Kansas to engage with students and consider a public/private partnership to meet employer needs for training, work based learning, apprenticeships, and employment.
* Recruit and retain talent in Kansas
* Build a sense of community as we take this concept to rural communities
* Create key strategies for higher education partnerships following the criticalities as a result of the pandemic that build enrollments and potentially reduce operating costs
* Provide opportunity for tuition assistance for families of students whose household incomes are below $40,000
* Focus on building a model that provides a win/win for students, the community, educational institutions involved and the University creating impactful opportunities to better prepare our graduates