

# THE SOUTHERN VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER



## A Framework for Success

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A Model of Excellence for Systemic Change and  
Transformation of Southern Virginia

## I. The History

Long before the exodus of the Southern Virginia manufacturing giants in the late 1990s, the people of Halifax County understood that, “Where there is no vision the people perish. . .”<sup>1</sup> and therefore recognized that even in the strong economy of the 1980s a plan for future growth was necessary. Essential to that plan was the need for a higher education presence in the county. As it were, Halifax had no community college or 4-year university, and was at least 30 miles in either direction from such institutions. The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center was born out of the recognition that education is the foundation upon which strong communities, families, and economies are built, and that without readily accessible and affordable higher education Halifax County’s prosperous growth would be stunted.

Established in 1986 as the Halifax-South Boston Continuing Education Center, this institution began in a two room, 500 sq.ft trailer on the grounds of the Halifax County Senior High School. Because of the trailer’s meager space, it was used for office space and advising sessions, while the high school’s classrooms were used for class meetings. Though the Center’s physical location was humble, its mission was anything but. The following three-component plan for success was immediately created and implemented:

1. Bring in college courses to build a college presence in Halifax County.
2. Implement a comprehensive literacy program to provide free, confidential, one-on-one literacy instruction.
3. Design and deliver a fun, educational summer enrichment program for children 4-12 in Halifax County to instill a lifelong love of learning in future generations.

This plan, simple yet ambitious, was embraced and within 10 years the opportunity existed for individuals to start a two year degree or to complete a master’s degree. In like fashion, the Volunteer Literacy Program was strong with more than 200 trained tutors delivering services to more than 225 adult learners, and the children’s summer enrichment program, named Kids “Kollege,” had developed

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 29:18

into a series of week-long, half-day courses offered each summer. Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) and Danville Community College (DCC) were offering a large number of their courses at the Center, and Longwood University offered complete Master's degree programs onsite. Along with this impressive growth came two moves: one physical, the other organizational. From the two room trailer the Center relocated to a 5,000 sq.ft facility (a former Lowe's Home Improvement building), while organizationally the Center moved under the purview of Longwood University, becoming an official off-campus site of the university.

Yet in the midst of this incredible success and growth, the Center was faced with several new challenges. Chief among them was the prolonged, profound economic downturn that was now descending upon Southern Virginia. By the late 1990s the realities of globalization were hitting the region, and whisperings of outsourcing and major industries relocating to cheaper soil were prevalent. Likewise, the storms that would embroil the tobacco industry in years of litigation and serve an eventual deathblow to the vitality of the rural tobacco tradition were quickly forming. The Center's leadership recognized that while the current programming was impressive, it was insufficient in reaching the heart of the educational dilemma. Though an individual could start an associate's degree or complete a master's degree, the critical link between those two extremes was missing. If the region hoped to meet the pressing challenges of a global economy, bachelor degree programs were critically needed. In response, the Center worked to bridge the associates-master's divide by working with its two community college partners to provide a greater array of courses—enough to allow an individual to complete an associate's degree, not just start one. Additionally, Center staff worked with its then parent agency, Longwood University, to bring in a bachelor's degree program. By 1999, success was achieved when the first onsite bachelor's degree program, Business Administration from Longwood University, was offered at the Center.

With expanded program offerings came the need for more classroom and office space. It was evident the Center needed a much larger facility—one that could meet the current needs as well as allow for future growth and expansion. The community rallied behind the Center and raised 3.6 million dollars through a bond referendum and private gifts to purchase and renovate a STEM factory tobacco warehouse located in the heart of downtown South Boston. An additional 5 million dollars was received through grant awards from local corporate and non-profit partners. No state funds went to the purchasing or renovating of the facility—an extraordinary testament to the devotion of this community to its future and to its core belief that education is the catalyst for change.

In 2001, the Halifax-South Boston Continuing Education Center moved to its current 70,000 sq. ft (35,000 of which was renovated at the time) location at 820 Bruce Street in downtown South Boston. To reflect the more expansive program focus and more regional outlook, the Center was renamed the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (HEC). The Center continued to partner with four-year colleges and universities to expand the bachelor degree options available; Mary Baldwin College, Bluefield College, Old Dominion University and Ferrum College were some of the partnerships formed at that time.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, the General Assembly passed legislation making the HEC an independent state higher education agency. This move allowed the HEC to exercise greater flexibility in the types of programs it brought in and the partnerships it formed. In January 2006, the HEC, as a state agency, hired its first executive director. Longtime supporter and advocate of rural education and the Center, W.W. Ted Bennett, attorney and former Virginia General Assembly Delegate, was chosen for the position. That fall, the Center completed renovations on 10,000 of the remaining 25,000 sq.ft of unfinished space. The addition, called the “West Wing,” allowed for four additional classrooms, an executive office suite, a conference room, two bathrooms, and a student lounge.

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<sup>2</sup> While Bluefield College and Ferrum College are no longer providing programs at the HEC, the Center has since partnered with Troy University, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Cambridge College.

## II. The Demographics

The Southern Virginia region has faced, and continues to face, many unique challenges. To fully understand the HEC, its history, and its future, one must understand the community it serves and the problems that community faces. While the following statistics focus on Halifax County, the numbers and conclusions can be extrapolated to the Southern Virginia region as a whole.

**Persistent Unemployment:** As of September 2007, Halifax County's unemployment rate was, at 6.0%, the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in Virginia behind Martinsville, Danville, and Galax (6.1% with 189 of the 3,096 civilian labor force unemployed). Elevated unemployment rates have plagued Halifax for over a decade with rates fluctuating from 10.2% in 2003 to 5.7% in 2006 and 7.0% in February 2007. Since the 1990s, Halifax County's unemployment rates are consistently above the state unemployment averages.

**Low Per Capita and Median Household Income<sup>3</sup>:** As of 2005, the per capita personal income in Halifax County was \$22,671. In 2002, that number was \$20,790, representing a meager \$1881 increase over three years. The median household income in 2004 was \$31,030 and \$29,743 in 2001. On the surface, it appears that households showed a \$1287 increase in those three years; however, when we see that the median household income in 2000 was \$30,690 we see that households actually suffered a nearly \$1,000 **decrease** between 2000 and 2001 and only a \$340 increase in the four years between 2000 and 2004.

**Worsening Poverty:** The Commonwealth's self-assessment, Virginia Performs, rates the level of poverty in Halifax County as a worsening condition. More than half of the county's children (57%) are eligible for free or reduced meals at school, and as late as 2003 21% of children under 18 lived below the poverty line with 60 out of 1,000 children receiving public assistance in the form of the Department of Social Services' Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Sadly, this is representative of the larger picture of poverty in the United States. According to the US Department of Agriculture's report, "Rural America at a Glance," poverty rates for nonmetro (i.e. rural) areas have historically been, and continue to remain, higher than poverty rates in metro areas. In 2005, 17.4 percent of nonmetro families with related children were poor compared with 14 percent of metro families with related children. Additionally, 43.1 percent of nonmetro families with related children with a female householder were poor compared with 35 percent of metro families of the same type.<sup>4</sup>

**Low Educational Attainment:** Thirty-two percent of the adult population has a level 1 literacy rate; that means approximately 3 out of every 10 adults in Halifax County do not read well enough to function in daily life. Thirty-six percent of adults 25 and older do not hold a high school diploma or GED and an overwhelming 90.1% do not hold a Bachelor's degree. Again, this reflects the larger, national picture. Educational attainment levels are lower in the nonmetro South than in **any other region in the nation.**

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<sup>3</sup>The newest statistics available were from 2005 for per capita income and 2004 for median household income.

<sup>4</sup> Rural America at a Glance, 2007 edition. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Economic Information Bulletin Number 31 Oct.2007.

Approximately 24 percent of nonmetro southern adults lacked a high school diploma in 2005, and only 15 percent had completed 4 years of college.<sup>5</sup>

**Population Loss:** In the decade between 1990 and 2000 Halifax County experienced modest population growth with a 3.48% increase. But the jobs that once attracted and held people here are gone and are not being replaced at a rate sufficient to keep people in the community. Halifax is therefore in the midst of considerable outmigration resulting in a projected 6.48% population loss by 2010. This trend can already be felt and seen in the shrinking labor force. Between September 2003 and September 2007, Halifax County’s civilian labor force shrunk from 16,358 to 15,882—with an average loss of 119 workers per year. Such significant population loss has resulted in Southern Virginia facing the worst diaspora since the Civil War.

**Growing Minority Population:** Statewide, minorities comprise 31% of the overall population. In Halifax County that number is about 39%. By 2020 minorities are projected to make up 41.2% of the population with Latinos comprising an increasingly larger part of that number. Projections indicate in the next 40 years, Asians and Hispanics will be the only racial/ethnic groups to increase in population. The growing minority presence is reflected in the national workforce data. In 1960, the United States workforce was 87% White and 15% minority; in 2005, those numbers shifted to 63% White and 37% minority. This indicates the existence of an underserved minority, both regionally and nationally, and we must work collaboratively to address the needs of this population.

**New Industry in the Southern Virginia Region Tends to be in the Low-Wage Sector:** Accommodation and food services, retail trade, and transportation and warehousing industries have seen the largest number of new hires (443, 247, and 212 respectively). The average weekly wages for those industries are:

- Accommodation and Food Service--\$208
- Retail Trade--\$367
- Transportation and Warehousing--\$511

As the numbers demonstrate, there is an inverse relationship between industries with the largest number of new hires and the amount of weekly wages. This presents a troublesome reality when attempting to resolve the issue of significant population loss and sustainable economic growth.

### **III. January 2006 Report by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia**

In 2005, a needs assessment evaluating the educational demand for a public four-year college located in Southside Virginia was conducted.<sup>6</sup> In its January 10, 2006, publication entitled, “Report on the Analysis of Education Demand in Southside Virginia and Recommendations for Action,” the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) summarized the assessment findings and listed its recommendations for future direction as this:

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote #4.

<sup>6</sup> The report defined Southside Virginia as the cities of Martinsville, Danville, and South Boston, and the counties of Henry, Pittsylvania, Patrick, and Franklin.

1. There is not sufficient demand to warrant a new public four-year college in Southside Virginia.
2. For families previously participating in the manufacturing and agricultural economies (i.e. traditional blue-collar working families), a strong culture of college attendance ***does not*** exist, and educational attainment levels are comparatively ***low***.
3. Because a strong culture of college attendance does not exist, the three higher education institutions in the region (HEC, NCI, and IALR) should reach out to K-12 parents, teachers, and students to begin fostering a college-going culture.
4. Regional economic development could be strengthened by introducing new higher education degree programs that capitalize on local assets.
5. The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (HEC) model should serve the entire Southern Virginia region and should leverage existing public and private institutions' assets and resources; in addition, the HEC, New College Institute, and Institute for Advanced Learning and Research should collaborate, coordinate, and not duplicate program offerings.

The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center quickly responded to the 2006 report, and began implementing a strategic plan that addresses SCHEV's recommendations and that positions the Center as a catalyst for regional transformation.

#### **IV. The HEC Response to the 2006 SCHEV Report**

In responding to the SCHEV report the critical piece was finding a way to hold onto the Center's successful foundation while fully embracing the future. The Center's leadership recognized that a prosperous HEC future would, in many ways be a continuation of a prosperous past. With this concept in place the following approach was crafted:

1. Form a coalition with the two other higher education centers in the region: New College Institute in Martinsville and the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville. Collaborative efforts with coalition partners resulted in the HEC's designation as the primary institution for K-12 outreach in the region.
2. Create a regional research and outreach center for K-12 to be housed at the HEC and facilitate the Center's K-12 outreach efforts.
  - a. Use the outreach arm of this center to take the HEC's program offerings to communities throughout the region.
3. Develop new bachelor degree programs that will capitalize on local assets and strengthen the region's economic development efforts.
  - a. Leverage existing college, university, and local partnerships to develop these programs and to make them affordable and accessible to the citizens of the region.

What follows is a fuller discussion of the HEC's three-step plan for future growth and a rationale for each component of that plan.

***Form a coalition with New College Institute (NCI) and the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR).***

In direct response to the SCHEV recommendation that the HEC, NCI, and IALR collaborate, cooperate, and not duplicate program offerings, the three institutions partnered to form the Southside Higher Education Coalition (SHEC). Each institution's degree options would be cross marketed and cross delivered utilizing the state of the art distance learning technologies available at each institution. This will create a distributed campus providing expanded higher education offerings to meet the region's needs. Given the realities of rural Southern Virginia—a large geographic area with a thinly dispersed population—a distributed campus provides the most cost effective method to leverage existing resources and maximize each institution's regional impact. With concentrated efforts between the three sites, it will be possible to create the critical mass needed to develop, implement, and grow new baccalaureate degree completion programs.

To assist with non-duplicated program development, it was determined each institution would focus its energies on a different academic area and develop signature programs within those areas. Based upon its mission and 20 year history of proven results, the HEC would continue to offer its more than 35 degree programs, and add an emphasis on K-12 teacher education, early childhood interventions, outreach, and student learning focused on career and academy pathways in design and the arts (encompassing everything from engineering and wood science design to advertising and culinary arts), and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). In addition, the Center will expand its existing adult education and workforce development programs while developing four new baccalaureate degree completion programs that will leverage existing regional assets and grow new ones. The Coalition determined the HEC would take the primary lead in the regional K-12 outreach efforts recommended by SCHEV. To begin development of these signature programs, the Coalition partners submitted a collaborative grant application to the Tobacco Commission; this application was

funded, and the HEC, NCI, and IALR each received \$1.5 million in 2007 to further new program development.

***Create a research and outreach center to be housed at the HEC; use the outreach arm of this center to take the HEC's program offerings to communities throughout the region.***

With the Center's new emphasis on K-12 teacher education, student learning, early childhood interventions, and outreach there was no effective way to meet this newest challenge through its existing slate of program offerings. The solution, therefore, was the creation of a research and outreach entity that could be devoted to this new task, housed at the HEC, and used by the Center as it expands throughout the region. Because excellence without research is a hard and often expensive lesson and pursuit, the HEC's progress would rely on using the best research and development backed by the best data available. It was clear that without an in-house research and development program, the HEC could neither overcome the immense barriers it would face as it expanded throughout the region, nor could it effect the systemic change the region needed.

Therefore, in January 2006, in response to the SCHEV report, the HEC applied for, and was awarded, a \$100,000 research grant by the Warner administration to begin examining the trends facing Southern Virginia. The grant funds allowed the HEC to initiate its regional K-12 outreach efforts, focusing on Science, Technology, Math, and Engineering areas; in addition, the HEC began researching the broad picture of Southern Virginia demographics and labor and education trends. Because of the efforts facilitated by the grant, the basic picture of the region's future began to develop. It was evident the HEC had to take a comprehensive, regional approach beginning with reaching out to the 22 school divisions within the region to create a unified network. Out of this undeniable need came the establishment of The Center for Rural Education and Economic Development (CREED).

CREED's strategic focus and goals are to:

1. Inspire a "culture of education" that will build on and facilitate career pathways beginning with outstanding early childhood programs. The value of education must be reinforced through grade 12 in order to support economic development in Southside.
2. Use only strategies and initiatives that are research-based.
3. Ensure all efforts are regional, collaborative, and sustainable.
4. Provide leadership in fostering K-12 partnerships that ensure public school children can pursue pathways of world-class educational opportunities consistent with career interest and regional economic development initiatives
5. Research rural education issues and advocate for initiatives that will influence and enable policy-makers to make responsible decisions that enhance education, economic development and quality of life in Southside.
6. Identify and emulate innovative models of excellence that serve rural students, schools, businesses, and communities well for a knowledge-oriented society and global economy
7. Advance applications of technology needed to overcome the problems of a large geographic area with thinly disbursed populations to develop state of the art distance learning centers providing world class content and utilizing nationally recognized best practices that will improve teacher quality and student learning.

Because education is inextricably linked with economic development, CREED allows the HEC to have a dual impact on the level of educational attainment and future economic growth in the region. It is this twofold attack that will allow the HEC's efforts to begin chipping away at some of the stark realities facing the region. Because CREED will focus on advancing the region's K-12 public school systems towards world class achievement, the HEC's outreach efforts will be most effective when using CREED as its vehicle.

### ***Why Outreach?***

Before moving forward, the question of outreach must be fully addressed. Why is it necessary for a higher education center like the HEC to devote an abundance of human, financial, and intellectual resources to reaching out to the K-12 public school system? It is one of the most valid, pertinent questions that could be asked of the Center. The quick answer is that unless the region's children are reached at an early age and impressed with the importance of continuing their education beyond high

school (or in many cases to at least complete high school) then the future of the HEC and the initiatives of its university partners is at extreme risk. Without a steady stream of participants into academic programs, there is no program sustainability; the state legislature, and in turn the needed university partners will not make a considerable financial investment only to have a program wiped away in five years for lack of participation. That is the bottom line from a programmatic standpoint; the wider, regional outlook is more complex.

According to Paul Stapleton and Hobart Harmon's "Proposal to Create Center for the Advancement of Rural Schools," for rural communities, public schools are the one common thread and conduit for passing on core values to future generations. The rich and diverse traditions of rural communities are not only reflected in its schools, but are also passed down from generation to generation in those schools. It is therefore not a stretch or understatement to say that failing schools and students result in failing communities and a crumbling cultural infrastructure.

Moreover, it is a rural community's schools that "[have] the potential to bridge the gap in transitioning the local community. . . .to a more information and technology based economy."<sup>7</sup>

Stapleton and Harmon state:

Rural communities must capitalize on the potential of their local rural schools and related partners to create home grown economic development that emphasizes entrepreneurship, school-based enterprises, innovation, and applications of telecommunications technology in ways that incubate microbusinesses and sustainable economic development for local communities.

A knowledge or creativity-based economy is a salient point for rural communities like Southern Virginia.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service<sup>8</sup>, nonmetro (or rural) areas with a high percentage of creative occupations experienced significant employment growth between 1990 and 2004. Likewise, the study found nonmetro counties with a relatively large college-

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Stapleton and Hobart Harmon. "Proposal to Create Center for the Advancement of Rural Schools" 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Rural America at a Glance, 2007 edition. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Economic Information Bulletin Number 31 Oct.2007.

educated population and a high percentage of creative occupations, experienced employment growth at a rate three times faster than areas with a low percentage of creative occupations. This has significant implications for rural Southern Virginia, and its importance needs to be introduced and reinforced in the formative K-12 years.

Outreach is absolutely critical for not only the success of the HEC and its programs, but also for the region as a whole. Southern Virginia's economic transformation stands the best chance of success when utilizing its common thread, the public school systems. To effectively impact the region's youth with the economic and cultural importance of continued education, the HEC must take up the mantle of outreach. And indeed, since embarking on a systemized plan of K-12 outreach, the Center has experienced strong initial success—specifically when using CREED as the vehicle for that outreach. As the following accomplishments indicate, the Center's success through CREED is evident.

- ***Earning the Support of the Region's School Superintendents***

CREED's first success was garnering the support of the superintendents from 22 school divisions in Southern Virginia. At a meeting in September 2006, the HEC brought together the regional superintendents and the State Superintendent for Public Instruction Billy Cannaday for a discussion on the HEC's proposal of CREED. HEC Executive Director W. W. "Ted" Bennett, emphasized that CREED would be an advocate, a voice, and a force for K-12 education, and would do so without seeking any monetary gain from the school divisions. He also reminded the meeting participants that there is strength in numbers, and that each of them would have a greater impact if they worked together through CREED. Superintendent Cannaday urged his regional counterparts to support this initiative, and indeed they did. The Center for Rural Education and Economic Development officially launched in September 2006 with the regional superintendents' pledge to support and participate in the organization's initiatives.

- ***Advanced Placement Initiative***

In September 2007, a **\$13.2 million Advanced Placement (AP) grant** was received from the National Math and Science Initiative with funding donated by Exxon Mobil. This grant award came as a direct result of CREED's efforts, and is the first major K-12 outreach initiative for the HEC. The grant will be used to increase the number of students throughout the Commonwealth, and particularly in rural Southern and Southwest Virginia, participating in AP Math, Science, and English courses and succeeding on the corresponding AP exam. From its work with the 2006 Governor's research grant, one of the HEC's key findings was the critical need to strengthen science, technology, engineering, and math in the region, and the massive financial resources that would be required to reach out to the region in those areas. Because of the immense financial demand, the challenge of strengthening the region's STEM efforts seemed insurmountable. The Advanced Placement grant, was nothing short of a godsend, and solidified at least six years of teacher development and student initiatives, particularly to underserved minority students, in the STEM areas.

The Center applied for this grant because an Advanced Placement initiative begins to fulfill the HEC's emphasis on teacher development and student success in STEM using nationally recognized best practices. Advanced Placement is recognized nationally and internationally as a means of reaching a school's best and brightest students. Moreover, past recipients of this AP grant have had considerable success reaching underserved racial and socio-economic minorities. While Virginia is #4 among states with the greatest percentage of graduating seniors earning a 3 or better on an AP exam, the majority of these students are found in wealthy Northern Virginia school districts. Over the last several years in Southern Virginia, nine school divisions, including Halifax County, have **no record of any student taking an AP exam**; in Southwest and Southern Virginia a combined **17 school divisions have fewer than 50 students taking an AP exam**. By expanding access to AP courses, the HEC will build on Virginia's success and push it to #1.

Because student success is measured by an end of course exam that is graded by an independent third party (the College Board), AP is universally accepted as a best practices model. Additionally, the grant will allow the HEC to deliver professional development content to teachers in the region thereby addressing the pervasive need of rural school divisions to attract and retain qualified teachers.

The HEC competed against 29 organizations from across the United States for the AP grant. Only seven grants were awarded, and the HEC was the first to be announced. Additionally, the full \$13.2 million dollar grant was not guaranteed unless the HEC could raise \$2.4 million in matching funds. The Center's success in raising that money not only manifests the Center's solid reputation as a force for educational and economic transformation throughout the region, but also demonstrates the strength of the Center's corporate and non-profit partnerships. Matching funds totaling \$3.1 million (well in excess of the initial needed amount) was donated by the following partners:

- Dominion Power--\$300,000
- Halifax Educational Foundation--\$100,000
- Old Dominion Electric Cooperative--\$110,000
- Philip Morris USA--\$150,000 (pending)
- Virginia Tobacco Commission--\$2.5 million

Receiving the matching funds secured the full \$13.2 million AP grant for the HEC, and considerably raised the Center's state-wide profile. A non-profit 503(c) organization, Virginia Advanced Study Strategies (VASS), was created to administer the grant program and is housed at the Center.

HEC Executive Director W. W. "Ted" Bennett has been named chair of the Virginia Math Science Coalition (VMSC) for 2007-2008, and as a result of his appointment, the Coalition has agreed to focus on 15 pairs of Southern Virginia public schools in the 2008 extension of a \$4 million federal, math-science grant towards the creation of Southern Virginia Master Teachers in the areas of math and science. These monies, in addition to the teacher development that will result from the AP grant, will enable the

region's students to achieve great success in professional development for rural teachers in the critical STEM areas.

After the award was announced, the HEC learned it was CREED that solidified its Advanced Placement grant application. The National Math and Science Initiative looked for organizations with a mission of and success with reaching out to K-12. The HEC's creation and early success with CREED helped make it a strong candidate for, and winner of, the AP grant.

- ***Teaching American History Initiative***

The third CREED success is a **\$1 million Teaching American History grant** received in June 2007. This grant will fund professional development for K-12 history teachers from four regional school divisions: Halifax, Charlotte, and Pittsylvania Counties, and the City of Danville. Over a three-year period, the participating teachers will take part in a series of workshops, lectures, and visits to historical sites designed to enhance their understanding of and excitement for local history and how it fits into the wider framework of American history. The first workshops began in October 2007, with an initial core of 24 teaching fellows. These fellows will take the resources gained back to their school divisions and share them with fellow educators. The Teaching American History initiative is an excellent example of the HEC's broader emphasis on K-12 teacher education, and demonstrates the focus on pedagogy that will be a key part of that emphasis.

- ***Last Mile Broadband Access Initiative***

Finally, the future of many of CREED's efforts will hinge on the ability to exchange large amounts of data instantaneously, securely, and dependably from centrally-located data sources. It is without question that to do so will require affordable, high-speed Internet connection availability not just to the HEC, but to the teachers, students, and administrators throughout the Southern Virginia region. In a serendipitous confluence of events, the HEC's efforts through CREED coincide with the 700-mile broadband network being built and managed by the Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative (MBC). The implications of this powerful technology have been noted, and a plan to leverage this broadband

network to create a private education network that will serve the schools and higher education institutions partnered with the HEC through its Southside Higher Education Coalition and CREED has been developed. This private education network, coined the **Southern Virginia Education Network (SVEN)**, will open doors previously unimaginable within rural America. The SVEN concept is so unique it captured the attention of Governor Tim Kaine and his Broadband Roundtable, whose mission is to solve the problem of bringing last mile broadband access to rural Virginia. In September 2007, the entire Broadband Roundtable, of whom former Governor Mark Warner and Secretary of Technology Aneesh Chopra are members, came to the HEC to discuss SVEN and see a demonstration of its capabilities.

For the first time, world class distance learning and remote classroom participation will occur on a technological plane that will rival that of the most sophisticated urban schools in the nation. SVEN will allow the region to collaborate in the teaching, training, and retraining of rural educators, as well as allow students to become more globally competitive through the availability of an array of new course offerings such as Advanced Placement and dual enrollment. Because current networks were established to merely allow internet users to “browse the web,” they are not capable of supporting modern applications and future distance learning models necessary for schools and businesses to compete in the global economy. SVEN, however, will be unified, expandable, dependable, and provided at a much lower cost than what is currently available. The quality of distance education will rival that of in-person instruction. Students and teachers will interact with the clarity and focus of face-to-face interactions; the days of choppy, scrambled images and frustrating time delays as the material is delivered are a thing of the past. SVEN will provide the region with access to a variety and richness in instruction never seen before.

Beyond the vast possibilities for education is the potential for economic development that SVEN holds. Delivering broadband access to rural schools makes it possible for every business and entrepreneur along the route to access broadband as well. There is also the ability to incorporate

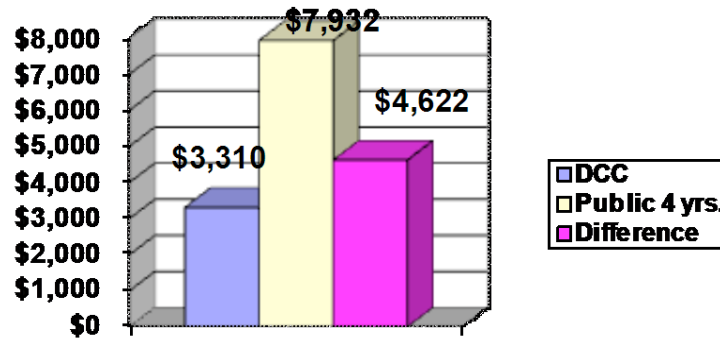
private internet service providers and extend them an opportunity to leverage the network to offer reliable, high-speed, cost-effective broadband service to private citizens throughout the region. This in turn, will encourage and enhance entrepreneurship and small business development in Southern Virginia and will help revitalize the region's depressed economy.

- ***Develop new bachelor degree programs that will capitalize on local assets and strengthen the region's economic development efforts; leverage existing college, university, and local partnerships to develop these programs and to make them affordable to the citizens of the region.***

One of the key recommendations in the SCHEV 2006 report was the strengthening of regional economic development by introducing new higher education degree programs that capitalize on local assets. Since the 1990s, the HEC has seen bachelor degree completion programs as a critical part of the region's growth and success. In response to the SCHEV recommendation, HEC leadership once again looked throughout the region at existing assets, resources, and opportunities for future growth that would build on the region's K-12 efforts moving towards academic and career pathways that allow students to see and follow a clear path from high school and college into the workforce.

Developing new bachelor degree programs, however, is only one side of the equation; the other is leveraging existing college and university partnerships to make these new programs accessible and affordable. To solve this equation the HEC implemented the 2+2 model. This model pairs 2 years of community college instruction with 2 years of instruction by a four-year college or university to reach a baccalaureate degree. This allows the HEC to fully access its strong community college partnerships, as well as leverage its partnerships with four-year institutions. The 2+2 model is, without questions, the best option for providing students with a cost-effective method of completing a bachelor's degree program. Utilizing the 2+2 method, a student can save almost \$10,000 in tuition per year in completing a bachelor's degree—this amount is in addition to the tremendous cost savings in room, board, and other incidental expenses inherent in living on a college campus.

### Yearly Tuition Cost Savings in Using the 2+2 Model



Since the majority of the HEC's current students require some form of financial assistance, the 2+2 savings will provide an enormous incentive to participation. The new 2+2 programs to be fully introduced fall 2008 are: Wood Science and Design, Forestry, Hospitality and Tourism, and Graphic Arts and Design.

- ***Wood Science and Design and Forestry***

The Wood Science and Design and Forestry degrees will capitalize on the region's current assets. With the loss of textile and manufacturing, forestry has become the largest revenue producer for all rural areas in Virginia. It is therefore a resource people are familiar with and one that is already fully integrated into the economy. As the region explores other avenues for future economic prosperity, it cannot afford to ignore or neglect an industry that accounts for much of its current employment base and has the potential to account for even more in the future.

While logging, wood products, furniture, and paper manufacturing only account for 1.5 percent of employment in Virginia as a whole, these same industries account for 8.8 percent of employment in Southern Virginia. A prime example is Charlotte County, Halifax County's northeastern neighbor, where employment in forestry and logging is **59 times greater** than is typical in the rest of the Commonwealth. Moreover, average weekly wages in forestry and logging are 11 percent higher than the typical average weekly wage in Southern Virginia; the average weekly wages in wood product manufacturing are 13

percent higher. Simply put, logging, wood products, furniture, and paper manufacturing are important industries for the region, and by developing degrees to expand them, the HEC will strengthen and support the region's existing economic development efforts as recommended by SCHEV.

A natural extension of the region's forestry base is the expansion of wood science and design within Southern Virginia. Wood science is a technological and science based approach to the manufacturing of wood, and is the future for the wood and wood products industry. It also represents a prime area of economic expansion for this region. To take advantage of it, Southern Virginia must grow a skilled workforce, with the technological and scientific background the wood science and design industry requires. The Center will position the region to meet this demand by leveraging existing partnerships to create a seamless career pathway from high school to a bachelor's degree and the workforce. Using CREED's network of school divisions, the HEC has secured support from five Southern Virginia high schools to institute a WoodLINKS USA program beginning in fall 2008. WoodLINKS USA is a grassroots educational program that fosters career pathways by allowing students to enter the program in high school to gain awareness, knowledge, and training to meet the needs of the global forest products manufacturing industry. Students will have the opportunity to be involved in on-site training opportunities at various industries and businesses across the Southern Virginia region, as well as educational training programs on-site in their geographic areas.

The HEC and its partners in this initiative have secured funding to open two WoodLINKS Training Labs: the west site in Danville City/Pittsylvania County serving students in that area as well as those in Patrick and Henry Counties, and the east site in Halifax County serving students there and those in Charlotte and Mecklenburg Counties. Students completing the WoodLINKS program in high school will have the ability to continue their education in wood science by enrolling in an associate's degree program provided by one of the HEC's community college partners, and continue to the baccalaureate program in Wood Science and Design or Forestry provided by Virginia Tech at the HEC; those high school

students who wish to enter the workforce directly will be better prepared with 2-3 years of hands-on experience using the same machines in labs as professionals use in their everyday work. This will make students completing the WoodLINKS program immensely more attractive to future employers.

- ***Hospitality and Tourism***

A Hospitality and Tourism degree program will also support existing economic development efforts, as well as, provide some crucial inputs to help this industry expand in the region. As an industry, hospitality and tourism has emerged as one of the leading strategies for rural economic development. A recent study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service found rural recreation counties—counties heavily dependent on recreation and tourism economically—generally experienced higher employment and income, lower poverty rates, and healthier and better educated populations than other rural communities. This study also found that earnings per resident worker were **\$2,000** higher in rural recreation counties than in other rural counties. The Southern Virginia region has experienced similar trends. Between 2000 and 2005, while overall employment in the region fell by 8.7 percent, employment in hospitality and tourism actually **increased** by 1.8 percent. Over the same time period, the average weekly wage in the hospitality and tourism **sector increased at a rate of 25 percent**; especially impressive considering the overall average weekly wage in the region only increased by 14 percent.

- ***Design and the Arts***

While forestry, wood science, and hospitality and tourism will all leverage existing resources, the arts and design program, starting perhaps with graphic design as the first arts-career, creative building block will position the region to continue to take full advantage of the future growth predicted as the nation continues its move towards a knowledge-based economy. Between 2002 and 2014, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects occupations in the service and professional and related sector will increase by over 11 million jobs—thereby accounting for three-fifths of the total job growth in the country. As Richard Florida noted in his work, “Rise of the Creative Class,” the “creative sector” will be responsible

for creating more jobs over the next 10 years than currently exists in all of manufacturing. Not only are jobs in the “creative sector” projected to make up a large part of the nation’s future economy, wages in this sector are quite lucrative. According to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), the average annual salary in Virginia for multi-media artists and animators in 2005 was \$49,800, \$40,900 for graphic designers, and \$63,200 for programmers. Moreover, the VEC projects that between 2002 and 2012, there will be approximately 684 statewide openings *each year* in these three occupations. See also November 29, 2007 news article in the Richmond Times Dispatch (Appendix 1).

This trend is being played out across the nation. According to John Hawkins in “The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas,” more Americans today work in arts, entertainment, and design than work as lawyers, accountants, and auditors. Increasingly design, not functionality and price, will be the platform upon which businesses compete and subsequently thrive or fail. As stated in A Whole New Mind, in today’s economy decent quality and reasonable price are the basic expectations—they are the “entry ticket for being allowed into the marketplace.” That means companies must compete on the aesthetics and emotional pull of a product. The former chairman of the Sony Corporation, Norio Ohga, put it succinctly: “At Sony, we assume that all products of our competitors have basically the same technology, price, performance, and features. Design is the only thing that differentiates one product from another in the marketplace.”<sup>9</sup>

The HEC sees the arts as a critical piece in the region’s future growth and prosperity. Just as the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math are essential, so are the arts and the cultivation of Southern Virginia’s creative class. Unfortunately, the need and financing of the arts have been lost to the myopic focus on STEM areas; so much so that the business of art as a career pathway for graphic design, visual and performing arts, ceramics, photography, and culinary arts, to mention just a few, have fallen off the average radar screen to numerous educators, school boards, and administrators. Given the

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<sup>9</sup> A Whole New Mind pg.78

fact that the Standards of Learning (SOL) reward success in the STEM areas, it is neither surprising nor incomprehensible why school divisions have neglected the arts. Yet, the HEC does not advocate art for art's sake. Rather, the arts have a larger purpose in buttressing the cultural and economic infrastructure of Southern Virginia. The economics of art have been discussed above; but aspect of art as a critical community builder requires further elaboration.

As mentioned earlier, rural communities rely on public schools to transform economies and pass on core values to future generations. Yet year after year large numbers of rural students drop out of the SOL, STEM driven high schools thereby relinquishing their place in transforming their communities. According to focus group results reported in the 2004 Halifax County Chamber of Commerce's Community Strategic Plan, respondents said SOLs "actually impede learning because teachers are forced to focus on test preparation, and do not have the freedom to make their curricula interesting or engaging." Looking at that another way, focus group respondents felt the current school curriculum was **uninteresting and not engaging**. This detail reveals more than the boredom of irascible teenagers; according to the March 2006 report "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts," 47 percent of former students surveyed said a major factor in their decision to drop out of school was that classes were not interesting; "When participants in this focus group were asked in what areas their high school did not do enough, their highest level of response related to 'not making school interesting.'"<sup>10</sup>

The arts, however, is a proven method of holding onto those students who do not neatly fit solely into a STEM silo. Using everything from graphic, visual, performing, ceramics, photography, and culinary arts as a hook and as definitive technical and career routes with a strong instructional emphasis on creativity, it will be possible to nurture this cross-section and effectively reduce the dropout rate for the region. The need for the arts has been recognized and embraced by the Halifax community. In 2004, renovations to convert a former tobacco prizery (where the tobacco was prized or pressed into barrels)

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<sup>10</sup> The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. March 2006. By John M. Bridgeland, John Dilulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison.

into a community arts facility with performing and exhibiting space were completed. In addition, the 2004 Community Strategic Plan commissioned by the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce recommended the “establishment of an Arts and Technology Magnet Governor’s School at the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center. . .for eleventh and twelfth grade students,” as well as the development of a “progressive curricula” incorporating the Prizery and the HEC in world class-development strategies.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, as the HEC works with the Prizery and university partners to establish strong arts career pathways, professionals in the arts will relocate to Southern Virginia (as a requirement of their contract of hire) to serve as faculty members and consultants. These highly educated, highly creative individuals will impact the local economy by driving the creation of goods and services in response to their consumption patterns. As stated in the April 2007 report, “The Creative Class: A Key to Rural Growth”:

The presence of the creative class may itself create amenities. For instance, a place that has attracted artists and designers may appeal to people who like artistic communities. And, the influence may be indirect—people may be drawn to a community by the restaurants, stores, and other consumer services that develop in response to the consumption patterns of the creative class.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed there is an emerging trend in the United States of high-tech workers migrating out of large cities to suburban and rural areas. Attracted by the lower costs of living, lower crime rates, and natural amenities, these workers are emigrating at accelerated rates, taking their jobs and companies with them. In a nation with hundreds of small towns and rural counties clamoring for new business and industry to replace lost manufacturing, textile, and tobacco industries, a postsecondary education institution offering programs to support the knowledge economy will be a determining factor in where a company relocates. The U.S. Department of Agriculture found, “the single characteristic most strongly associated with rural arts magnets. . .was the ability to retain college-educated workers.”<sup>13</sup> With an

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<sup>11</sup> Market Street Services pg.43. June 10, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> David A. McGranahan and Timothy R. Wojan, April 2007. Pg.21

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November07/Findings/ArtsEmployment.htm>

affordable bachelor's degree program in Graphic Arts and Design<sup>14</sup>, regional high-speed broadband access, and a clear plan to take on the challenges facing the area, Southern Virginia will be positioned as a prime attractor of jobs within the creative sector.

- ***Center for Nursing Excellence***

An additional initiative of the HEC to capitalize on local assets and strengthen the region's economic development efforts, is the Center for Nursing Excellence (CNE) which will address the regional and state-wide challenge of preparing qualified nurses and nurse educators to meet the growing needs of an aging society. Soon to be located in an innovative and flexible nursing education facility, the CNE will feature an instructional delivery model designed to advance the nursing profession in Southern Virginia. As a regional hub for existing nursing higher education partners (HEPs), the CNE and its partners will collaborate to continue delivery of traditional nursing education programs. The partners will also develop and implement non-traditional instructional delivery models for multiple levels of nursing education and training. The Halifax Educational Foundation (HEF), a non-profit entity located in Halifax County, Virginia, will build out 4,175 square feet of existing space at the HEC for the CNE.

Distinctives of the CNE include its (a) collaborative partnerships with existing nursing education providers, (b) seamless continuum of nursing education, training, and retraining, (c) attention to traditional barriers for nursing students, and (d) efforts to recruit and retain interested individuals at all levels of the nursing professions. Danville Community College, Old Dominion University, Southside Virginia Community College, and Troy University, current nursing education providers at the HEC, will work together to develop and deliver a seamless nursing education continuum in the CNE.

Some of the traditional barriers for nursing students to be addressed by the creation of the Center for Nursing Excellence include commuting, rigid scheduling, waiting lists, supportive services, and adequate career preparation. Students completing Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) courses will be

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<sup>14</sup> There are currently **no** four year programs in the Southern Virginia region in Graphic Arts and Design, and the higher-paying, less vulnerable levels of employment in this field requires **at least** a bachelor of fine arts degree.

encouraged and advised about the pathway to becoming a Practical Nurse (PN) or Registered Nurse (RN) and interested students will be provided supportive services to prepare them academically for the PN and RN programs. The Learning Community concept will be an integral component of the CNE's seamless career pathway from CNA to RN. Onsite supportive services needed to ensure adequate preparation of students at all nursing levels to move up to next level will be provided.

Key to the addition of flexible scheduling and increased student enrollment in each nursing program is nursing faculty to teach the additional courses. The Bachelor's and Master's of Science in Nursing (B.S.N. and M.S.N.) programs providers will recruit and prepare existing nurses to pursue higher educational levels to become qualified to teach. The CNE staff will identify and work with incumbent nurses to determine individual educational and support needs and with HEPs to increase enrollment in each of the higher educational level programs. The CNE staff will work regionally with the existing nursing workforce to aggressively promote, support, enroll, and follow-up with these sectors. Healthcare providers including hospitals, nursing homes, doctors' offices, etc. will support the project as employment partners with the CNE and HEPs. Each will help to ensure employment opportunities for nursing program completers.

The Center for Nursing Excellence will prepare a larger number of the workforce for multiple levels in the nursing profession. It will provide an educational continuum for new nursing professionals to enter, incumbent professionals to continue, as well as previous nurses to re-enter the profession. The opportunity to pursue and access higher education and attain additional nursing credentials in one location within Southern Virginia will be realized. Higher educational attainment for more students entering nursing programs, state-of-the-art training experiences, expanded job placement opportunities, and increased salaries as a result of integrated curriculums within and across institutions are expected.

#### **Economic Impact of Center for Nursing Excellence at the HEC**

Adequate staffing enables healthcare facilities and other providers to deliver needed services to citizens. The absence of adequate staffing threatens access to care for many. Additionally, increased competition for workers in short supply increases labor costs, threatening the financial viability of healthcare providers. Aiken and Fagin (1997) report that poor staffing results in decreased access, decreased patient safety, and increased cost for healthcare<sup>15</sup>. The Center for Nursing Excellence will increase educational and workforce training opportunities for the surrounding area leading to higher paying jobs to meet healthcare needs in Southern Virginia.

The economic impact of the Center for Nursing Excellence will be an increase in the number of CNAs, PNs, and RNs, enrolled in, completing, and attaining related credentials in Southern Virginia. More credentialed nursing professionals will be available to fill the nursing shortage and more healthcare providers will have a viable applicant pool for hiring considerations. Increased educational attainment translates into higher salaries in high-demand professions.

## **V. Summary**

The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center began with a vision 20 years ago. Through the years it has grown into a comprehensive higher education facility that has served as a recognized model throughout the state. At the heart of everything it does is the truth that education is the catalyst for change. And though the Center has weathered many storms throughout its history—and undoubtedly will weather more in the coming years, that truth, that core value, has never changed.

The past five years in particular, have brought explosive growth to the Center. Anytime growth at that speed in that short period of time is experienced, it becomes necessary for an organization to stop and ask some critical questions:

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<sup>15</sup> Aiken, L. H., Clarke, S. P., Sloane, D. M., Sochalski, J., & Silber, J. H. (1997). Hospital nurse staffing and patient mortality, nurse burnout, and job dissatisfaction. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 288, 1987-1993.

- Are we headed in the right direction?
- Have we remained true to our values and mission?
- Are we embarking on divergent paths?

Based on the HEC's history, research conducted for and by the Center, and the findings in the SCHEV 2006 report, we believe and are sure, we are headed in the right direction. Our future programs and initiatives are driven by fundamental research and statistical data, and will strengthen the Center and thereby, the entire Southern Virginia region. We have indeed remained faithful to our core values and mission, as evidenced by the similarities between the Center's three-component plan for success developed in 1986 and the three-component strategic plan currently being pursued. The final question of whether the Center has embarked on divergent paths that will ultimately take it away from and not closer to its goal can be answered rather simply: Yes, there are many pieces involved in our future plan but all of those pieces are a part of the same puzzle and fit together to create the same mosaic. That image, when all has been unfolded, is one of a strong, unified region destined for greatness and excellence in a global economy. The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center is proud to lead that charge to greatness.

*Respectfully submitted,  
W. W. "Ted" Bennett  
Hope S. Harris-Gayles  
29 November 2007*



# Appendix I

## Richmond

# Technical high school would need business aid

BY OLYMPIA MEOLA  
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

Intensified scrutiny of Richmond's public schools from city and business leaders has created an atmosphere ripe for cultivating innovations, city and school leaders say.

Now is the time, they say, to discuss a regional comprehensive technical high school designed to produce highly skilled, job-ready graduates in relevant fields.

But it will take significant business-sector investment, as tech center supporters envision a formal partnership with businesses or industries that will oversee the technical side of the endeavor, helping to shape curriculum and providing and updating equipment.

That's what Richmond's City Council, city administration and School Board heard yesterday as they hosted a regional forum that included presentations from comprehensive technical high schools in Georgia and Pennsylvania.

Mark Whitlock serves as CEO of the Central Educational Center in Newnan, Ga., which operates a charter school through a partnership among business and industry, a county school system and a technical

See **SCHOOL**, Page B4

B4 Thursday, November 29, 2007

## School

From Page B1

college. He told the audience yesterday that since the school opened in 2000, the county's dropout rate has fallen by nearly half and test scores have improved. The school in Newnan is now used as a model for other districts, he said.

James Showrank, director of government and community relations for Manchester Bidwell Corporation, talked about successes at the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, a school in Pittsburgh.

At the guild, high school students study visual arts, design, ceramics and photography. They do not use the terms "cafeteria" or "auditorium." Instead, students at the guild share a dining hall and attend performances in a concert hall where musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie have played.

Officials with both schools touted deep involvement from businesses. In Pittsburgh, the school approached companies and asked what they needed out of high school graduates and went from there.

After yesterday's forum, Richmond leaders said they were excited about the possibilities and also of enhancing the current Richmond Technical Center.

"If business, and if industry, has a vested interest in work-force quality and work-force training and abilities, maybe what we're not doing is talking to each other enough," City Council President William J. Pantele said. "I think people are eager, but there has to be a clearly articulated way to participate. So I think that this forum helps define the kinds of elements that we need to go forward."

What the project really needs is someone with the power to "grip it and rip it," Pantele said.

City Councilman Douglas G. Conner Jr., among the lead advocates for a technical high school — along with School Board member Carol A.O. Wolf and Royal W. "Roy" Reynolds, president and CEO of Princeton Group Inc. of Va. — said the forum was meant to reach out to the business community.

Richmond was not the only school system represented. Education leaders from Petersburg, Chesterfield, Henrico and Louisa counties; and other school systems were on hand.

Among the 70 or so people in attendance was Sheila Hill-Christian, the city's chief administrative officer, who made remarks on behalf of the administration.

Business leaders included James E. Ucrop, chairman of First Market Bank, and representatives from Philip Morris, a home builders group, the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, the Virginia State Building and Construction Trades Council and the Greater Richmond Partnership.

Conner said he would have liked to have seen more business leaders in the audience at Plant Zero, but he thinks the forum will start building momentum.

Career and technical education has been a prominent topic of discussion recently, punctuated by Gov. Timothy M. Kaine's plan to open up to six Governor's Career and Technical Academies by next fall, adapting the challenging governor's-school curriculum model to emphasize science, technology, engineering and math.

The schools will be started with seed grant money, and school systems are vying to host the academies.

"With the governor designating ... monies available to help regional career and technical education," Wolf said, "I hope that this could be a starting point for the school districts to come together and work to create a governor's school-caliber career and technical education that would benefit the whole region."

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