Kansas Association of Community Colleges
Statement of Principles
Response to the U.S. Department of Education's Call to Action

September 24, 2026

Kansas community and member technical colleges appreciate the opportunity to respond to Secretary McMahon's call for renewed accountability, academic excellence, affordability, transparency, and public service in American higher education. Kansas community and member technical colleges share these priorities. Our institutions are open-access, locally governed, workforce-focused, and deeply connected to the communities and students they serve. For decades, each Kansas community and member technical college has advanced many of the principles now at the center of the national conversation: expanding opportunity, maintaining academic standards, responding to workforce needs, safeguarding public resources, and preparing students to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

We welcome the opportunity to work together to ensure the public understands the value of higher education and particularly the value that Kansas community and technical colleges contribute to both the state and nation. We also respectfully encourage federal policy to recognize the important differences among different types of higher education institutions and to ensure that federal policies reflect the different types of institutional missions.

Transparent Access- Kansas community and technical colleges are proud of their open-access mission. For most students, admission is straightforward and transparent. Our colleges are designed to meet students where they are academically and help them build the knowledge and skills necessary to advance into higher paying jobs. Programs with additional requirements, including nursing, allied health, technical education, and other capacity-limited or licensure-related programs, use clearly communicated standards tied to academic readiness, safety, professional expectations, or program capacity. The highly selective admissions practices that have generated national concern at some institutions are not characteristic of Kansas community and technical colleges.

Free Expression and Diversity of Thought- Kansas community colleges reflect the communities they serve. Faculty are selected and evaluated based on professional qualifications, subject-matter expertise, lived experience in the field of study, teaching effectiveness, and student learning. The purpose of higher education is to equip students with the knowledge and judgment necessary to evaluate evidence, think critically, and reach informed conclusions. Our students include recent high school graduates, working adults, veterans, parents, and career changers representing a broad range of backgrounds and viewpoints. We are committed to ensuring our campuses remain places where students can ask difficult questions, encounter competing ideas, engage with people holding differing beliefs, express their perspectives through civil discourse, and participate in spirited debate that may end in thoughtful disagreement. Kansas community and technical colleges take seriously the responsibility to maintain safe learning and working environments for students, employees, and visitors. Each college maintains campus safety protocols and response procedures designed to address threats, harassment, disruptive conduct, and other circumstances that may interfere with the educational environment. Kansas community colleges also comply with the "Charlie Kirk Act" which recently passed the Kansas Legislature, as well as any other applicable state and federal laws designed to further promote civic discourse, intellectual openness, and lawful expression.

Affordability, Transparency, and Responsible Stewardship- Affordability is one of the defining strengths of Kansas community and member technical colleges. The pathways our colleges provide to workforce credentials, transfer, and degrees, often allow students to remain in their home communities while pursuing education and career advancement at one-third the cost of large public universities. Kansas has also made taxpayer transparency at community colleges a clear public priority. Consistent with the principles embodied in the "Kansas Taxpayer Transparency Act" passed by the Kansas Legislature, Kansas community colleges post on their websites financial information about the college in a format that is understandable and accessible to the public. This transparency clearly communicates tuition and fee information critical to students and families related to their cost of education.

Transparency is more than a reporting requirement; it is part of the obligation that comes with receiving public support. Kansas taxpayers should know how public institutions use their resources, and students should understand what their education will cost and what they can expect in return. Kansas community and member technical colleges continually evaluate administrative and instructional costs to assess whether programs are producing meaningful outcomes and meeting the educational and workforce needs of their communities. Return on investment for the student and institution is part of each college's regular program review process. Accountability and transparency in relation to public resources is not new for Kansas community colleges who are locally governed and directly accountable to the communities and taxpayers they serve.

Workforce Preparation and Return on Investment- Kansas community and technical colleges are a vital part of the state's workforce development system. Our colleges prepare nurses, welders, machinists, emergency responders, information technology and cybersecurity professionals, agricultural workers, educators, business professionals, skilled tradespeople, and many others whose work sustains Kansas communities and industries. We maintain direct relationships with employers, workforce organizations, licensing bodies, school districts, economic-development organizations, and industry partners. These partnerships help ensure that programs remain responsive to current and emerging workforce needs. Many programs are also subject to external measures of student competence through licensure, industry certification, clinical performance, or demonstrated technical skill. These measures provide meaningful accountability for academic quality and student readiness.

Kansas community and member technical colleges also support clear information regarding program cost, completion, transfer, licensure, employment, and post-completion earnings so that students and families can make informed decisions about what path of academic study makes the most sense for them, whether that be a registered apprenticeship, work and learn opportunities, or full-time study. While return on the students' investment is critical, Kansas community and member technical colleges also recognize the broader public value of essential occupations whose workforce we train. Teachers, childcare professionals, emergency responders, wastewater technicians, and other critical professionals contribute to the strength and stability of communities in ways that extend beyond wages alone.

Academic Rigor and Artificial Intelligence- Access should never come at the expense of academic standards. A Kansas community college or member technical college credential represents genuine learning, demonstrated skill, and meaningful content mastery. Employers, universities, licensing boards, taxpayers, and students must continue to be able to trust that a graduate has mastered the competencies associated with a certificate or degree. Many community and member technical college programs already rely on competency-based assessment, clinical evaluation, laboratory performance, certification examinations, and demonstrations of practical skills. These measures help ensure that academic credentials reflect genuine competence. For many of our programs, the academic rigor standard we continue to uphold is demonstrated by pass rates of national competency exams. As we continue to

evolve as a nation and new technology emerges, Kansas community and member technical colleges stand ready to be a leader in the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence. Students will increasingly need to understand and responsibly use AI in the workplace. Kansas community colleges are preparing students to use these tools appropriately while ensuring that technology does not replace the reasoning, communication, technical competence, or independent judgment that education is intended to develop.

Research Integrity, Security, and National Interests- The research mission of community and technical colleges differs substantially from that of major research universities. Most Kansas community and technical colleges do not operate large research enterprises or manage extensive portfolios of sensitive federally funded research. Federal requirements in this area should therefore be appropriately tailored to institutional mission and risk. Kansas community and member technical colleges also recognize that protecting student information and institutional systems is an essential part of maintaining public trust. Our colleges take cybersecurity, data privacy, and the protection of personally identifiable student information seriously and maintain safeguards, policies, employee training, and incident-response procedures consistent with applicable state and federal requirements. Where Kansas community and member technical colleges participate in federally funded projects, cybersecurity programs, advanced manufacturing initiatives, defense-related workforce programs, applied research, or partnerships involving sensitive technologies, each college will comply with applicable requirements and take appropriate steps to protect data, technology, and institutional integrity. Any international partnerships will remain consistent with American law, institutional mission, student safety, and will protect national security interests.

Serving Kansas and the Nation- Kansas community and member technical colleges contribute to the strength of the Nation by serving the people, employers, and communities of our state. We train the workforce American employers need. We provide affordable pathways to certificates, degrees, and transfer opportunities. We help high school students begin college early. We retrain adults for changing industries and emerging occupations. We prepare nurses, educators, technicians, manufacturers, first responders, and skilled tradespeople. We support both rural and urban communities. We work directly with employers to address workforce shortages and strengthen regional economies. We provide students with the opportunity to build skills, earn credentials, support their families, and contribute to the economic vitality of Kansas and the United States.

Our Commitment- Kansas community and member technical colleges share your goal of ensuring that American higher education remains worthy of public confidence. We are committed to transparency, academic quality, affordability, responsible stewardship, workforce alignment, and service to students and taxpayers. We also respectfully encourage the Department to recognize the diversity of the institutions which deliver American higher education. Open-access, teaching-focused community colleges operate under a different model from highly selective and research-intensive institutions, and both public and private actions should reflect those distinctions. Policies addressing admissions should recognize the difference between selective and open-access institutions. Policies addressing tuition and student debt should recognize institutions where costs remain comparatively low and borrowing is limited. Policies addressing research security should account for differences in research scale and institutional risk. Policies aimed at strengthening workforce alignment should recognize institutions that already build programs in direct partnership with employers, licensing bodies, and local communities. Kansas community and member technical colleges welcome continued dialogue with you and the Department and stand ready to demonstrate how accountability, affordability, academic rigor, workforce preparation, and public service are already central to our work. Kansas community and member technical colleges reaffirm a straightforward commitment: to remain accessible, affordable, rigorous, transparent, responsive to employers, accountable to taxpayers, and focused on helping students build productive lives which will

strengthen our state and Nation. These principles are not new aspirations for Kansas community and member technical colleges. They are the foundation of our mission and our contribution to the future strength of Kansas and the United States.

Respectfully,

Heather Morgan

Heather Morgan
Executive Director
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On behalf of the Members of the Kansas Association of Community Colleges