

**Dr. Barbara M. Hanson, Chancellor
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This is a critical time in our economic history. Demographers are projecting severe shortages in skilled workers in the next ten years. While the skills gap will be a crisis in....., the lack of basic skills, technical skills and competencies is an issue for industry right now. To meet this challenge, we need to invest in worker education and training. Now is the time to take a more strategic approach to workforce education and training and create a seamless, dynamic and sufficiently-funded systems for advancing the skills and credentials and productivity of our entire workforce.

It is interesting to note that these words appeared in the executive summary of a document entitled *Toward a National Workforce Education and Training Policy** written in 2003. Advocacy over the last decade for the position set forth in the 2003 document has resulted in many advances, but the skills gap is still increasing. Our inability to effectively address the training needs of our workforce will ultimately cripple the economy of the great State of Louisiana as well as the economy of our nation. After all, the great State of Louisiana does not have a budget problem, it has a revenue problem.

As a system of community and technical colleges, we know that the solution to the State's revenue issues are in the training facilities and virtual classrooms of Louisiana's community and technical colleges. We must produce more skilled graduates in high-demand, high-wage programs aligned to local and State economies and put those graduates to work so that they can contribute to the tax base. It really is that simple.

Louisiana has made great strides over the last two years in creating strategic and synergist alignments. Louisiana Economic Development has identified emerging growth sectors and projected the number of educated completers needed in those targeted sectors over the next decade; the State has established a pool of money to support higher education and incentivize partnerships with business and industry, officially called the Workforce and Innovation for a Stronger Economy (WISE) fund, structured to align higher education programming with Louisiana's job market; and Louisiana's Department of Education has rolled out the Jump Start initiative to support a state-of-the-art system of career and technical education provided by high schools, community colleges, and employers themselves as an educational pathway to economic prosperity. And yet, we are still falling short.

Now is the time to think outside of the box. We cannot continue to do what we have always done and expect to achieve different results. Our State needs a market responsive higher education enterprise to ensure we are meeting the needs of citizens, communities, and industry in real time. We need to find better incentives for defining and creating strategic educational pathways from high school, to community and technical colleges and/or to universities while still allowing each to effectively fulfill their respective missions in service to our students; we need to continue to educate our citizenry that modern career education combines rigorous academics, technical preparation, and workforce experiences and, as such, is not less valuable than a four year education-it is merely different from a four year education; and we need to provide a mechanism whereby the nearly 600,000 citizens in the State of Louisiana who have neither a high school credential nor a post-secondary credential can access educational and training opportunities so that they too can enjoy economic prosperity.

While the discussions ensue, Louisiana Delta Community College will remain focused on the mission of training and educating Louisiana citizens to meet this season of unprecedented economic growth in our great State.

*National Center on Education and the Economy, *Toward a National Workforce Education and Training Policy*, June 30, 2003