



**To:** South Dakota Board of Technical Education  
**From:** Nick Wendell, Executive Director *Nick Wendell*  
**Date:** 5/21/20  
**RE:** WDT LEA Petition Written Proponent Testimony

This document includes written proponent testimony received in support of Western Dakota Technical Institute's petition to establish a separate and distinct local education agency. The attached testimony is from the following proponents:

- Jon Gillam, President, Floyd's Truck Center
- Gloria Plumier, Vice-Chair, Western Dakota Technical Institute Foundation
- Michael Roesler, President, Rapid City Area Schools Board of Education
- Andy Scull, President, Scull Construction Service, Inc.



April 1, 2020

Dear Board of Technical Education:

I am writing in support of a new governance board for Western Dakota Tech (WDT). I write primarily as a local business owner and an employer of WDT graduates, but I have also learned much about WDT and its operations while serving on its foundation board, Skilled Workforce Advisory Council, and Diesel Technology Advisory Board.

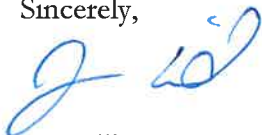
I support the governance change for three reasons. First, the new governance board would better align with WDT's geographical vision. WDT's Vision Statement notes that WDT strives to "lead the region" by providing education that drives careers and economic growth. As the only technical college west river, WDT represents the whole west river region, from Belle Fourche and Spearfish to Wall and Pierre. The Rapid City Area Schools Board of Education (RCAS), on the other hand, is focused on the Rapid City area only. The new governance board could be more inclusive of this geography, bringing a stronger understanding to the region's needs as whole.

Second, the new governance board would better grasp industry and workforce needs. As mentioned above, WDT's vision includes "driv[ing] career development and economic growth." WDT's vision represents that its students are on the verge of entering the workforce. RCAS's mission, on the other hand, is to "build *tomorrow's* community...." The new governance board could include industry and economic development leaders to guide WDT on the near-term workforce opportunities.

Lastly, over time, a new governance board would gain experience and expertise in technical colleges, providing WDT with valuable insight to best practices and growth opportunities. RCAS likely does not have the time to develop such expertise while managing a large K-12 school system (1,800 employees). Also, the RCAS members are subject to public elections and the public—likely focused on K-12 issues such as school bonds—can easily vote off any members that have developed technical college expertise. Consequently, there is no guarantee this type of expertise can be gained, and in the long-term maintained, on the RCAS.

Thank you for considering these thoughts as you make your decision, and thank you for your efforts to improve technical education in the state.

Sincerely,



Jon Gillam  
President  
Floyd's Truck Center

March 26, 2020

Thank you to the members of the South Dakota Board of Technical Education for the opportunity to comment on the proposed consideration of Western Dakota Tech becoming a separate Local Educational Agency (LEA). My name is Gloria Pluimer and I am the Vice-Chair of the Western Dakota Tech Foundation Board. I have had the privilege to serve as a board member and officer of Western Dakota Tech Foundation from 2002 to 2007 and a second time in 2017. I am currently the Vice-Chair of the Foundation with my term ending June 30, 2020. I have seen tremendous progress and change in WDT over the years and most recently, under the leadership of Dr. Ann Bolman.

In my professional capacity, as Director of Education and Workforce Development for Black Hills Special Services, I experience first-hand the exceptional programming offered by WDT in our adult education program. In this program, we serve approximately 500 adults, ranging in age from 18 to 70, a year. The majority of these individuals come to us to pursue their GED. Based on formal career interest and career aptitude testing, we refer numerous graduates to WDT to continue their education and training. The transition of our students to WDT is seamless because of the exceptional staff and programming in place at WDT. We institute a "soft hand-off" of our students accompanying them to WDT and staying with them as they build new relationships with the WDT team.

As a Foundation Board Member, I have seen new programs developed to meet the workforce needs. I have seen financial support increase from the business community and the residents. The quality of programming and job placement performance has been instrumental in these developments.

So why, one might ask, is it important that WDT pursue the move to a separate LEA? I have outlined what I believe to be significant and critical reasoning in support of this change.

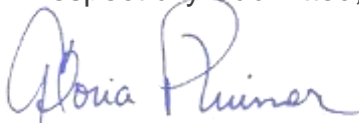
1. The geographical representation of the current board members does not reflect the geographical location of the WDT student body. Approximately sixty-five percent (64.5%) of the entire student body at WDT is from outside the Rapid City area. For degree seeking students, this percentage increases to 70.4%. A separate LEA would provide the opportunity to more closely align with the communities where the WDT students reside and/or relocate from to attend school.
2. The Rapid City School Board members are elected by the residents of the school district to manage the school district's affairs, personnel, and properties with a specific focus on the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively govern the K-12 system and student achievement and learning. I

believe it is an unreasonable requirement to ask them to do the same for a post-secondary educational institute that serves over 1,600 students and continues to grow.

3. Finally, becoming a separate LEA provides the opportunity to identify potential board members representing the industry specific programs offered at WDT. Who better to govern WDT than those who have an explicit interest in meeting their workforce needs?

My support of the proposal for WDT to become a separate LEA is not a reflection on the current governing board. Rather it represents an opportunity for future growth where a board's focus is concentrated on the betterment of technical education and the customers they serve--area employers and their students.

Respectfully Submitted,



Gloria Pluimer, Vice-Chair  
WDT Foundation



**Board of Education**  
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May 18, 2020

**Nick Wendell** | Executive Director  
South Dakota Board of Technical Education  
925 East Sioux Avenue | Pierre, SD 57501

We, the members of the Rapid City Board of Education, wish to go on record in unanimous support of the petition submitted by Western Dakota Technical College (WDT) for the purpose of establishing a Local Education Agency (LEA) to serve as the College's governing body.

There are several reasons that we believe this is needed. The primary reason is that WDT truly deserves to be governed by its own independent dedicated governing board. WDT has operated under the auspices of the Rapid City Area School District for more than 40 years, but we believe the time has come for that authority to be transferred to a separate LEA. We believe WDT, its staff and faculty, the students, and ultimately the entire region will benefit from this decision.

WDT serves a broad geographic area while the local Board of Education represents only the area comprised by the RC Area School District. An independent LEA will encompass membership and representation from throughout western South Dakota. We believe this will better support the College's mission to serve the broader West River community and the businesses and industries that depend on graduates from WDT.

An independent LEA will also be able to select trustees who will represent the wide range of occupational fields for which WDT generates graduates who work in those fields. As committed as the local Board of Education is to serving the particular needs of a technical college, its members may not always have the background and life experience necessary to anticipate workforce training needs. We believe the LEA will be much better suited to serving in that role.

Finally, the new LEA as proposed will include three members of the local Board of Education who will be able to guide the transition process. One will serve a one-year term, another a two-year term, and the other a three-year term. We believe this is important to ensure continuity for WDT and promote the positive working relationship between the RC Area Schools and WDT.

The President of the RC Board of Education and one other member will be present to provide additional background and support of the WDT petition when the Board of Technical Education is scheduled to consider the request. In addition, local Board members are available as needed to answer any questions the Board of Technical Education may have.

For the Board,

Mike Roesler  
President

*Raising expectations.*



March 26, 2020

Dear South Dakota Board of Technical Education:

I am writing in support of Western Dakota Tech and the Rapid City Area Schools District's petition for Western Dakota Tech to become a separate educational entity from Rapid City Area Schools.

Western Dakota Tech is a two-year technical college that serves a very large geographic region in South Dakota. The current governance board structure allows only people from the Rapid City school district to be on the board that governs Western Dakota Tech. Separating from the school district will allow WDT to have board members from the broader region with input into the governance of the technical college that supports their community. This broader voice into the governance of WDT should have a positive impact into WDT's ability to connect well with communities outside of Rapid City, which will lead to more people with the technical skills employers and community members need today.

In addition, Western Dakota Tech has a very focused mission on providing technical education to adult learners. The current board structure does not promote WDT's ability to have employers serve in a governing role, since these employers would have to run for office for the school district and would wind up spending most of their time focusing on K-12 issues. It makes sense that employers, economic development professionals, and other typical two-year college partners should be able to serve on the technical college's board since they have a strong understanding of the role and impact of technical education and have access to information that can strengthen WDT's ties to economic drivers in the regional economy.

Finally, as it stands, Western Dakota Tech has operated with financial and other systems that were developed and designed for K-12 school systems. Because of the current tie to the Rapid City Area School District, WDT is unable to operate as efficiently as it might be able to do if the college was able to utilize systems designed for higher education. Particularly in the finance area, being able to use software that can assist in analyzing the college's resources would be a powerful tool that would allow WDT to respond more quickly to requests and emerging opportunities.

I am confident that Western Dakota Tech and the Rapid City Area Schools District will continue their strong partnership after the separation occurs. WDT currently provides a large number of dual credit classes on site at Rapid City Stevens and Rapid City Central High Schools, and the planned Pathways program with the district will only strengthen and increase this connection.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share my perspective with you. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Scull", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Andy Scull  
President