

Utah Lawmakers Weigh Tech-College System

Utah lawmakers will vote this month on whether to create a college of applied technology that would have 10 campuses throughout the state and rely heavily on competency exams.

The new college is an attempt to settle a decades-old dispute between secondary-school and higher-education officials over who

should administer the state's applied-technology programs, which offer job-training classes, computer courses, and high-school-equivalency degrees.

Those programs are currently handled by five learning centers and three regional service programs under the control of the Board of Education, which oversees all elementary and secondary education in the state.

The bill would replace the learning centers and service programs with the 10 applied-technology campuses. The campuses would be overseen by a college president appointed by the state Board of Regents.

The legislation has supporters in both houses of the State Legislature. Gov. Mike Leavitt, a Repub-

lican, who worked closely with lawmakers on its development, has endorsed the bill.

The proposed college would share a focus on competency-based exams with Western Governors University, an online institution whose founders include Mr. Leavitt.

Most students at the new college would not earn credit hours, but would advance when they have demonstrated mastery of a subject.

In a statement, the state Board of Education called the proposed college "controversial, unnecessary, and certainly risk-laden." The board maintained that without its oversight, vocational programs would become less accessible for high-school students.

But the bill includes a provision that would allow high-school students to take applied-technology classes at no cost, noted Rep. Ronnie C. Bigelow, a Republican and the sponsor of the bill.

Supporters of the legislation also argue that the new college would save the state money by consolidating services that colleges and the learning centers have been providing.

The new college would be forbidden to offer courses other than in technology, hire faculty members for tenure-track positions, or participate in intercollegiate athletics.

"This state does not need another community college," Mr. Bigelow said. "We already have plenty of places like that." —DAN CURRY

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