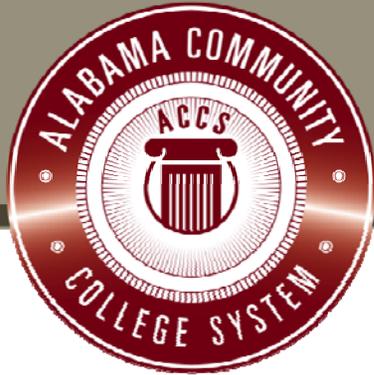


# **Building On Our Successes, Meeting Our Challenges**

## **The Alabama Community College System**

Phase I

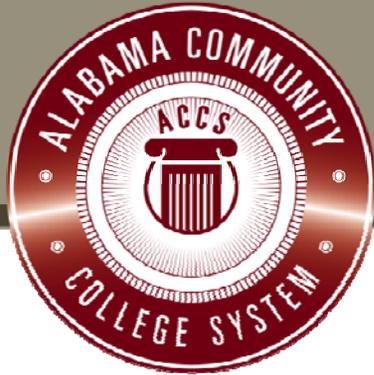




## ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

### Contents

- ❖ Task Force 2008 Members
- ❖ Overview
- ❖ Mission, vision and values
- ❖ Critical issues and staff recommendations
- ❖ Next steps



## ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

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# OVERVIEW

The Alabama Community College System comprises 25 publicly-operated community and technical colleges, as well as Marion Military Institute, Athens State University, Alabama Industrial Development Training Institute, Alabama Technology Network, and Alabama Fire College.

Throughout its history, ACCS has sought to provide maximum access to higher education with community-based institutions offering smaller classes and one-on-one instruction. In recent years, ACCS became responsible for offering adult education focused on GED preparation. As Alabama's economic development efforts are bringing in tens of thousands of new jobs over the next few years, the System's workforce training and technical education role has become more critical to the state's success.

With so much of Alabama's future relying on the performance of the System, it became apparent that an updated, thorough, and well-thought-out strategic plan was in order. The State Board of Education established Task Force 2008 to conduct a broad review of the operations and internal governance of the Alabama Community College System. The Task Force's mission: To begin the process of identifying and overcoming barriers to the System's success, and paving the way for a long-term, comprehensive strategic plan to map the System's future.

Phase I has required an extensive environmental scan to assess the current condition of a complex system in transition. Aided by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, System staff provided the Task Force with a wide-ranging view of the Alabama Community College System and its core functions and processes. Next, the Task Force provided valuable insight and input to System staff charged with developing suggested mission, vision and values statements for the system, a critical first step of any strategic planning process. Using those affirmations as a framework, System staff developed a list of critical issues affecting operations, and offered proposed solutions.

With the participation and input of college Presidents and a representative of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Task Force deliberated during three all-day meetings around Alabama: Lawson State Community College in Birmingham, Bishop State Community College in Mobile, and J. F. Drake State Technical College in Huntsville.

The following document reflects the culmination of those deliberations and represents staff recommendations for the Task Force's consideration. Upon final approval and/or amending of the mission, vision and values statements, as well as the critical issues and accompanying recommendations, the Staff recommends that Phase II of the Strategic Planning Process commence, as outlined in "Next Steps."

# Who are we?

## Mission, Vision & Values

### Our Mission

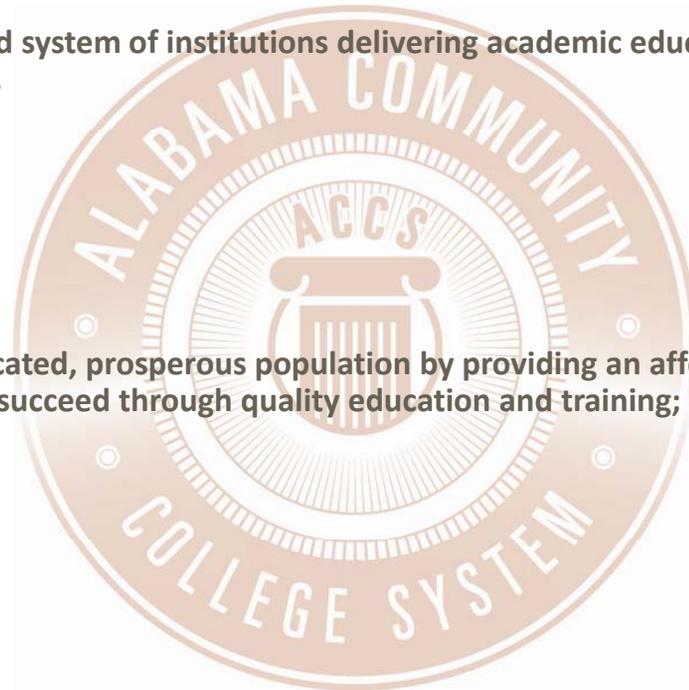
... is to provide a unified system of institutions delivering academic education, adult education, and workforce development.

### Our Vision

... is to develop an educated, prosperous population by providing an affordable pathway to help citizens of any walk or stage of life succeed through quality education and training; a community college system where education works for all.

### We value

... integrity, excellence, accessibility, accountability, and diversity.



## What's stopping us? Defining our critical issues

- **PARCA's definition of "critical issues"**

- A "show-stopper" – an impediment that must be removed or a missing ingredient that must be added to enable the organization to achieve its mission.
- Key factors standing in the way of accomplishing the organization's purpose.



## Critical issue: Human Resources

- **Fair Dismissal Act**

- Effective management of institutional employees is substantially hindered by unreasonable administrative expense, litigation, poor employee performance and workforce stagnation engendered by certain provisions of the Fair Dismissal Act (Alabama Code 36-26-100 et seq.)
- Act fails to give any weight to the decisions of college administrators who are responsible for college performance.
- Decisions from arbitrators are frequently capricious.

- **Diversity**

- While much progress has been made since the Shuford/Johnson/Kennedy Partial Consent Decrees, which have now expired and have been replaced by “Uniform Guidelines” for hiring and promotion based on their provisions, diversity will always be a continuing goal for System and institutional administrators.



## Critical issue: Human Resources

- **Background: Fair Dismissal Act**

- Alabama’s “Fair Dismissal Act” was supposed to provide many of the employees of Alabama’s educational institutions protection from unfair loss of the employment as a result of personal or political motivations not related to their job performance, but still allow the discipline or dismissal of employees for good and sufficient cause, and a fair process to resolve disputes that might arise. The Act has not worked as it should have, and has resulted in long delays in cases being heard, administrative stagnation, litigation, and great expense. It has also engendered many unusual decisions.
- As an example of the system-wide problems engendered by the act, capricious decisions made by arbitration judges have led to the reinstatement – at one college alone – of these employees:
  - A nursing instructor who had lost his license – and therefore is ineligible to teach – due to sexual misconduct with students
  - A culinary arts instructor who enrolled himself in his own courses for credit
  - An administrator convicted of a felony for running over a little girl’s foot and leaving the scene of the accident, who also had been impeached from his position as a local school board member for misuse of public funds to purchase \$9,000 worth of Mardi Gras throws



## Critical issue: Human Resources

- **Background: Diversity**
  - Diversity represents the Community College System's fundamental attitude to not only respect and value the individuality of our employees, but also to understand how to tap the potentially significant contributions inherent in that diversity. In the Alabama Community College System, we are committed to achieving and sustaining diversity at all levels by establishing inclusive, supportive, discrimination-free working environments, policies and procedures.
  - Diversity is about much more than complying with legal requirements against discrimination. Recognizing and honoring the principle of diversity is recognizing and honoring the essential quality, strength, dignity and ultimate potential of every human being; elements which are essential to the mission and meaning of education.



## Staff recommendations: Human Resources

- **Fair Dismissal Act Revisions—Legislation required.**
  - Provide for an improved, expedited hearing and appeal process, within constitutional mandates.
  - Limit applicability of tenure under the act to employees below the dean or director level who have five or more years of full-time service.
  - Consider revising the applicability of pay pending hearings or appeals, and/or providing for recovery of compensation paid during the hearing process in certain circumstances.
- **Evaluations**
  - Emphasize the necessity of frequent and substantive evaluation of employees, especially probationary employees early in their initial employment, as frequently as every six months; emphasize the importance of candid documentation of performance.
- **Diversity**
  - System staff should define the concept of “diversity,” accept the definition, and then embrace it.
- **Recruitment, Professional Development and Retention**
  - The System should encourage additional emphasis on recruiting, developing and retaining quality leadership in its institutions.



## Critical issue: Adult Education

- **Program Effectiveness**
  - The adult education program has not been operating at an optimum level of effectiveness and efficiency because of poor programmatic leadership, declining enrollment, low retention rates, a lack of established teacher competencies, and inadequate instructor professional development.
- **Resources**
  - Program improvements and expansion have been limited due to inadequate, flat federal and reduced state appropriations; inconsistent adult education services have resulted from the absence of a performance and needs-based funding formula.



## Critical issue: Adult Education

- **Background**

- Approximately half a million working-age Alabamians, most of them under age 30, do not have a high-school diploma or a GED. Without such a credential, they are automatically disqualified from applying for most high-demand, high-wage, and high-tech jobs now being created in Alabama, and are facing almost certain impoverishment.
- The Alabama Community College System is responsible for assisting these adults in preparing for GED examinations.
- ACCS is committed to increasing the numbers of citizens successfully obtaining their GEDs and opening the doors to additional postsecondary education or workforce training.



## Staff recommendations: Adult Education

- **Program Effectiveness**

- Develop an Adult Education Strategic Plan to be executed by October 1, 2009, in collaboration with the Presidents' Advisory Committee on Adult Education, the Adult Education Director's Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders such as teachers and students.
- Provide Federal grant management training to grant recipients.
- Establish quarterly regional training workshops for instructors.
- Convene an Adult Education Conference of all Adult Education directors, support staff and instructors in July, 2009.
- Rewrite the State Plan for Adult Education to respond to focus on efficiency and effectiveness based on available data.
- Implement Recruitment and Retention Committee Recommendations, including:
  - Creating student counselor/advisor positions.
  - Establishing a student referral system between K-12 and Adult Education providers.
  - Improving Accountability with a detailed student attendance data system.
  - Implementing a marketing/branding campaign.
  - Creating a Learning Disability Initiative.
- Consider requiring some evidence of preparation or proficiency prior to administering GED examinations.
- The Adult Education Report Card system should be evaluated for effectiveness, and improved where needed.



## Staff recommendations: Adult Education (cont.)

- **Resources**

- Require that at least 80% of each grant be applied to direct instruction costs.
- Require that no more than 20% of each grant be applied to administration, including at least 5% to be spent on professional development.
- Review all budgets to ensure efficient use of funds, awarding additional funds only for program expansion.
- Engage community and faith-based groups.
- Implement a performance-based funding formula, effective October 1, 2009.
- Conduct individual state and federal grant budget management processes.



## Critical issue: Funding

- **Legislatively-based funding allocations**
  - Allocations have become increasingly out of synch with System and institutional needs.
- **Operating funds**
  - Current allocations for operations of System's institutions are tied to a funding base established in FY 1994-95
  - Allocations do not account for disproportionate growth, modifications to institutional programs, changes in community needs, or institutional performance.
- **Facilities**
  - Too many campus facilities are old, in poor condition, suffer from years of inadequate funding for maintenance, and are in need of replacement or substantial renovation.
  - Until recently, decisions on facility construction across the System were often out of alignment with program or facility needs.
- **Grant development & philanthropy**
  - At most of the system's institutions, grant-based funding from Federal and private sources is not seen as a major resource.
  - While nearly all System institutions do some fundraising, and most have some foundation activity, most have not engaged in substantial external fundraising efforts or major gift campaigns.



## Critical issue: Funding

- **Background**

- Budget allocation formulas can be powerful tools in achieving strategic goals, by creating institutional incentives to maintain programs, create new ones, and thereby encourage growth of the programs which benefit each institution's service area. Increased enrollment in traditional credit-bearing academic and technical programs and expansion of non-credit workforce training programs both translate into a better educated and higher-skilled work force, and fulfillment of the System's stated Mission.
- The primary State appropriations requiring allocation in the Alabama Community College System are contained in the system's Operation and Maintenance funds, which, since as far back as 1995, have been allocated on a "year over year," institution by institution basis. Growth of enrollment generally, and increased costs of certain areas of technical education have not been separately funded, and large discretionary allocations have been used to fill gaps in funding on sometimes haphazard, unpredictable, or politically-fueled bases which were not reflective of an institution's credit hour production or adult education or workforce training output. The result, in some institutions, was underfunding of academic and technical programs and slow growth. In some of the colleges, presidents were forced to resort to political wrangling to promote their institutions' financial needs. Another group of colleges experienced unfunded growth, as they depended on efficiencies of scale, community-based support and careful management of resources. While these schools succeeded in the short run, they faced increasing difficulty as inequity in funding ultimately constrained their potential trajectories of performance and excellence in education and workforce training.
- Revenues beyond State sources and tuition are needed to support College operations and program enhancements, to improve facilities, to assist students, enhance enrollment, and build community support. Community Colleges in Alabama are ideal objects of philanthropy as they provide students opportunities not provided anywhere else. Corporate donors are available for workforce-related programs. Foundations are necessary for success in a comprehensive development program.
- Financial challenges brought on by recent economic conditions may delay or modify implementation of some goals. In the meantime, it will be necessary for System and College leaders to manage the System in order to sustain our core mission elements of academic education, adult education, and workforce development until conditions improve.



## Staff recommendations: Funding

- **Operating Funds**

- Convene a cross-disciplinary, consultant-supported “formula study task force” to conduct a detailed study of funding formula options to include factors that would account for disproportionate growth, evolving institutional programs, inherent program cost differentials, changes in state and community needs, institutional performance, and institutional inequities.
- Seek legislation at the beginning of the 2010 legislative session to authorize implementation of the new funding formula so that it can be implemented as soon as it is economically feasible to do so.

- **Facilities**

- Institutions should earmark consistent portions of Operations and Maintenance funds for routine maintenance of facilities.
- College presidents should ensure that maintenance staff receives regular training and continuing education classes in proper maintenance procedures, energy efficiency, green building standards, and current building products, equipment, services, and systems.
- Institutions should allocate a proportionate share of Operations and Maintenance Funds to a dedicated account for deferred maintenance, replacement and renewal of each of their facilities.
- Consideration should be given to seeking interagency and legislative approval of a “small project procedure” for College facility project to reduce time and costs in projects under \$250,000.
- Recent improvements in capital planning should continue to be used by colleges to set construction priorities.
- Future capital expenditures should be coordinated closely with determinations made through enhanced academic, adult education and workforce training program review efforts.



## Staff recommendations: Funding (cont.)

- **Grant Development**
  - The Department should acquire grant development and grant management expertise to catalyze the development of grant funding opportunities in support of the colleges.
  - The Department and the Colleges should regularly review grant opportunities to build grant portfolios for mission support.
  - Federal and State grant development should be coordinated in cooperation with Government Relations at the System level.
- **Philanthropy**
  - College and leadership must recognize that fundraising from private sources will be increasingly necessary to maintain accessibility and quality in college programs and to maintain or improve facilities.
  - Each College should provide its leadership such training and resources as may be necessary to conduct productive fundraising.
  - Each College should maintain an active and supportive foundation and involve members of that College's community in fundraising activities and foundation initiatives.
  - The Department should provide institutions with information, training and guidance in this area.



## Critical issue: Decision-making

- **Decision-making processes**
  - Processes need to be more fully informed by reliable and timely information, contain better internal controls, and more input from all levels of the system.
- **Data systems**
  - The System and its institutions do not have sufficiently integrated and comprehensive data collection and analysis mechanisms to gather detailed information on finances, operations, and program performance.
- **Internal controls**
  - The System and its institutions are in need of stronger internal control mechanisms to help ensure compliance with fiscal and operational policies and legal directives.
- **Internal governance**
  - The Department of Postsecondary Education and some of its institutions need additional participation and regular input from stakeholders in all segments of the educational community.



## Critical issue: Decision-making

- **Background**

- Good decision-making is critical to any organization. Timely and effective decision-making at every level requires several elements: A constant supply of timely and reliable information, meaningful participation of stakeholders, thoughtful consideration of the best alternatives by competent managers, within a sound policy structure, with inherent safeguards against waste or abuse of resources.
- Information flow among stakeholders and decision-makers in the System is impaired by aging and inadequate legacy software platforms in use in most of its institutions. Data reports under these legacy systems are not routinely available to individual users without the execution of special inquiries or manual data mining by IT staff, either of which is time-consuming and unduly expensive. System and institutional staff are not afforded the benefits of real-time interactive observation of institutional financial and program performance that would be provided by available state of the art software. Administrators are also concerned that the legacy systems might be especially subject to sudden failure of the software itself, or any business issues affecting the proprietor of the software.
- Information is only a raw material in decision-making. Once obtained, it must be digested, processed, considered and molded into action by the collective knowledge, expertise, judgment and hard work of stakeholders and decision-makers. Institutions of higher education have often employed a participatory model that attempts to involve virtually all members of the college community in defining the direction of the institution. This model is commonly described as “shared governance,” a term which does not denote a binding structural authority, but a process that recognizes the importance and advantages of considering the knowledge and constructive opinions of community members, students, faculty and staff as an institution serves the educational needs of the community.
- Until recently, Alabama’s community colleges have not had a fully-functional Internal Audit function, or sufficient internal control structures, with training and testing of internal controls, to prevent or detect waste, fraud or abuse of critical system resources. This deficiency may have partly contributed to some of the difficulties suffered by the System and its institutions in recent years as a result of the misconduct of some individuals.



# Staff recommendations: Decision-making

- **Decision-making**
  - **Decision-making processes**
    - Processes need to be collaborative, and fully-informed by reliable and timely information, contain better internal controls, and involve more input from all levels of the system.
  - **Data Systems**
    - Replace outdated legacy systems with a competitively-procured, comprehensive higher education enterprise software system, based upon a system-wide common architecture to provide real-time reporting and analysis of financial, operational, capital and educational data.
  - **Internal Controls**
    - Conduct periodic risk assessments, and teach and test internal controls at all System institutions. Continue to enhance the System's internal audit resources.
  - **Internal Governance**
    - Consider policies that enhance the participation of faculty, students and community stakeholders in decision-making in the "shared governance" model, such as faculty and student-representative bodies, and committee structures. Where structures or traditions supportive of participation already exist, such as the Presidents' Association and others, encourage their use in informing institutional decisions.



## Critical issue: Distance Education

- **Disparity**
  - There are great differences among System institutions with respect to access to online learning, learning management systems and technology, course development and course quality.
- **Lost potential**
  - Strategic decisions and program modifications are being made without systematic program review. As a result, the potential value of online learning is not being fully realized.



## Critical issue: Distance Education

- **Background**

- It is projected that there will continue to be significant growth in distance education (“online”) classes, courses, and programs in the next five to ten years. Currently, more than 3 million students are enrolled in online course nationwide. Online education is becoming an important long-term strategy for most postsecondary institutions. Given the rapid grow of online education and its importance for postsecondary institutions, it is imperative that institutions of higher education provide quality online programs. More and more learners are requiring flexibility in program structure to accommodate their other responsibilities, such as full-time jobs or family needs. With these constraints, students now look for courses and programs that best accommodate their schedules and learning styles.
- Institutions of higher education also face the growing costs of hardware, technical support, maintenance, and especially software licenses. There is a critical need to develop reusable learning objects, tagging them in a systemic way, storing them in well-designed databases, and retrieving and recombining them with other objects to create customized learning experiences for students.
- For the Alabama Community College System the percentage of online courses offered to students range from 0% at some institutions to a high of some 31%. Most institutions have well below 10% of their courses offered online and there are very few programs offered completely online, with at least one exception. Some private institutions offer scores of online degree programs. At least one public four-year institution outside our system is currently offering over eighteen degrees online. In general, Alabama Community College System institutions are just beginning to tap the potentials of the distance education market.



## Staff recommendations: Distance Education

- **Conduct a system-wide assessment** of all distance education programs and courses.
- **Develop a system distance education plan** to enable every institution in the system to provide high quality, online programs and courses, along with appropriate instructional technology.
- **Maximize access** to online learning for all students.
- **Establish policies, procedures, guidelines, and funding methodology** as necessary for implementation.



## Critical issue: Program Review

- **Lack of fact-based decision-making**
  - Program Review is an important and continuing function in the administration of every college's educational programs. Yet, at some institutions, strategic decisions about program modifications are sometimes made without thorough systematic program review, or a detailed understanding of external demand for programs.



# Critical issue: Program Review

- **Background**

- Program Review is an ongoing activity at each of the institutions within the Alabama Community College System. In addition to review at the college level, program review needs to occur at the system level. Academic and Technical programs work best when collective responsibility is taken for the quality of instruction. Program review is a process, indeed a conversation, which allows a system to speak with one voice about its goals and aspirations. It looks honestly at the quality of its academic and career technical offerings and use of faculty in delivering the best educational services possible. Questions such as "What is the student demand for this program and how are graduates doing?" are explored. Transfer rates, occupational demand and other indicators of success are examined. Finally, an analysis of resources - current and needed- are reviewed to develop a plan to get the people, money, technology together in order to live up to the goals of the system as a whole. While some of the data requested is available at the system level, much is not. For example, while the system is able to determine how many total students were enrolled in a program based on a CIP code at any given time, it is not able to determine how many students entered a program in any given semester and of those how many graduated. This is information that can show how successful an institution is in retaining and graduating students.
- The goal of program review is the improvement of programs based on information gathered and analyzed during a cyclical review process. Colleges within the Alabama Community College System are required, as an element of accreditation, to conduct program reviews; in conducting these reviews, institutional faculty and administrators assess progress over time, analyze costs and benefits of programs, and make strategic decisions about program modification. System-level Program Review would continue to respect the individual college's review process while calling for the collection of additional data as part institutional management plan required by the Department of Postsecondary Education. Program review is one component of the institutional management plan; other components include strategic planning, assessment of student learning outcomes, and assessment of outcomes in administrative areas. An in-depth program review provides a mechanism for constructive change. It provides the opportunity to review, to evaluate, and to plan in a collegial and reasoned setting. But, more importantly, it provides the system a means of identifying exceptional programs and review processes that can be shared with other institutions.



## Staff recommendations: Program Review

- **Program review**
  - Work with a quality team, comprised of System Presidents and employee representatives, to design a more comprehensive process for program review that includes developing a new instrument for program assessment.
- **Review & assessment**
  - Beginning Fall 2009, implement the new program review process and include the new assessment tool as a part of the college's Institutional Management Plan.



## Critical issue: Workforce Development

- **Funding**
  - Federal Perkins and Workforce Investment Act funds are declining as the State's need for workforce training in new and existing businesses and industries is increasing, putting a greater burden on State-based funding.
- **Instructors**
  - Highly qualified technical educators and workforce trainers are in short supply and in great demand.



## Critical issue: Workforce Development

- **Background**

- Alabama has had tremendous recent successes in attracting new and expanding industries to our state. Tens of thousands of new jobs are being created. But even though the creation of new jobs is outpacing the shutdowns of companies in declining industries, there is tremendous need for additional training and education for prospective employees who can compete for high-demand, high-wage, high-technology jobs of the future.
- Training for many high-tech and health-related jobs is much more expensive than other kinds of postsecondary education.
- The competition for qualified instructors is intense, because these individuals can earn a great deal more in the private sector.



## Staff recommendation: Workforce Development

- **Funding**
  - Target funds to address priority needs; disinvest in lower priority activities.
  - Develop an agenda that addresses funding for priority workforce development needs in the state.
- **Instructors**
  - Work with employers to promote flex time for employees to serve as trainers in workforce training programs.
  - Review State Board policies and pay schedules for barriers to employing highly qualified workforce trainers.
- **Accountability**
  - Monitor fiscal and programmatic performance to assure maximum program efficiency and effectiveness.



## Critical issue: Public Awareness

- **Lack of awareness**
  - Most citizens and decision-makers, and many of the system's 10,500 employees are not aware of all that its colleges do, and the beneficial impact that they have at the local and state level.
  - Potential students of all ages need to know more about what they can achieve in their lives by taking advantage of Alabama's two-year colleges and training programs.



## Critical issue: Public Awareness

- **Background**

- Up until 2007, colleges operated primarily as independent units rather than part of a cohesive system. In doing so, they missed the opportunity to present a unified public image of strength. Public awareness of community colleges was therefore confined to their own local institutions, or of those linked to negative headlines. The depth and breadth of services provided by all the institutions of the Alabama Community College System was largely unknown by the public at large, students, legislators, the business community, and even ACCS employees themselves.



## Staff recommendations: Public Awareness

- **Public Information**

- Define a clear public image in which the System’s institutions provide quality, affordable education to their students.
- Continue implementation and augmentation of the new Alabama Community College System website: [www.accs.cc](http://www.accs.cc) , using it as a primary tool for both internal and external communications, celebrating system successes, and modeling transparency.
- Continue implementation of the current “rebranding” campaign and “Education Works” marketing outreach.
- Collaborate with the proposed statewide workforce development and adult education marketing efforts.

- **Culture, Policies and Practices**

- Inform and infuse the organization at every level of the organization the values of
  - **Integrity**
  - **Excellence**
  - **Accessibility**
  - **Accountability**
  - **Diversity**

Revise applicable policies practices and procedures accordingly.



## Next Steps

- **Development and Implementation of a Formal Strategic Plan**
  - With the continued involvement of the Task Force and with the assistance of a nationally recognized expert in the field, the System should embark upon a formal, in-depth Strategic Planning Process.
  - The Strategic Plan should formulate specific strategic goals for each division and component unit in the Department of Postsecondary Education over a five-year period.
  - At a minimum, the Plan should:
    - Reflect the best practices of peer systems in other states
    - Be guided by national norms
    - Establish detailed goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, timelines and measurable outcomes
  - Ultimately, all System institutions and programs should be aligned within the provisions of the plan.



**Alabama Community College System**

Bradley Byrne, Chancellor

[www.accs.cc](http://www.accs.cc)

