



A group in Idaho Falls is looking at turning Eastern Idaho Technical College in a community college that would be able to confer academic degrees. Photo courtesy of Wendy Horman.

# Group seeks to create Idaho Falls community college

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Transformation could be in store for Eastern Idaho Technical College, a two-year school that serves 750 students in Idaho Falls.

The city's mayor and a group of supporters would like to see EITC become a community college capable of conferring academic degrees. The trustees have established as college president Rick Aman, who helped get the southwestern community college College of Western Idaho started in 2009. And backers of the community college effort are

surveying residents to see what the chances are for property tax support.

The idea of making EITC a full two-year college has been around at least since the 1990s, but it started gathering steam last year, when Idaho Falls Mayor Rebecca Casper put together a committee to explore the options. The effort is picking up speed now as backers plan a survey to see if they have the support they need to present a ballot measure to voters in May.

"We've had numerous really good meetings involving a lot of the leadership in the Idaho Falls area," said Aman, who served as vice president of instruction at CWI. "We're going to have to decide kind of quickly to be committed."

Idaho now has three community colleges: the large and well-established College of Southern Idaho, which serves 7,570 students in Twin Falls; North Idaho College, which serves 5,779 students in Coeur d'Alene, and the newly minted CWI, which has ballooned in enrollment from 1,208 students in its first semester in January 2009 to 8,375 for-credit and 10,140 non-credit students this fall.

Advocates for the community college said its establishment would provide more affordable options for people in eastern Idaho.

"Once they have affordable access to academic programs, they can go to the local community college and for literally half the cost, get their first two years of academic credit in place and then transfer," said Bert Glandon, president of CWI.

"There's a need. Just like you saw a huge increase in enrollment at CWI, there would be a proportional increase in Idaho Falls. Anything we can do, such as expanding the capacity of ITECH, we will do."

Dwight Johnson, the head of the state Division of Professional-Technical Education



Rick Aman

Idaho Falls does not now have a community college, although residents do have access to state higher education facilities through local outposts of Idaho State University, CSI, and the University of Idaho. BYU-Idaho is about 20 miles away from Idaho Falls in Rexburg, and Idaho State is in Pocatello, 40 minutes away.

But creating an Idaho Falls-based community college would do more than add classes to the mix, said Rep. Wendy Horman, R-Idaho Falls, who serves on a local committee that is examining the community college idea.

"A community college would enrich the opportunities not only for our students but for our citizens," Horman said.

EITC now provides only technical credits used toward a job. As a community college, the school would be able to provide credits that could be transferred to a four-year college.

"There's a pretty big difference between the pure technical college and a comprehensive community college," Aman said.

Idaho's three community colleges do not report to the State Board of Education the way the University of Idaho, Idaho State, and Boise State University do. They have separate locally elected five-member boards of trustees.

"They certainly attend State Board of Education meetings," Aman said of the community colleges. "But when push comes to shove, it is a locally governed entity."

Aman couldn't estimate how much it would cost local taxpayers to make EITC into a two-year community college. EITC is now supported by money from the Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education, tuition, and fees. Dwight Johnson, the head of that division, said he's all for seeing EITC become a community college.



*Rep. Wendy Horman*

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A community college can get support from a local property tax levy, from tuition and fees, from Idaho State Liquor Division revenues, and from the General Fund administered by the state Legislature. EITC's 60-acre campus already has all the buildings that it needs to serve an expected community college population of 1,300 in the first year, Aman said.

"Everything is in place here," he said. "It's just a matter of forming a taxing district and then creating a community college district."

The local committee hasn't established what the new district would be. State law says it has to include at least one full county and four school districts, Horman said. A vote to establish such a taxing district in the 1990s failed, she added. Such a measure requires 66.6 percent of the vote.

"Raising taxes is not an easy thing to do with a supermajority," Aman said.