

## Four colleges join UMass to form link

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In an effort to help shape the economic future of the region, the presidents of four colleges have joined forces with the chancellor of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell to form EdLink, the first formal partnership to represent all three segments of the public higher education system in Northeastern Massachusetts.

"The group intends to focus on the region's sustainable economic development," said Mary Williams, who serves as coordinator for the new partnership, which includes North Shore Community College, Salem State College, Northern Essex Community College, and Middlesex Community College in Lowell.

"We're hoping to achieve as a group what we can't achieve as individual campuses, and that is a regional approach to area challenges," said Wayne Burton, president of North Shore Community College.

According to Burton, EdLink's first priority is to launch Project Connect, an initiative to be unveiled tomorrow at a meeting of the Northeast Regional Competitive Council, a panel that was set up by Governor Mitt Romney to determine the regional economic needs on the North Shore and in the Merrimack Valley. Project Connect will examine how Massachusetts will compete with other regions of the country to meet business needs.

"We have always been commingled with Boston in terms of planning and economic development, and to be frank, I think that we've been shortchanged because of it," Burton said. "Through this partnership, we can be the education node for our region."

Williams added: "We want to be a resource for our communities so that when a business in this region is looking to expand, we will be part of that conversation. We will be at the table to find out what skills their workers need to have. Our goal is to stay ahead of emerging technologies."

EdLink was established in response to the state Board of Higher Education's recent push to make regional partnerships a priority. Connect, an initiative similar to EdLink, has been established in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Through EdLink, the five schools will collaborate to fill any gap in job skills in the region.

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