

PROPOSAL

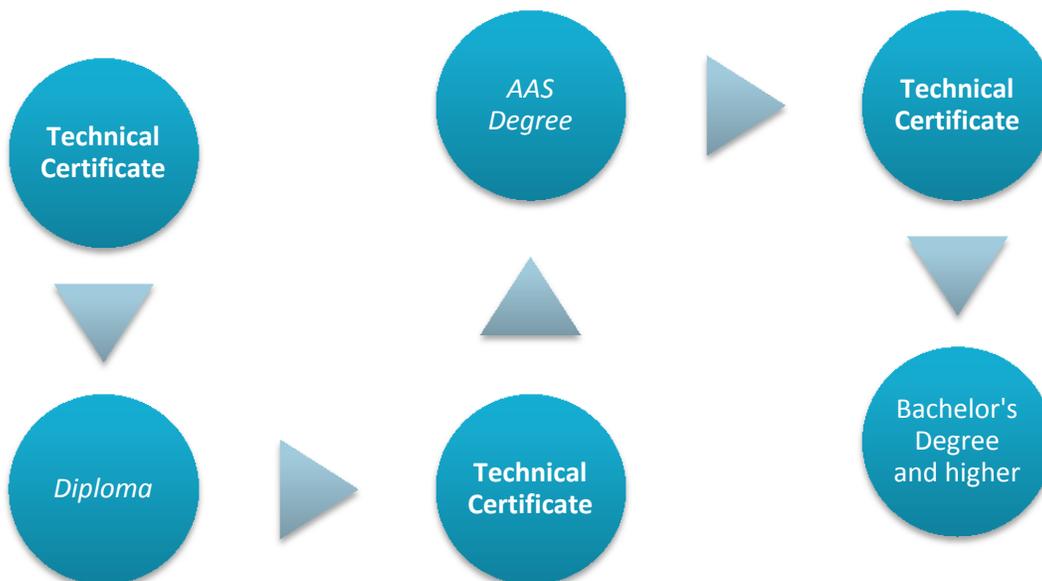
For South Dakota's Postsecondary Technical Institutes to Offer Technical Certificate Options



The technical institutes have long offered diploma and Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree programs. These program options offer students a wide range of technical knowledge and skills in one- and two-year completion times, preparing them for the demands of the technical workforce across South Dakota and the surrounding region. With business and industry's dire need for skilled employees, the current program options do not fully address the state's technical workforce needs. An additional, short-term option to assist in preparing individuals for the work environment is offering technical certificate options at the technical institutes.

What are technical certificates?

Technical certificates are short-term career pathway programs that result in the award of a formal certificate, validating to employers the individuals' credentials for applicable careers. Certificate options can be used as individuals stack their credentials, enriching their abilities for the workplace. Certificates can add value for individuals as a stand-alone credential, between a diploma and AAS degree, or bridging from an AAS degree to a Bachelor's degree.



Technical certificates allow students to find in-field or related-field employment and typically provide a wage premium when compared to those who do not have training in the field. Students seeking a technical certificate might include:

1. Students who have recently graduated from high school and are looking to enter the workforce quickly,
2. Those who have been working in industry for some time and would like to obtain specialized skills in their career field to add value to their company and advance in their career, or
3. Non-traditional students who haven't yet obtained a postsecondary credential and would like to take the next step in their career.

In brief, certificate programs benefit students and industry by:

- Acknowledging the skill advancement of students and provide technical certificates for their accomplishments.
- Serving as celebration points within longer programs and help students see the progress they are making.
- Encouraging students to return and complete a diploma or degree to advance their knowledge, skills, and careers.
- Providing skilled workers in fields where employees are needed.
- Providing lifelong learning opportunities for those who need additional skills.

With approval from the SD Board of Education to offer certificate options, each technical institute would have the ability to create formal, technical certificate programs to continue meeting the needs of students and industry through another education path. Currently, all of the technical institutes provide flexible training options for companies and individuals, but these options do not result in the completion of a diploma or AAS degree. For example, many students complete welding courses and receive industry certification that leads to active employment in the welding industry, yet some do not complete the full diploma or AAS requirements. As such, students like these welding students are considered failures within reporting structures because the students failed to complete the official diploma or AAS program. It is the goal of this proposal to change that failure perception while ensuring a quality education that prepares students for in-demand, well-paying careers in South Dakota.

The certificate programs would adhere to the following guidelines:

- Grant credit to students and meet Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation requirements.
- Consist of either:
 - Existing curriculum from approved diploma or AAS degree programs (**embedded certificates**). For example, a technical institute could create an Aluminum Welding certificate that includes technical courses from a diploma or AAS degree related to aluminum welding.
 - Some portion of new curriculum (**stand-alone certificates**). For example, a technical institute could create a Sterile Compounding certificate to train pharmacy technicians already working in the industry.

- Allow students to enroll directly in a technical certificate program. Students also may receive a technical certificate if they are enrolled in a diploma or AAS program and have completed the technical certificate requirements.
- Require students to complete all certificate requirements in order to be considered completers, just as students enrolled in a diploma or AAS Degree program must complete its requirements in order to be noted as completers.
- Record students completing certificate requirements or returning to the institution the following year as retained.

How will technical certificates be created and reported?

- For **embedded certificates** (consisting of existing courses in already approved diploma or AAS degree programs):
 - Technical institutes inform the South Dakota Department of Education in writing about intentions to begin a technical certificate program and provide an update to the South Dakota Board of Education. The letter and update must illustrate how the technical certificate serves an industry need and leads to employment opportunities.
 - Certificate seekers and completers would be included in state-level reports (ex. enrollment, retention, graduation, placement). Technical institutes may elect to separate certificate data from diploma and AAS degree data.
 - Currently, the state collects two different lists regarding the awarding of degrees/diplomas: total degrees/diplomas awarded (duplicated count) and unduplicated degrees/diplomas awarded. Certificates awarded would be added to the duplicated count. For the unduplicated count, only the highest degree obtained would be counted.
- For **stand-alone certificates** (incorporating new course offerings in a high-demand industry area outside of existing diploma or AAS degree programs):
 - Technical institutes must complete the full, formal program approval process that currently exists for diploma programs.
 - State reports would detail each stand-alone certificate program.
 - Graduates would be reported just like they are for any diploma or degree program.
 - Certificate seekers and completers would be included in state-level reports (ex. enrollment, retention, graduation, placement). This data would be separated to indicate the success rate of those in stand-alone certificate programs.

South Dakota's businesses and industry organizations demand more workers with technical credentials at all education levels. By 2025, approximately 65% of the state's workforce will need some kind of postsecondary credential. From the state's actual 2013 postsecondary credential attainment of 38%, meeting the needs of industry in the next decade will require aggressive and well-aligned strategies to support students and the labor market. Adding technical certificate options at the technical institutes to compliment the suite of diploma and AAS degrees currently in place provides students and businesses additional needed options.