

Atlantic County plans for new aviation school at AC airport

By [John DeRosier](#), Staff Writer

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP — Atlantic City International Airport will soon be the home of a new aviation maintenance academy.

Atlantic County announced Wednesday it will partner with Atlantic Cape Community College to create an aviation maintenance, repair and overhaul training institute at the airport that will train students to fix planes for small and major airlines around the country.

The program will take one to two years to be developed by Atlantic Cape with technical support from the county, according to college President Barbara Gaba.

“We have the facility and the interest. What we are lacking is a professionally trained workforce to support this field,” County Executive Dennis Levinson said in a statement, adding the county has had discussions with several airlines interested in participating. “We plan to take advantage of our assets to build an aviation industry. This is yet another step in that direction that should bring good-paying jobs to our region and help us diversify our economy beyond gaming.”

The idea of creating an aviation maintenance academy has been discussed by county officials for more than a year. Last year, the county looked to partner with Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology, located in New York, to create the school, but the plans remained stagnant.

Gaba said Atlantic Cape has worked with Vaughn College in the past, but it is too early to determine what institutions they will partner with for this project.

Both organizations, along with the county, will work to secure funding for implementation and operation of a Federal Aviation Administration-approved program.

This initiative is fully supported by the South Jersey Transportation Authority, according to the county. The SJTA operates and maintains the airport and has looked to expand its use in the past.

The aviation academy will prepare students for FAA certification and provide a foundation for an associate of applied science degree in aviation maintenance with the ability to transfer into a variety of four-year programs, according to a statement from the county.

Gaba said those in the program will be Atlantic Cape students and they will be available for the same financial-aid opportunities current students have. The FAA will determine the requirements to be accepted in the program.

Creating an aviation industry was a key element in a report authored by Texas-based economic firm Angelou Economics in 2015 that urged Atlantic County to diversify its economy away from gambling in the wake of five casinos closing in Atlantic City.

A 2015 Boeing technical outlook forecasts the need for more than 609,000 maintenance technicians during the next 17 years.

The creation of the maintenance program would go along with the building of the Stockton Aviation Research and Technology Park, which the county broke ground on earlier this year.

"We see this as a tremendous opportunity and are very appreciative of Atlantic Cape President Dr. Barbara Gaba and her team for their shared vision in moving this forward," Levinson said in the statement. "Aviation maintenance and repair-technician careers should appeal to both our youth as well as those who may be currently underemployed or unemployed."