



## Wisconsin Technical College Legislative Priorities

2013 Legislative Session

January 2013

### Priority 1

**Address Wisconsin's "skills gap" and grow jobs and prosperity by supporting:**

- **State investment to build Wisconsin technical college capacity;**
- **Local flexibility to increase technical college responsiveness; and**
- **Financial aid to expand the number of Wisconsinites who can afford to attend technical college.**

### Rationale

Wisconsin technical colleges are the key resource to meet the state's "skills gap," the mismatch between workers' current skills and what employers are seeking.

- Despite persistent unemployment, the Department of Workforce Development estimates there are from 32,000 to 45,000 unfilled job openings statewide. The majority of these jobs, an estimated 70%, require skills from technical colleges; education beyond high school, but not at the bachelor's degree level.
- In an independent analysis, Wisconsin's technical colleges – working with private employer partners – estimated the need for 39,000 skilled graduates over the next two years *beyond the technical colleges' current capacity*.
- The colleges enroll more than 350,000 and aggressively manage their program "mix" based on direct employer input and regional labor market intelligence.
- The direct result is exceptionally high job placement rates across programs, an immediate economic impact for Wisconsin, and enduring graduate success:
  - 88% of 2011 graduates were employed within six months with annual salaries up to \$65,000 and a median salary of \$36,000 (associate degree)
  - 86% of graduates were employed *in Wisconsin*
  - 71% were employed *in their field*
  - 2006 graduates reported a 50% earnings increase since graduation, far exceeding the rate of inflation and average employee increases
- Despite this, the colleges sometimes can't meet employer demand or student interest because of physical and instructional capacity constraints.

## Solutions

### ***Make Wisconsin technical colleges a priority in the 2013-2015 biennial budget.***

#### **Invest to expand technical college capacity**

Initiatives proposed by the System to deliver the additional skilled graduates sought by Wisconsin employers include *Wisconsin Skills Link* competitive grants to technical colleges working closely with employer and regional partners. These grants (\$20 million in 2013 and \$40 million in 2014) would build college program capacity in direct response to employer demand to deliver the workers needed in the next two years. Other proposed initiatives included expanding career pathways for adults (\$10 million over the biennium) and dual credit opportunities for youth (\$4 million over the biennium) to provide clear educational pathways to great careers. For complete details on these initiatives, see: [http://www.wtcsystem.edu/legislative/state/budget\\_2013\\_15.htm](http://www.wtcsystem.edu/legislative/state/budget_2013_15.htm).

#### **Expand local technical college flexibility**

Provide flexibility to address the colleges' physical capacity constraints by increasing the capital project limit (the size of a campus expansion project) from \$1.5 to \$3 million without requiring a districtwide referendum. Additionally, exempt certain revenue sources – student activity fees and property sales – from the capital project limit.

Support the intent of the previous legislature by allowing the strict freeze on district property tax levies for operations to expire effective June 30, 2013. The strict 2011 freeze impedes local control and flexibility to respond to employer needs by capping district operating levies, regardless of local needs, to no more than the amount of the 2010 levy (or to the 2010 mill rate, if property values were to increase districtwide). Allowing the freeze to expire maintains the longstanding 1.5 mill levy limit.

#### **Expand technical college student financial aid**

Address the financial aid “need gap” of current and prospective WTCS students by investing in Wisconsin Higher Education Grants (WHEG), the state’s primary need-based financial aid. The “need gap” is the difference between college costs and all available student and family resources (including personal resources, aid and loans).

WHEG funding for WTCS students is exhausted earlier and earlier each year and is now depleted well before the academic year even begins. Each year, some 50,000 qualifying technical college students receive no aid award because of this funding gap. Technical college students tend to be older, working, and have more dependents than traditional 4-year college students.

## Priority 2

### **Fight unwarranted credentialism, including threats to the jobs and job titles technical college graduates may hold and for which technical colleges may train.**

#### Rationale

Wisconsin is experiencing threats to who may call themselves by certain titles in the workplace, as well as threats to who may train individuals to qualify for those titles. These threats occur in several ways:

*Imposing unnecessary degrees to hold a job title* -- Nursing, for example, is experiencing attempts to make a bachelor's degree the entry level credential despite the fact that technical colleges provide more than 1,000 associate degree nurses annually who pass the RN board exams at the same level as bachelor's graduate nurses. There is no data showing a difference in competencies, professionalism or skill levels among new RNs based on the underlying degree earned. Specialized nursing skills are obtained by specialized training beyond the underlying nursing degree, not by one underlying degree over another.

*Protectionism against traditional and emerging job titles* -- A number of job titles have been subject to attempts to "fence in" or "fence out" individuals in ways that affect technical college graduates and employers seeking to hire them. This can occur by seeking to limit who may work in emerging professions or by limiting who may provide continuing education. Just a few examples of areas in which employers and graduates have been affected recently include chiropractic technicians, commercial air transport pilots, and geothermal energy technicians.

*Inappropriately marketing introductory experiences as training qualified professionals* -- A number of proprietary and even public institutions offer short-term overview courses marketed with titles such as "pharmacy technician," "dental assistant," or "paralegal" training. Persons successfully working with these job titles traditionally have skills gained through intensive 1 or 2-year technical college programs not available through a short-term introductory or "test prep" course.

#### Solution

Legislators are urged to work closely with their technical colleges on any matter that may affect qualifications and training for specific jobs and job titles before taking positions on these matters.

### Priority 3

#### **Protect the Wisconsin technical colleges' longstanding mission and governance. Recognize Wisconsin technical colleges' leadership role in higher education.**

##### Rationale

*Protect the technical colleges' mission* -- Wisconsin technical colleges intentionally have a broad mission. In addition to a core mission providing technical and occupational careers, they provide adult basic education and high school completion, dual enrollment for thousands of high school students earning college credit, and affordable pathways to 4-year degree programs, among others. Technical colleges fulfill thousands of custom training contracts with business and industry annually, often at the workplace. The colleges offer innovative boot camps, academies and continuing professional education.

These are valuable resources for communities and are central to the overall technical college mission. Technical colleges are the state's only open admission institutions. Every adult is eligible to gain job skills or the ability to continue in higher education.

*Protect technical college governance* -- Protect the longstanding responsive and accountable technical college governance model. Technical colleges are governed in a shared local-state coordinated model that maximizes local responsiveness, accountability and state-level coordination. Local college boards respond directly to private sector advisory committees for every program at every college. They are accountable to local taxpayers as open, ethical and responsive local governments. Board members are publicly recruited and selected based on "job interviews" held in public hearings to identify the best representatives among local employers, employees, local and state government and K-12 school leaders.

*Recognize Wisconsin technical colleges' leadership in higher education* -- Collectively, Wisconsin technical colleges are the largest higher education system in Wisconsin. They are fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the Northcentral Association of Colleges and Universities, the same accreditation as UW institutions and the state's top independent non-profit colleges and universities.

##### Solutions

Support Wisconsin technical colleges' broad mission and independence. Protect balanced local and state board governance as central to nimble responsiveness. Recognize the strong bond between the colleges' mission and governance and the colleges' outcomes and results. Refer consistently to Wisconsin technical colleges as "colleges" and as "higher education."

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