



Creating a Welcome Option for Younger Generations

Morna Foy, President, Wisconsin Technical College System

Education isn't what it was. Wisconsin's 16 technical colleges – including Moraine Park (MPTC), Waukesha County (WCTC) and Milwaukee Area (MATC) – are making certain of that.

For example, no longer is career exploration something that waits until the last semester of high school...or college. I recall when forward-thinking elementary school teachers staged a "Bring Your Dad to Class" day, asking them to discuss their career with the students.

Now? I've stood with second-graders interacting with state-of-the-art health education technology on one of our campuses. I've ridden with a busload of middle-schoolers, heading out to the local manufacturing park or technical college on a "Heavy Metal Bus Tour." I've been aloft with an MPTC electrical power distribution instructor, showing the ropes (wires?) to older students eager for the hands-on experience.

No longer do motivated high school students have to wait seemingly forever for "what comes next." When I was in school, I had many classmates who were ready, willing and able to start what came next long before finishing high school.

Now? Our colleges work with K-12 partners to deliver dual credit opportunities for high school students – credit that meets graduation requirements and results in transferable college credit, like courses offered

WTCS President Morna Foy aloft with an Electrical Power Distribution instructor during a recent, hands-on career exploration day.

through WCTC's "Dual Enrollment Academy." Last year, over 32,000 Wisconsin high school students earned more than 127,000 technical college credits, typically cost-free to students and their families. That's a jumpstart valued in the millions.

No longer are we without answers as to how to address persistent concerns about college affordability and equity, in both access and success.

Now? Our colleges are working with employer champions and other community partners to expand access and success. For example, under its "MATC Promise," MATC pays tuition and fees for eligible students – after financial aid is applied – for five consecutive semesters. Students must maintain full-time status and a 2.0 GPA, participate in service-learning projects, and complete academic success and career planning workshops.

That's great for students, but it's also great for employers, who are searching for talent as they face the reality of unfavorable workforce demographics.

We owe much of our success to our unique ties to these employers, who help to assure that our programs and services align with current workforce needs and trends. So we work hard to deliver for them, too.

But truly re-imagining education requires a "culture of collaboration" with committed partners: local and state workforce agencies, like the WOW Workforce Development Board; K-12 teachers, counselors and administrators; private and public colleges and universities; economic development agencies; and policymakers, among many others.

Students now in middle and high school, or just beyond high school age – frequently referred to as "Generation Z" – are pretty savvy about their options and their choices, including when it comes to education. Increasingly, they can see the value and opportunity delivered by Wisconsin's technical colleges. Let's work together to make certain their "influencers" can, too.

