



## Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS)

16 technical college districts

416,857 students enrolled

Students ages 29-45 make up 50 percent of those enrolled

21,309 graduates

\$1.2 billion annual budget, \$565 million from property taxes

Tuition for degree, diploma, and certificate programs - \$87 per credit

Tuition for collegiate transfer program—\$117.90 per credit

More than 85 percent of graduates stay to work in the state

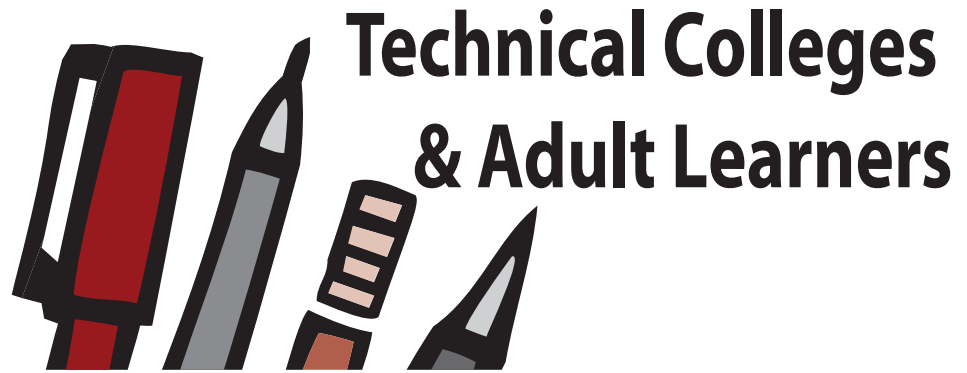
One in ten residents holds a occupational associate degree, twice the national share

These degrees generate a median wage of \$16.34 an hour, compared to \$15.17 nationally

## Building a Stronger

# Wisconsin

Center on Wisconsin Strategy



# Technical Colleges & Adult Learners

## Strengthening Ties between Working Adults & Local Economies

**A** large number of jobs in Wisconsin require solid technical skills but not necessarily four-year college degrees. Nearly three-quarters of the state's workers do not have a four-year college degree, and it is projected that over the next decade 77 percent of job openings in the state will not require such a degree. The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) plays a key role in preparing thousands of Wisconsin workers for the skilled jobs in our economy.

With 16 districts, our technical college system covers the state. The colleges produce over 20,000 graduates a year, 85 to 90 percent of whom remain in the state to work. Among the WTCS' many strengths, its occupational associate degree programs stand out: Wisconsin's workforce has twice as many occupational associate degree holders does the nation as a whole. And with median wages at \$16.34 per hour, those occupational associate degree holders have more than a \$1 per hour wage advantage relative to their national counterparts. The technical colleges also serve employers by providing customized training to thousands of workers each year. Due to their myriad connections to local economies, the technical colleges have the most positive effect on the state's economy of all its institutions, according to a survey of state residents.

The state can link more qualified workers to quality jobs by building on the strengths of our technical colleges. This means connecting working adults and other Wisconsinites to the colleges—and to occupational associate degree programs in particular. It means reaching more workers who need basic skills training by boosting investments in adult basic education. It also means deepening the ties between the colleges and local employers, so that skills training is as relevant and practical as possible. To these ends, we should:

- 1. Improve access to training for working adults.** As opposed to “traditional students” (young adults without children, financial obligations, or jobs), working adults, many of them parents, must fit school in between work and family. When these “non-traditional students” are also low-income, other barriers to education may exist—transportation limitations, multiple jobs, out-of-reach child care expenses. More flexibility in the way technical colleges deliver instruction can help ease this crunch.
  - More modularization: By “chunking” certificate or degree coursework into smaller sets of courses, modularization allows adults already in the labor force to build skills on a schedule more amenable to work and family life, while enabling firms to utilize exactly the minimum training they need.
  - More workplace education: The best way to ensure that those who do not have the time or means beyond regular work hours to pursue skills development is to deliver technical college instruction at the workplace. This is also beneficial because instructors work with firms to link the instruction to actual jobs, so it is viewed by employers and workers as particularly relevant and practical.

## Washington's Integrated Education and Basic Skills Training (I-BEST)

The I-BEST program combines adult basic education, including English as a second language instruction, with workforce training. Instructors from each field coordinate curriculum and co-teach to provide students with literacy education and workforce skills. The ESL curriculum is tailored to language needs in the job for which the student is training. A 2005 study found that ESL students enrolled in I-BEST were five times as likely to earn college credits and 15 times as likely to complete occupational training than non-ESL students.

- More integrated basic skills and occupational training: For many workers, the road to quality jobs is not just about acquiring the right technical skills; it's also about mastering fundamental math, language, or computer skills. Typically, workers with these skills deficits must take adult basic education (ABE) courses before enrolling in degree or certificate programs—minimizing the likelihood that they will ever pursue the kinds of occupational training that pay off well in the labor market. By allowing students to pursue basic education and occupational training simultaneously, and in the same class, co-taught by an ABE instructor and vocational trainer, we stand to greatly increase the number of workers who graduate with a valuable associate degree in hand.
  - More affordable: Wisconsin's major financial aid programs are designed to benefit students who attend our colleges and universities at least half time. For many working adults, especially those with children, carrying a half-time load is simply impossible. By making less-than-half-time students eligible for financial aid, we will help low-income working adults access and complete programs at our technical colleges.
- 2. Make the technical colleges more responsive to the local economy.** Education and training that is not tied to local labor markets in Wisconsin will be limited in its benefit to workers and employers. In many ways, particularly through the various colleges' business and industry service divisions, the WTCS connects well to local economies, providing training to fill pressing skill and occupational shortages. There is room, however, to improve the link between the colleges and the employers' needs.
- More skills standards and credentialing: Industry-specific credentials, or cross-industry "work readiness" credentials at the entry-level, can be an effective mechanism for setting students' training goals while informing employers of

### RISE Partnership for Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development have just announced a new RISE Partnership for Wisconsin. RISE (Regional Industry Skills Education) will focus on building stronger state policies to support career pathways in the state. These innovations directly answer many of the ideas here.

"Career pathways" provide workers the skills they need to access good jobs. Strong employer partnerships will ensure that these pathways are directly relevant to industry needs.

Key elements of the emerging model include:

competency based training tied to employer needs and skill standards

modular, sequential courses offering "stepping stones" of skill building

flexible course formats convenient for workers and employers alike

course credit portability to ensure smooth transition across programs

"road maps" showing links between education, skills, and jobs

The innovations and partnerships emerging from this project promise stronger advancement for workers, and better skills for employers.

workers' skill level. Engaging numerous employers in the creation of local or statewide skill standards and their attendant credentials, or the adoption of national standards and credentials, is key to ensuring their widespread use.

- More multiple-employer training: When employers with common skills needs pool their resources to purchase joint training from the technical colleges, they can realize big savings. In fact, for some small and mid-size firms, this cost sharing may be the only way training is affordable. By privileging multiple-employer training, where feasible, in grant awards, and otherwise supporting this approach, we can expand the number of firms and workers that can access training.
- More investment in Workforce Advancement Training grants: Through the Workforce Advancement Training grants program, WTCS funds its colleges to form partnerships with local businesses to design and deliver skills training to incumbent workers. Since 2005 the grants have served nearly 12,000 workers at over 100 companies, mostly in Wisconsin's critical manufacturing sector. A recent survey of participating employers found that all respondents said the training increased employee skills, and 89 percent of companies said work environments were improved. The state provided \$2 million in grants in 2005-07; Governor Jim Doyle included \$8 million for this training program in his 2007-09 budget proposal. An investment of this size would greatly expand the reach of this popular grant program, to the benefit of employers and workers alike.

**3. Make bigger investments in adult basic education.** For many working adults, basic math, literacy, and computer skills stand in the way of any opportunity to move toward family supporting work. The state should invest more heavily in building this first rung toward decent jobs. But expanding programs to do that, like the integrated training described above, will require increased investment. Wisconsin spends about \$10.5 million on adult basic education (ABE) annually, far less than many other states. As a result, the number of adults we serve through ABE programs, and the amount we spend per pupil, are relatively low. Just 5 percent of the 571,673 Wisconsinites eligible for ABE programs are enrolled. For each of the 29,132 enrolled students, Wisconsin spends around \$360 per pupil—investing less than the national average (\$597) and considerably less than some of our neighbors in the Midwest. Minnesota, for example, spends about \$778 on each of its 44,220 ABE students.

- More overall spending: Washington, with approximately the same number of adults eligible for ABE programs as Wisconsin, served roughly 11,000 more people than we did in 2003. It did so, in part, by investing over \$15 million more on its ABE programs than did Wisconsin. Clearly, a sizeable increase over current spending is needed to reach more of those eligible for basic skills instruction in the state.
- More per-pupil spending: Evidence suggests that low-cost, low-intensity education and training programs are less effective than their higher-cost, more comprehensive counterparts; success in adult education programming is better guaranteed by spending more money per pupil. If Wisconsin were to serve double the number of adults it does now at Minnesota's investment level (\$778 per student), we would need to contribute approximately \$45 million annually.

## • Illinois Occupational Skills Standards

- In 1992, Illinois passed the Occupational Skills Standard Act, which brought together business and labor leaders along with educators and policymakers, to develop a statewide system of industry-defined and recognized skills standards and credentials. Since then, the state has invested over \$5 million to develop skills standards, many of them aligned with the National Skills Standards Board, in 49 occupational areas. The skills standards help the Illinois Workforce Development System deliver education and training to workers that meet industry criteria.

## • C O W S

- center on wisconsin strategy
- The Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) is a non-profit, nonpartisan "think-and-do tank" dedicated to improving economic performance and living standards in the state of Wisconsin and nationally. Based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, COWS works to promote "high road" strategies that support living wages, environmental sustainability, strong communities, and public accountability.

- For more information visit: [www.cows.org](http://www.cows.org)

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