

ACTION
August 28, 2026

HIGHER EDUCATIONAL AIDS BOARD

BOARD REPORT #27-02

Budget Recommendation for Technical Colleges



Layla Merrifield, President
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August 28, 2026

Tammie DeVooght, Executive Secretary
Higher Educational Aids Board
PO Box 7885
Madison, WI 53707-7885

Dear Executive Secretary Tammie DeVooght,

On behalf of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Board and students across the state, we request the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) seek additional grant funding for the WTCS Wisconsin Grants Program. We urge HEAB to include this request as part of its 2027-29 biennial budget proposal submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Administration.

Wisconsin Grants, the state's largest needs-based financial aid initiative, is crucial for helping students pursue higher education and improve their career prospects. WTCS, the largest higher education system in Wisconsin, which is designed to educate and prepare students in their districts to participate in the local workforce, does not receive the same investments as the Universities of Wisconsin and private nonprofit institutions in the state, although technical college students have the highest need of the three major sectors. Additional information comparing WTCS with the state's two other major higher education sectors can be found in the attached WTCS Budget Document.

The WTCS Board realizes that HEAB, like all state agencies, will likely seek to exercise restraint in its 2027-29 biennial budget request. At the same time, we cannot ignore the financial needs of our students and the important role of WTCS graduates in improving the state's long-term economic health.

Therefore, to address the immediate need for additional student financial aid resources, the WTCS Board respectfully asks that the HEAB 2027-29 budget request include the following:

Provide \$18.5 million in each year of the biennium to equalize funding levels; increase the average grant award; support increased student enrollment; address unmet financial need among technical college students; and reduce reliance on student debt.

Establish a formula to annually adjust the WTCS allocation based on changes in the cost of attendance.

Thank you for considering our request and for your commitment to helping Wisconsin Technical College System students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L Merrifield".

Layla Merrifield,
President

Wisconsin Technical College System 2027-29 Biennial Budget Request

ISSUE PAPER

DIN: XXXX

ISSUE TITLE: Wisconsin Grants Funding Increase

REQUEST: Provide \$18.5 million in each year of the biennium to equalize funding levels, increase the maximum grant award, support increased student enrollment, address unmet financial need among technical college students and reduce reliance on student debt.

Establish a formula in state statute to annually adjust the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) allocation based on changes in the cost of attendance.

SUMMARY: Wisconsin Grants is the state's largest need-based financial aid program and is administered by the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB). WTCS, the largest higher education system in Wisconsin, which is designed to educate and prepare students in their districts to participate in the local workforce, does not receive the same investments as the Universities of Wisconsin and private nonprofit institutions in the state, although technical college students have the highest need of the three major sectors.

JUSTIFICATION: Wisconsin's technical college students face some of the greatest financial barriers to higher education in the state, yet WTCS receives the smallest Wisconsin Grants appropriation among Wisconsin's three major higher education sectors. Currently, WTCS receives \$28.9 million in Wisconsin Grants funding, compared to \$65.9 million for the Universities of Wisconsin and \$32.5 million for Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU) institutions. As a result, the Universities of Wisconsin Grant appropriation is 128% higher than WTCS funding, despite technical college students demonstrating significantly greater financial need and higher levels of unmet need.

WTCS students have more need than students who are enrolled in the other major sectors. In FY25, more than 41,000 students applying to a technical college had no financial contribution available for their education and would likely need to borrow money to cover their cost of attendance without additional state financial assistance. Additionally, over 65% of technical college students who applied for financial aid qualified for the maximum Wisconsin Grants award. This reflects a broader trend: 65% of technical college students have no resources available to contribute toward college costs, compared to 51% of private nonprofit students and 33% of Universities of Wisconsin students.

Despite this high level of need, Wisconsin Grants awards for technical college students remain comparatively low. The average Wisconsin Grants award for WTCS students was \$1,313 in FY25, compared to \$3,041 for Universities of Wisconsin students and \$3,327 for students attending private nonprofit institutions. For the 2025-26 academic year, the maximum grant award for a full-time WTCS student was \$1,752, while the annual tuition for a full-time student was \$3,668.40. As a result, the maximum award covered only 46% of tuition costs.

Financial challenges extend well beyond tuition. While the average annual cost of attendance is lower at public technical colleges (\$20,602) than at public Universities of Wisconsin institutions (\$22,716), technical college students still experience the highest average unmet financial need. After grants, scholarships, and other aid are applied, the average unmet need for a WTCS student is \$11,315, compared to \$6,080 for a Universities of Wisconsin student.

These challenges are compounded by the unique demographics of technical college students. Only 19% attend full-time, and the average student is 31 years old. Many are balancing education with employment, childcare and other family responsibilities, making financial assistance critical to their ability to enroll and persist.

Additional investments in Wisconsin Grants would help more students access higher education, enroll in additional credits and complete programs more quickly. Increased funding would reduce barriers for students with the greatest financial need while strengthening Wisconsin's workforce pipeline by accelerating credential attainment and helping students enter high-demand careers throughout the state. Notably, while Universities of Wisconsin receives 28% more funding through the federal Pell Grant program, which is allocated based on student need and enrollment intensity, technical college students continue to demonstrate the highest levels of financial need, underscoring the importance of further state investment in WTCS Wisconsin Grants.



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Tammie DeVooght, Executive Secretary
Higher Educational Aids Board
PO Box 7885
Madison, WI 53707-7885

Dear Executive Secretary Tammie DeVooght,

On behalf of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Board and students across the state, we request the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) seek sum-sufficient funding for the Wisconsin GI (WIGI) Bill program. We urge HEAB to include this request as part of its 2027-29 biennial budget proposal submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Administration.

The WIGI Bill provides full remission of tuition and fees at all WTCS districts and Universities of Wisconsin campuses for Wisconsin veterans and the dependents of Wisconsin veterans who die or are significantly disabled as the result of their military service. Under state law, HEAB reimburses both WTCS and Universities of Wisconsin institutions with General Purpose Revenue for tuition and fees remitted on behalf of eligible veterans, spouses and children. State funding for the WIGI Bill has remained flat at \$6.5 million for both the WTCS and the Universities of Wisconsin since the program's inception. In FY2025, 1,979 veterans and dependents received remission of \$4.6 million under the WIGI Bill. WTCS colleges received \$694,916 in reimbursement—equivalent to roughly 15 cents for every dollar of tuition remission granted. As a result, colleges must cover the remaining 85% of the cost using other funding sources and/or may be required to reduce student services to make up for the lost revenue.

The WTCS Board realizes that HEAB, like all state agencies, will likely seek to exercise restraint in its 2027-29 biennial budget request. At the same time, we cannot ignore the financial needs of our students and the important role of WTCS graduates in improving the state's long-term economic health.

Therefore, to address the immediate need for additional funding for the WIGI Bill Program, the WTCS Board respectfully asks that the HEAB 2027-29 budget request include the following:

By amending the state funding appropriation to sum sufficient, the State would be making WTCS colleges whole regardless of growth in recipients of this aid. Fully funding the program would cost at least \$4,600,000 per year for WTCS' portion of the program.

Thank you for considering our request and for your commitment to helping WTCS students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Merrifield".

Layla Merrifield,
President

Wisconsin Technical College System

2027-29 Biennial Budget Request

ISSUE PAPER

DIN: XXXX

ISSUE Title: Wisconsin GI Bill – Sum Sufficient Appropriation

REQUEST: Modify state statutes changing the Wisconsin GI (WIGI) Bill to a sum sufficient appropriation.

SUMMARY: The WIGI Bill provides full remission of tuition and fees at all WTCS districts and Universities of Wisconsin campuses for Wisconsin veterans and the dependents of Wisconsin veterans who die or are significantly disabled as the result of their military service. Under state law, HEAB reimburses both WTCS and Universities of Wisconsin institutions with General Purpose Revenue for tuition and fees remitted on behalf of eligible veterans, spouses and children. State funding for the WIGI Bill has remained flat at \$6.5 million for both the WTCS and the Universities of Wisconsin since the program's inception. In FY2025, 1,979 veterans and dependents received remission of \$4.6 million under the WIGI Bill. WTCS colleges received \$694,916 in reimbursement—equivalent to roughly 15 cents for every dollar of tuition remission granted. As a result, colleges must cover the remaining 85% of the cost using other funding sources and/or may be required to reduce student services to make up for the lost revenue.

JUSTIFICATION: With continued lack of funding for the WIGI Bill, WTCS districts are seeing a decline in services available to veterans, active-duty service members and military-connected families on campus. In many cases, the shortfall is also beginning to affect other student services, as colleges must redirect limited financial resources to cover unreimbursed WIGI costs. Typical veteran services include academic advising, benefits navigation, mental-health referrals and transition support—services that play a critical role in student retention and graduation. Ongoing underfunding will force many of these supports to be scaled back or eliminated entirely. To ensure the program remains effective, the state should modify the funding to sum sufficient, similar to the Wisconsin National Guard reimbursement program. It is essential to fully fund it so that veterans and military-connected students receive the services they need to succeed academically, complete their programs and enter the workforce.