



October 2, 2013

Governor Announces “Working for Wisconsin” Workforce Development Bills Package

- Bills would affect professional licensing, technical education student scholarships, apprenticeship, skills certification training in high school, and other programs.
- The series of draft bills is being circulated for co-sponsors; to be introduced in coming days.
- Bills are likely to be on a fast track.

The Governor has announced a series of bills that comprise a Fall, 2013, workforce development package called “Working for Wisconsin.” The proposals are in drafting or being circulated for co-sponsors. They will be introduced as separate measures led by different legislators and may move quickly to hearing through several different committees.

A summary follows based on the most recent version or versions we have been able to review. As reflected below, we have already secured amendments or promises of amendments in ways that improve two of the proposals.

Technical Education Higher Education Scholarships (LRB-3026/1)

This bill creates a “Technical Education Higher Education Scholarship Program” that is similar to the longstanding Academic Excellence Higher Education Scholarship at Wisconsin high schools. Existing academic excellence scholarships provide funding for a top graduating student or students at each high school for a portion of tuition at a Wisconsin college or university, including a technical college. The new program would create a distinct new opportunity in addition to the existing scholarships.

The new grants would focus on high school seniors who “demonstrate high level of proficiency in technical education courses” and who will enroll on a full-time basis specifically in a Wisconsin technical college, or in other higher education programs certified by the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) as “specializing in technical education.”

Importantly, the initial bill version we reviewed would allow HEAB to approve programs at for-profit/proprietary institutions. We expressed serious concerns about the expansion of state-funded public financial aid to be used for the first time at for-profit proprietary colleges. Thanks in large measure to the direct work of WTCS President Morna Foy, we believe that the bill version to be formally introduced will not allow for this expansion. The revised version, we believe, will allow for students to use the scholarship only at a Wisconsin technical college or as approved by HEAB at a UW college/university or a *private not-for-profit independent* college or university (e.g., Marquette, St. Norbert, etc.).

The number of eligible seniors at each high school would be based on school size. Recipients would be required to maintain a 3.0 GPA while in college and would be eligible for scholarships for up to three years. The program provides scholarships of \$2,250 per academic year, which would include \$1,125 funded by HEAB through a new state appropriation, plus a required match of \$1,125 from institutional (college) funds, gifts or grants. Grants would begin with 2015 high school graduates who enroll in college in 2015-16.

This is an encouraging and positive investment in technical education. It must be noted that it also carries a significant unfunded cost to technical colleges for the scholarship matching funds. While the number of existing academic excellence enrollees at technical colleges is modest, the new program would likely lead to hundreds of new students enrolling, each requiring a funding match.

Professional Licensing and Credentials Reform (LRB 1866/5)

The District Boards Association has already secured important changes to this bill prior to introduction, as described below.

This bill would prohibit state regulators (the Department of Safety and Professional Services, “DSPS,” formerly the Department of Regulation and Licensing) from requiring candidates for exams to have graduated or passed academic or training programs before sitting for licensing exams. In other words, a person could not be stopped from sitting for licensing exams before completing the degree or training leading up to the exams.

The bill includes some important exceptions. First, some professional titles have national or regional bodies that require graduation before exams can be taken (e.g., certified public accounting). Second, some professional titles are outside the scope of DSPS oversight covered by the bill (e.g., attorneys).

Third, importantly, the bill treats several other professions uniquely. This includes registered nursing (RNs) and licensed practical nursing (LPNs). The District Boards Association has secured an important amendment to the draft bill that will provide no person may sit for the RN or LPN licensing exams until they have either graduated from *or have the express approval of their nursing program*. For nursing, sitting for the board exams will not be prohibited before graduation. Doing so will be up to the college, not the student, however. The latest bill version (1866/5) has been updated with these changes for both RNs and LPNs consistent with our request.

This is a major accomplishment resulting from a joint effort by the Boards Association; our nursing and health professions leadership, especially Dean Dessie Levy at MATC-Milwaukee and Dean Diane Skewes at Gateway; by the WTCS staff; by our advocacy partners Sean Stephenson and Tim Elverman; and through the cooperation of the Governor's Office, DSPS staff, and the bill's lead sponsors, Senator Frank Lasee (R-DePere) and Representative Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield).

Many other professional titles and licenses could be affected by this bill. It is challenging to establish at this time exactly which titles will be affected: 1. for which technical colleges provide training, 2. in ways that alter current licensing and exam practices, and 3. where a national or other body does not already require graduation before exams.

Importantly, in all cases, the bill does not eliminate the need for a degree or training for any license or title requiring it now. Rather, it changes the sequencing to allow students to sit for exams pre-graduation if they so choose.

Career and Technical Education Incentive Grants (LRB 3115/1)

This bill would provide \$3.0 million for career and technical education grants to be awarded by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to K-12 districts. Districts would receive \$1,000 per pupil for each student who completes an approved, industry-validated certification program and who graduates from high school in the district. This bill parallels a proposal made by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers as part of the DPI 2013-15 biennial budget request.

The grants would start in the 2014-15 school year. The amount would be prorated/reduced if demand exceeds the set appropriation for 3,000 grants annually.

The bill would provide positive opportunities for high school students and K-12 districts. It would also provide opportunities for technical colleges to partner with high schools on important industry certifications that promote career and technical education and pathways to further technical college study.

Expanded Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AB 351/SB 274)

These identical/twin bills have already been introduced. They would increase state funding provided to the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) for new staffing and program funding in support of vocational rehabilitation services. These services support special needs and disabled individuals to enter or reenter the workforce. The bills would provide \$1.8 million in 2013-14 and \$2.0 million in 2014-15 for new funding. The increased state funding would allow Wisconsin to leverage additional federal matching funds.

Expanding Youth Apprenticeships (LRB 3020/1 and LRB 2949/1)

These bills would provide new funding to expand youth apprenticeship by \$500,000 annually. Existing funding of \$1.8 million would be increased by 28% to \$2.3 million annually. This expansion would allow school districts and employers to expand the number of students and businesses participating. Youth apprentices receive on-the-job experience and training along with instruction, often provided by technical colleges, through the local high school.

Adult Apprenticeship Tuition Assistance (LRB 2976/1)

This bill would provide up to \$1,000 per adult apprentice or apprentice employer to cover up to 25% of tuition costs. The bill would provide a total of \$250,000 annually for this new program.

Extending the “Wisconsin Workers Win” Pilot (LRB 3054/2 and LRB 3227/2)

These twin bills would extend the pilot program “Wisconsin Workers Win” for another two years. Prior to expiring in 2013, the program operated in three high-unemployment areas. It matched clients receiving unemployment benefits with training services in new occupational areas.

Transitional Jobs Program (LRB 3183)

This bill would create a new Transitional Jobs Program to serve cities and counties with high unemployment and/or high child poverty rates. The program would be administered through the Department of Children and Families and would operate using a reallocation of existing agency funds.

Each of these bills is still subject to changes before and after introduction. Public hearings will be held for each bill in each house but have not yet been announced. The above summary is based on a review of the most recent draft bills available in a quickly evolving environment.

This update was prepared by Paul Gabriel for the Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association. Any analysis or opinion is exclusively the author's.