
Wisconsin Students Respond Enthusiastically to Tech Ed Month Events

Ongoing challenge: Alert more youth to good jobs tech training offers, ensure skilled workforce

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Maggie Fink and her classmates at Kaukauna High School represent the future generation of Wisconsin's workforce. Governor Walker and I, along with state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers, toured their lab recently. Our visit was among special events during Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month, which Governor Walker proclaimed for the month of February. The students were eager to tell us what they learned, show us an electronic vehicle they built, and talk about their plans for the future.

The same is true of the Milwaukee Bradley Tech students I, and Superintendent Evers met during another CTE event. This was at a Froedtert Hospital construction site in Wauwatosa, and the students were enrolled in an innovative Tech Tern program. They were exploring career opportunities in architecture, engineer, construction management and the building trades. These Tech Terns were equally enthusiastic about their school-to-work path and the future.

The Kaukauna and Bradley Tech students see the rewarding careers and family-supporting jobs that can become a reality with a technical education. While CTE month is at an end, the challenge is ongoing for all of us who want our youth to succeed and want to keep Wisconsin moving forward by building a skilled workforce. By all of us, I mean teachers, parents, mentors, community leaders and employers. We need to get the message to our youth at an early age, whether by text, twitter, or better yet, a face-to-face talk: A year or two in technical school, even short-term training, can open doors to challenging and good-paying careers.

Governor Walker has been and remains a strong supporter of career and technical education. Before the start of the current school year, Governor Walker announced \$1.8 million in funding for our popular Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program. The YA program provides high school juniors and seniors with school-to-work experience. More recently, he signed legislation to provide an additional \$500,000 for YA, opening slots for hundreds of additional students. Another bill Governor Walker recently signed into law would encourage school districts to promote CTE programs. For every pupil that completes an approved, industry-recognized program, the district will receive \$1,000.

Another shining example is Governor Walker's Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) initiative. Currently, WFF provides \$15 million in worker training grants for innovative, employer-driven training. Governor Walker now wants to add \$35 million more to address the current skills gap and ensure a skilled workforce in the future. The added funding would support a host of initiatives, including school district and technical college dual enrollment programs that target high demand jobs, many of which require technical education.

CTE month provides us with a special opportunity to highlight the value of career and technical education. Even so, our youth and the opportunities in their future through CTE must remain our focus throughout the year.

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