

MINUTES OF MEETING
WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM (WTCS) BOARD
JULY 14-15, 2026
WESTERN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Tuesday, July 14, 2026

Members Present: Lindsay Blumer, Terry Craney, Quincey Daniels, Jr., Eli Guthrie, Frances Huntley-Cooper, Dan Klecker, Timothy Nixon, Amy Pechacek, Joshua Robinson for Jill Underly, Sara Rogers, Michael Rosen, Daniel Sperberg.

Members Absent: Leslie Svacina.

System Office Staff Present: Hilary Barker, Rachel Colla, Julie Drake, Paul Hammer, Mandy Johnson, Christina Lorge, Colleen McCabe, Layla Merrifield, Jeremy Nichols, Katy Pettersen, Dan Scanlon, Chrystal Seeley-Schreck, Lenard Simpson, Megan Stritchko, Brandon Trujillo, Julie Tyznik, Ann Westrich.

District/Others Present: Sunem Beaton-Garcia, Chippewa Valley Technical College; Veronique Tran, Gateway Technical College; Paul Carlsen, Lakeshore Technical College; Jennifer Berne, Madison Area Technical College; Shelly Mondeik, Mid-State Technical College; Bonnie Baerwald, Moraine Park Technical College; Kate Ferrel, Nicolet Area Technical College; Jeannie Worden, Northcentral Technical College; Kristen Raney, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College; John Will, Northwood Technical College; Jeremy Pickard, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College; Rich Barnhouse, Waukesha County Technical College; Wade Hackbarth, Rebecca Hopkins, Margy Krogman, Julie Lemon, Dawson Olson, Jessica Pintz, Roger Stanford, Western Technical College; Tonya Kristiansen, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Bureau of Working Families; Pat Goss, John Wyatt, Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association.

Board President Rogers called the meeting to order at 4:32 pm. Julie Drake read the open meeting statement and roll call indicated that a quorum was present.

Board President Rogers welcomed President Roger Stanford of Western Technical College, who provided opening remarks to the Board.

President Stanford introduced Dawson Olson, Western Technical College's 2026 WTCS Ambassador, who addressed the Board following the presentation of [his video](#).

Board Member Robinson arrived at 4:40 pm.

ITEM A: Approval of May 19, 2026, Meeting Minutes

It was moved by Board Member Nixon, seconded by Board Member Craney, that the May 19, 2026, meeting minutes be approved as presented. Motion carried.

ITEM B: Report of the Board President

The June report from the Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents was distributed to Board Members on July 13, 2026.

Prior to the Board meeting, the Board Budget Workgroup Development Committee met and engaged in productive discussions regarding budget-related matters.

Board President Rogers attended a dairy industry event in Platteville in June. Drawing on her background in manufacturing, she reflected on the significant workforce and stakeholder involvement within the dairy and food manufacturing industries.

Board President Rogers noted that the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment (CWI) regularly uses business climate surveys to shape state talent strategies, identifying key hurdles like low employer awareness of state training programs and the need for hiring incentives to support target populations. These findings directly inform the CWI Strategic Plan and online data tracking tools.

ITEM C: Report of the System President

System President Layla Merrifield provided updates on recent System activities and initiatives:

- On June 2, System President Merrifield attended the Wisconsin Drives Manufacturing Summit at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, joining 700 Wisconsin industry, education and community leaders to discuss manufacturing's critical role in the state's economy.
- On July 8, the WTCS Compliance Collaborative convened at Madison College. System President Merrifield welcomed compliance officers from Wisconsin technical colleges. The meeting provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the impact of ongoing federal changes, share observations and reinforce communication and coordination among institutions.
- On June 10, the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment (CWI) met at the Wisconsin Operating Engineers Training Center, hosted by WTCS Board Member Sperberg. System President Merrifield attended the meeting, during which WTCS Associate Vice President for Student Success Dr. Christina Lorge presented an overview of Workforce Pell implementation in Wisconsin.
- WTCS recently hosted a meeting of the Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC) Board. RAMC is a coalition of like-minded state systems and two-year colleges from across the country working together with the belief that community colleges are key to a strong, competitive workforce. They discussed future advocacy directions, upcoming changes to accreditation regulations and Workforce Pell implementation.
- In May, WTCS participated in the Wisconsin Higher Education Summit alongside representatives from the Universities of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU). The conference focused on compliance and student success within the evolving higher education landscape.

WTCS plans to continue its involvement in future summits and has already begun planning for next year's event.

- System President Merrifield reported that she joined Lakeshore Technical College President Paul Carlsen and members of his leadership team for a campus visit last month. The visit included a tour of the college's Center for Health Care Excellence and a town hall meeting with faculty and staff.
- A [video featuring a nursing student from Lakeshore Technical College](#) was shared with the Board.
- In June, WTCS convened more than 120 participants for a statewide event on 2Gen (Two-Generation) initiatives, an approach that supports children and their caregivers simultaneously. The event featured five student parents who shared their experiences through presentations and a panel discussion. Participants discussed best practices related to community partnerships, funding strategies, creating family-friendly study spaces and policies regarding children and minors on campus. President Merrifield noted the Board will receive a more comprehensive presentation on WTCS's 2Gen efforts at a future meeting.
- System President Merrifield provided an update on the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. At the Board's May meeting, three WTCS colleges, Chippewa Valley Technical College, Mid-State Technical College and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, were recognized as Aspen Prize semifinalists. Chippewa Valley Technical College has since advanced to become a Top 10 finalist. As part of the selection process, the college will continue working with the Aspen Institute to provide data and highlight student success initiatives.
- System President Merrifield announced plans to revive the WTCS Student Showcase, an event previously held in the State Capitol Rotunda that featured students from all 16 technical colleges showcasing academic programs and student projects. The event is tentatively scheduled for April 2027, with additional details and invitations to be provided to Board members as planning progresses.
- System President Merrifield shared that two new staff members recently joined WTCS to support the administration of the System's Rural Health Grant initiatives. Both individuals bring extensive experience to their roles.
- Board Member Pechacek reported that the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is currently accepting applications for healthcare-focused applications due August 17. She also noted WTCS has received \$53 million in Rural Health Grant funding to support workforce and healthcare initiatives across the state.
- System President Merrifield introduced Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Assistant State Superintendent Division of Academics Joshua Robinson, attending for Board Member Underly, recognizing his previous service as a trustee for Northwood Technical College.

ITEM D: Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association

Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association (DBA) President and Lakeshore Technical College Trustee John Wyatt and DBA Executive Director Pat Goss provided an update on recent Association activities.

DBA President Wyatt expressed appreciation to Moraine Park Technical College President Bonnie Baerwald for her recent Trustee Tuesday presentation, which highlighted the college's successful referendum process and how it has created new opportunities for students, supported local employers and strengthened the surrounding community.

DBA President Wyatt also thanked Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) for hosting the DBA's virtual summer meeting. Recognition was given to Dr. Josh Gamer of Western Technical College for his presentation on artificial intelligence (AI), which helped attendees better understand the topic. Appreciation was also extended to WTCS Policy Advisor Megan Stritchko for her overview of Wisconsin's biennial budget process, providing trustees with a clearer understanding of the state budget and their role in the process. In addition, thanks were shared with Dan Lytle and Dr. Jeff Sullivan of CVTC for their presentation on the college's mission, programs, participation in the St. Croix Valley Business Innovations Center and offerings at the Manufacturing and Engineering Center. President Wyatt noted these presentations provide valuable insights for trustees across the state as they address the needs of students and employers within their own districts.

The Association's focus in the coming months will be welcoming and supporting new trustees by providing opportunities to better understand their governance responsibilities. Trustees were encouraged to participate in Association activities, including the annual planning meeting on July 16, during which priorities for the upcoming year will be established.

DBA President Wyatt also announced plans to reestablish the DBA Legislative Committee. Each of the 16 technical college districts will be invited to appoint a trustee representative to serve on the committee. The Presidents' Association and WTCS System Office will also be asked to designate representatives. The committee's purpose will be to coordinate advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels on issues affecting all Wisconsin technical colleges and to promote a unified voice in support of technical education across the state.

ITEM E: WTCS Presidents' Association

WTCS Presidents' Association (PA) Chair and Nicolet Area Technical College President Kate Ferrel updated the Board on recent activities.

At the June PA meeting, new executive positions for the Association were named:

- Kate Ferrel, Chair, from Nicolet Area Technical College (Nicolet College)
- Tracy Pierner, Vice Chair, from Blackhawk Technical College (BTC)
- Sunem Beaton-Garcia, Secretary, from Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC)
- Rich Barnhouse, Treasurer, from Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC)

- Jeannie Worden, Past Chair, from Northcentral Technical College (NTC)

The PA welcomed three new presidents:

- Dr. Jeremy Pickard, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College began on July 1. Dr. Pickard served as vice chancellor of academic affairs at Eastern Iowa Community Colleges. His mentor will be President Chris Matheny, Fox Valley Technical College.
- Dr. Veronique Tran, Gateway Technical College, began on July 1. Dr. Tran served as the founding vice provost of the School of Manufacturing & Industrial Technology at Dallas College. Her mentor will be President Sunem Beaton-Garcia, CVTC.
- On August 1, Dr. Kirk Bennett, Western Technical College, will join the WTCS team. Bennett currently serves as the vice president of administrative services at Lone Star College-Montgomery in Conroe, Texas where he is the institution's chief financial, administrative and compliance officer. His mentor will be President Bonnie Baerwald, Moraine Park Technical College.

The PA, in collaboration with System President Merrifield, DBA Executive Director Pat Goss and senior leaders from each technical college, participated in a strategic planning and visioning session on June 4-5 at NTC in Wausau. The session was facilitated by Dr. Andrea Henderson, former executive director of both Arkansas Community Colleges and the Oregon Association of Community Colleges. Using a foresight-based scenario planning approach, Dr. Henderson guided participants in developing a long-term vision for WTCS, exploring the System's future identity and identifying potential high-impact strategic initiatives for the next 10 to 15 years.

Following the session, the PA Executive Committee identified three priority focus areas for the near term:

- Legislative advocacy
- Strategic marketing and communications
- Operational efficiency, including opportunities for shared programs and services

Participants noted the planning session provided an important opportunity to think strategically about the future and ensure WTCS remains a strong, innovative and collaborative higher education partner for the state.

Future-Focused Initiatives:

- As planning begins for the next biennial budget cycle, President John Will of Northwood Technical College is representing the PA on the WTCS Board's budget workgroup.
- To continue the collaborative efforts focused on addressing financial challenges and opportunities across the System, the next Financial Summit is scheduled for October at NTC. Appreciation was extended to President Raney and President

Barnhouse for their leadership in establishing the summit and fostering continued strategic collaboration among the colleges.

The PA expressed its appreciation to President Roger Stanford for his leadership at Western Technical College and throughout WTCS. The Association recognized his significant contributions and lasting impact on students, colleges and communities across the state and wished him well in his retirement.

ITEM F: Board Policy Manual Updates

WTCS Policy Advisor Brandon Trujillo provided an overview of the WTCS Board Policy Manual updates to take place over the next six Board meetings. The Board will undertake a comprehensive review of its policies and consider updates as needed to ensure they remain relevant, effective and aligned with the System's priorities.

ITEM G: WTCS 2026 Employer Satisfaction Report

WTCS Director of Strategic Advancement Katy Pettersen provided the Board with an update on the [2026 Employer Satisfaction Report](#). A few highlights include:

- 97% of employers are satisfied with WTCS graduates' education.
- 96% would hire a WTCS graduate again.
- 92% would recommend a WTCS graduate to another employer.
- 97% said a technical college was important to the overall success of their business.
- 9 out of 10 employers said our graduates met or exceeded expectations.

ITEM H: Election of Officers

WTCS Executive Vice President Paul Hammer oversaw the election of officers.

Mr. Hammer called for nominations. **Board Member Pechacek nominated Sara Rogers for president, Lindsay Blumer for vice president and Dan Klecker for secretary and moved that a unanimous ballot be cast to elect these individuals as officers of the Board for 2026-27. Motion carried.**

Mr. Hammer declared a full slate as no other nominations were received.

System President Merrifield thanked the officers for their service to the System.

System President Merrifield introduced President Veronique Tran, who started on July 1 at Gateway Technical College.

It was moved by Board Member Huntley-Cooper, seconded by Board Member Nixon, to recess the meeting until Wednesday, July 15, 2026. The Board adjourned at 5:42 pm. Motion carried.

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Members Present: Lindsay Blumer, Terry Craney, Eli Guthrie, Frances Huntley-Cooper, Dan Klecker, Timothy Nixon, Amy Pechacek, Josh Robinson for Jill Underly, Sara Rogers, Michael Rosen, Leslie Svacina.

Members Absent: Daniel Sperberg.

System Office Staff Present: Sarah Arneson, Hilary Barker, Diana Borchert, Chevon Bowen, Kirston Buczak, Victoria Chung, Rachel Colla, Danielle Cook, Julie Drake, Paul Hammer, Mandy Johnson, Tou Ya Khang, Christina Lorge, Chris Martin, Colleen McCabe, Layla Merrifield, Carolann Nelson, Jeremy Nichols, Cristina Parente, Katy Pettersen, Anna Richter, Dan Scanlon, Chrystal Seeley-Schreck, Brent Simmons, Lenard Simpson, Latisha Spence-Brookens, Becky Stewart, Megan Stritchko, Brandon Trujillo, Julie Tyznik, JP Villavicencio, Ann Westrich.

District/Others Present: Katherine Lange, Jim Nemeth, Tracy Pierner, Blackhawk Technical College; Sunem Beaton-Garcia, Chippewa Valley Technical College; Chris Matheny, Fox Valley Technical College; Veronique Tran, Gateway Technical College; Paul Carlsen, Lakeshore Technical College; Jennifer Berne, Sylvia Ramirez, Madison Area Technical College; Shelly Mondeik, Mid-State Technical College; Tony Cruz, Milwaukee Area Technical College; Bonnie Baerwald, Moraine Park Technical College; Kate Ferrel, Nicolet Area Technical College; Jeannie Worden, Northcentral Technical College; Kristen Raney, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College; John Will, Northwood Technical College; Jeremy Pickard, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College; Rich Barnhouse, Waukesha County Technical College; Adam Conway, Tracy Dryden, Josh Gamer, Wade Hackbarth, Rebecca Hopkins, Jessica Pintz, Roger Stanford, Western Technical College; Tonya Kristiansen, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Bureau of Working Families; Pat Goss, Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association.

Board President Rogers called the meeting to order at 9:30 am. Julie Drake read the open meeting statement and roll call indicated that a quorum was present.

ITEM I: Teaching and Learning – Program & Course Redesign

WTCS Provost and Vice President Dr. Colleen McCabe and Western Technical College Vice President of Learning Dr. Rebecca Hopkins and M.S. Dean of Academic Excellence & Human Services Nicole Cooksey introduced the Board to the use of shortened academic terms as a strategy to improve student success, completion and workforce alignment. Evidence from national and Wisconsin institutions show these models increase momentum, credit attainment and equity in outcomes. Additionally, Western shared the foundational components of the instruction design that drove their large-scale shortened terms initiative, the collaborative processes implemented, emerging results and future thinking.

Board President Rogers left the meeting at 10:50 am. Board Vice President Blumer presided over the remainder of the meeting.

ITEM J: Facilities Approval Process

WTCS Director of Facilities Development Dan Scanlon provided an overview of the facilities approval process.

Board Member Craney left the meeting at 11:16 am.

ITEM K: Consent Agenda

It was moved by Board Member Klecker, seconded by Board Member Nixon, that the Board approves the program and facilities development requests and interim district board appointments as presented. Motion carried.

ITEM L: State and Federal Perkins and AEFLA Grant Guidelines

WTCS Grants Manager Tou Ya Khang provided an overview of the guidelines for the distribution of funds made available through the state of Wisconsin and Federal Perkins grant appropriations.

It was moved by Board Member Pechacek, seconded by Board Member Guthrie, to adopt the funding categories for the State of Wisconsin and Perkins V Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century grant programs for fiscal years 2027-28. Motion carried.

ITEM M: 2027-29 Student Financial Aid Request to the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB)

WTCS Policy Advisor Brandon Trujillo provided the Board with an overview of the 2027-29 biennial budget requests for need-based financial aid and the Wisconsin GI Bill, which must be submitted to the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB). Wisconsin Grants (WG), the state's largest need-based financial aid program, provides students with the necessary assistance to pursue a higher education credential with the objective of entering or improving their career in the workforce.

The Wisconsin GI Bill provides eligible veterans and their dependents with full tuition and fee remission at Wisconsin technical colleges and UW campuses, but state reimbursement funding has remained unchanged since 2005 and covers only a small portion of colleges' actual costs. As colleges absorb the funding shortfall, critical services for veterans and other students are at risk, highlighting the need to fully fund the program through a sum-sufficient appropriation.

The recommended request for WG is for \$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, and to establish a formula to annually adjust the WTCS allocation based on changes in the cost of attendance.

The recommended request for the Wisconsin GI Bill is to amend the state funding appropriation to sum sufficient; the State would be making WTCS colleges whole regardless of growth in recipients of this aid.

It was moved by Board Member Rosen, seconded by Board Member Klecker, that the Board approves the submission of the WTCS request for financial aid to the Higher Educational Aids Board. Motion carried.

ITEM N: Legislative Update

WTCS Executive Vice President Paul Hammer, joined by WTCS Policy Advisor Brandon Trujillo, provided an overview of state legislative items affecting the System.

WTCS Policy Advisor Megan Stritchko shared federal updates affecting the System.

ITEM O: Announcements/Adjourn

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board will be held September 1-2, 2026, at Milwaukee Area Technical College downtown Milwaukee.

It was moved by Board Member Huntley-Cooper, seconded by Board Member Guthrie, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:57 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Drake