

From the Desk of Senator Luther Olsen

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Trivia

Question:
 How many UW schools have enrollments over 10,000 undergraduate students?

1. 2
2. 3
3. 4
4. 5

Check your answer below!

Legislative Update

I hope you enjoy this legislative update. Read on for the next in my series of articles about the Legislative Council study committees plus information on a school I visited this week and information on the state's fruit harvest. Enjoy!

Wisconsin Technical College System

One of the Joint Legislative Council Study Committees that is meeting this summer is looking at the funding and governance of the Wisconsin Technical College System. How the system is funded and its governance structure have long been the subject of debate in Wisconsin, and I'm glad this study committee is meeting to take a close and methodical look at the issue.

Specifically, this committee is directed to "review the current governance model of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) in the interest of transferring governance responsibilities of local district boards to the state WTCS Board and examine the current funding model for the WTCS with a preference toward reassigning current local property tax revenue to a broader state tax source."

The committee met at the end of July and heard from The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, the Wisconsin Realtors Association, the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce, the WTCS, WEAC and Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce. The committee also received information from Legislative Council attorney on the history, funding and governance of the WTCS.

Wisconsin was the first state in the nation, in 1911, to establish a system of state support for industrial education. As defined in statute, the WTCS has two main purposes. First, to provide

Website of the Week

It's time for the fair. The Wisconsin State Fair runs through Sunday, August 10. Learn more on their [website](#).

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occupational education and training and retraining programs that enable residents to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment at a technical, paraprofessional, skilled, or semiskilled occupation. This includes general education courses to facilitate student achievement in occupational skills training. Second, to provide customized training and technical assistance to business and industry in order to foster economic development and the expansion of employment opportunities.

The WTCS is governed by a board made up of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the President of the UW System, the Secretary of the Department of Workforce Development, one employer, one employee who does not have hiring or firing authority, one farmer and one student. There are also an additional six public members.

Each technical college is also governed by its own board comprised of two employers, two employees, one school district administrator, one state or local elected official and three additional members.

Technical colleges are funded through a mix of state aid, property taxes, federal aid and student tuition and fees. There were a number of changes made to the funding mechanism during the last state budget. In addition to that, a portion of the state surplus (\$406 million) was directed to the WTCS in the last session, reducing the system's dependence on property taxes in 2014-15.

One of the concerns that has been raised over the years has been the system's reliance on property taxes for revenue and how that contributes to the state's property tax burden. The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance shared information with the committee about Wisconsin's tax system compared to other states and cautioned that changes to how one tax is used, like the property tax, need to be considered as a part of the state's overall tax system. The Wisconsin Realtors Association also voiced concern about property taxes and the impact the tax burden has on individuals and businesses in the state.

The Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce spoke more to the issue of governance than funding mechanism. They explained that the local decision-making authority of the technical college boards around the state allows them to be responsive to employers in their area and tailor training programs to meet specific needs. Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce also spoke about the need to keep the technical college system focused on local economic development needs.

You can follow the work of this committee, and others, by visiting the Joint Legislative Council [website](#).

A School With A Great Name

On Monday, I had the opportunity to visit Crossroads Alternative School, a Fort Atkinson school housed in an elementary school with an outstanding name: Luther School!

In addition to the jokes that I could become the school's mascot, I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with folks from Crossroads Alternative School.

Although it's July, I met with students and school staff. The alternative school operates on an alternative schedule, with classes in the summer. That one on one time gave the students and staff a chance to explain why their program works, how their curriculum is being used in other parts of the state and what they need from the state government to succeed.

Crossroads Alternative Education Program serves high school students who are credit deficient and not able to achieve academic success in the general high school environment. They have both regular and special education students. Student can earn their high school diploma by going through a series of academic competencies and demonstrating mastery of each of these competencies.

As I've said before, we can be proud in Wisconsin of the diversity of educational options for our students and alternative schools play an important role.

You can learn more about alternative education at DPI's [website](#).



Good News From Fruit Farmers

Data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that Wisconsin remains the number one cranberry producer in the country. According to the USDA, Wisconsin cranberry growers harvested 6.02 million barrels of cranberries in 2013. This new record represents a 25 percent from the previous year. Wisconsin produced two-thirds of the nation's cranberry supply last year.

2012 was not a great year for the state's cherry and apple growers, but they were able to rebound in 2013. The USDA reported that Wisconsin now ranks number four in the nation in tart cherry production. Ninety-six percent of the state's crop went to processing. The state's apple crop recovered with an 18 million pound increase in 2013, compared to 2012. Eighty-nine percent of the state's apple crop were sold as fresh market

apples.

If you like what you read here, please share it with a friend. If you are interested in information on other topics, let me know. I look forward to hearing from you on the issues that matter to you!

Sincerely,

Senator Luther Olsen
Wisconsin State Senate

Contact me via mail at P.O. Box 7882, Madison WI 53707, e-mail me at sen.olsen@legis.wi.gov or call my office toll-free at 800-991-5541. I want to hear from you!



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Trivia Answer: 3. Four UW campuses have undergraduate enrollments over 10,000: Madison, Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Oshkosh and Whitewater.

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