



THOMAS WEATHERSTON

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 62ND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

April 15, 2015

Dear Business and Manufacturing Leaders,

As business professionals, you know the value of a well-trained workforce. It's an essential building block of any going concern.

For years, business forecasters have predicted that a good portion of job growth will come in the area of middle-skill jobs - those jobs that require additional training beyond high school but less than a four-year degree.

In Wisconsin we're met with several challenges in meeting the needs of both students and employers to create a middle-skill workforce. Among these challenges are a lack of sufficient technical educational opportunities at the high school level in some areas of the state, unwillingness on the part of some K-12 school districts to partner with local technical colleges, and student debt load accumulated over the period spent in the higher education pipeline.

Rightly or wrongly, technical training opportunities have been pared back over the past several decades by K-12 school districts facing tight budgets. Coupled with parents emphasizing four-year college degrees to their children as the only means to a good paying job, cutting back on technical education has been a politically painless choice for many school boards.

Some K-12 districts are fantastic at partnering with local technical colleges and businesses to meet the educational and career goals of their students. Some aren't. Often times, those that aren't trap students interested in a technical career in the middle of an irrational turf war with technical colleges.

Student debt load has grown in part due to the steep increases in the cost of higher education. One way to reduce debt load is to shorten the higher education pipeline by getting students through their training over a shorter time period.

In order to meet these challenges I've introduced a bill that allows each technical district board to authorize independent charter high schools focused on occupational education and training or science, technology, engineering, and math.

This legislation has the potential to put technical education in the hands of the experts and provide expanded opportunities to students interested in technical careers. Additionally, it could be used as a tool to provide incentive to K-12 districts to enter into new partnerships with



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local technical colleges and businesses. Finally, it could shorten the educational pipeline and ease the debt load for students. Students who attended a technical college charter high school could be required to receive one additional year, instead of two years, of technical college training beyond the high school level to earn their Associate degree if the program is designed that way.

I'm also writing legislation that would require school districts to notify parents of graduating eighth grade students about the technical training opportunities or agreements that are in place for high school students to participate in. If there are none, the district must state that and refer the parents to the nearest technical college.

I hope you will take time to discuss these ideas with your colleagues at your next opportunity. If you agree that these ideas could be helpful to parents, students, and employers, then take a moment to contact me and your legislators to urge them to support these measures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas R. Weatherston". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Thomas Weatherston
State Representative
62nd Assembly District