



State Senator Rick Gudex

District 18

January 19, 2016

To: The Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges
From: Sen. Rick Gudex
Re: Senate Bill 476

Last session the Legislature passed 2013 Act 60 with enormous bipartisan majorities. Act 60 created a Technical Education scholarship (TES) that mirrors the existing Higher Education scholarship, which offers scholarships of \$2,250 a year to students at the top of their graduating classes. The TES likewise offers scholarships of \$2,250 to students who excel at technical education, for use in the Wisconsin Technical College System.

We did this for two reasons. One, technical skills are becoming both more important in our economy, and more scarce. Two, while more traditional routes of education are valuable and important, there are other roads to success than a Bachelor's of Arts or a Bachelor's of Science. Our technical schools provide a wide range of training in practical skills that will benefit both the student and the state, and we want to promote this as much as we can.

In its first year, the TES was tremendously popular. School districts nominated 614 students for the scholarships, out of 875 potentially available. This number will only get better as more districts find ways to take advantage of the program.

As with any new program, we have found a few ways to make this one run and work better. At the request of HEAB, we are introducing LRB 3692, which will make the following changes to student eligibility. Under the bill:

- a student must be enrolled for at least 6 credits (reduced from 12);
- a technical school must certify the student's progress toward a degree or diploma;
- a student must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA (down from 3.0).

Most importantly, the bill clarifies that a student who loses eligibility can regain it in the subsequent school year by meeting the above criteria.

These changes may appear to be "dumbing down" the scholarship compared to the Higher Ed scholarship. However, HEAB and WTCS have noted that the non-traditional nature of technical education means the same criteria will not always apply to students in technical vs. traditional academic education. These changes will allow the scholarship to better reflect and adapt to the non-traditional nature of technical education and, sometimes, its students.



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Scott Walker
Governor

John Reinemann
Executive Secretary

TO: Members, Senate Committee on Universities and Technical Colleges
FROM: John Reinemann, HEAB Executive Secretary
RE: Senate Bill 476, Eligibility for the Technical Excellence Scholarship (TES) Program
DATE: January 19, 2016

Your committee is holding a public hearing on SB 476. I write today to express support for SB 476 and to ask your support for this legislation.

SB 476 would amend part of current law regarding the Wisconsin Technical Excellence Scholarship Program or TES. As you know, TES was created by 2013 Wisconsin Act 60 (2013 Senate Bill 334).

As you know, the TES program is in its first year; students graduating this past spring of 2015 are now arriving at technical college campuses around the state and beginning to use their TES awards to pay for a technical education. http://heab.wisconsin.gov/technicalexcellence/hard_copy.html

The program has been tremendously popular. The TES formula allows 875 scholarships to be offered each year; in this first year of the program HEAB received nominations for 614 of these awards. The great majority of high schools able to offer a TES scholarship to their students, chose to nominate a student. We anticipate even higher participation in subsequent years, as word of the program circulates.

In September 2015 I met with the financial-aid directors from the state's sixteen WTCS technical colleges. (I meet with financial-aid directors periodically to discuss programs and services in which we are involved.) With the program now underway, the financial-aid staff of the WTCS schools have expressed two concerns to me about TES. SB 476 was introduced to address these concerns.

The two concerns are as follow:

1. Act 60 requires that a TES student maintain a grade point of 3.0 in order to retain the TES scholarship. I heard from several financial-aid professionals who are concerned that this requirement may be too high, and may result in students losing their TES scholarships.

As you know, technical education is not traditional classroom study; students who seek out and do well in technical fields, may not always be students who excel at traditional classroom study. (Certainly some

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will, of course, but financial-aid professional at the colleges assure me that some will not.) Grade point is an important measure of academic progress, but many who work with TES students feel that a GPA requirement of 3.0 may not accurately reflect likely performance by students in their FIRST SEMESTERS at technical school.

Act 60 makes no allowance for re-instatement of a student who has lost the TES scholarship due to a failure to meet the required grade point; as a result, once a TES scholarship is lost under current law (due to low grades), it is lost forever.

The US Department of Education (like HEAB) imposes a requirement that students who receive financial aid make "satisfactory academic progress" or SAP in their educations. The grade point required for SAP is 2.0.

After discussing the TES program with financial aid officials and others, HEAB asks that the legislature amend the laws governing the TES program to allow students to retain their TES scholarships as long as they have a grade point of 2.0.

SB 476 would amend the grade point requirement to retain a TES scholarship, to the federal level for "Satisfactory Academic Performance" or SAP. That level, as noted, is a GPA of 2.0 rather than the 3.0 specified in 2013 Act 60.

2. Act 60 required that students receiving a TES scholarship be enrolled full-time at a WTCS school. (Full-time enrollment for financial aid purposed is 12 credits per semester.) As the TES program was publicized, financial aid professionals began to note that for some students, full-time enrollment at a WTCS school would not always be possible.

- Some of the most-popular WTCS programs (such as nursing), waitlists for course slots play a role in dictating in which courses a student may enroll.

- In addition, some students arrive at a WTCS campus with credits earned during their high-school years, which often means that they already have some of the credits often earned by new students at a WTCS campus.

In these cases, there are may be reasons why a TES scholarship winner would find that there isn't enough classroom space (or the course offerings tailored to their circumstances) to allow them to enroll immediately and at a full-time level in courses that will advance their educations in a timely manner. Such students would lose their TES scholarships through no fault of their own.

HEAB has asked the WTCS schools to let us know exactly what percentage of this first year's TES recipients will face problems meeting the requirement that they must enroll full-time. The WTCS financial aid officials at last weeks' meeting assure HEAB that the proportion is significant.

In our discussions with WTCS financial aid professionals, it appears that most or all TES students should be able (as a matter of available space and course offerings) to enroll with at least 6 credits per semester (half-time) in most semesters as they pursue their technical educations.

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HEAB is therefore requesting that the legislature amend the laws governing the TES program on the matter of full-time enrollment.

HEAB would like to ask that the requirement be changed to allow HEAB to disperse the TES scholarship to recipients in their first semester of enrollment at a WTCS school, to students enrolled for at least 6 credits per semester; and to allow HEAB to disperse subsequent semesters of the scholarship to students enrolled for at least 6 credits per semester as long as the WTCS school the student attends, certifies that the student is making "satisfactory academic progress" or SAP, a function which the schools now perform under current law.

SB 476 also makes an adjustment to one other provision in the TES program. Currently, if a student satisfies the requirements of the TES program for a year, the bill provides that the student is eligible for the scholarship in the subsequent year. However, if the student does not enroll in a school in the subsequent year, he or she is eligible in the semester immediately following the subsequent year.

This change shortens the timeline for eligibility after an absence, by one semester. As you see in the bill, the current language states that if the scholar does not enroll in a participating district school in the subsequent year, the student would be eligible "in the 2nd year following the year in which the scholar received the scholarship." SB 476 would reduce that to be "the semester immediately following the subsequent year."

As you know, the TES program allows students to receive their scholarships for six semesters or three years; the amount of the award is \$2,250 annually. (Half is paid by the state through HEAB and half is provided by the WTCS schools the students attend.)

HEAB is NOT asking that the program be changed to adjust the limits to student eligibility for the award; we ask that eligibility remain limited to six semesters or three years. This will prevent administrative issues with proration.

Please let me know of any questions or concerns you have.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.