# Issue

The advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is shifting the skills needed in Wisconsin’s economy. As educators and developers of Wisconsin’s skilled workforce, technical colleges must be on the forefront of AI adoption and integration. Investment in professional development is needed to ensure that Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) educators have the knowledge and skills to keep pace with AI concepts, tools and applications.

# Background

AI technologies are rapidly and profoundly reshaping the skills that employers demand to sustain a thriving Wisconsin economy. As generators of the skilled talent pipeline in Wisconsin, WTCS colleges are critical in preparing the workforce for the changing technological landscape. To best prepare students for the evolving workplace, WTCS instructors, support staff and leaders must increase their own capacity and knowledge of AI concepts, tools and applications to effectively incorporate these tools in ways that meet the needs of their students and the local community.

Current AI technologies represent opportunities for WTCS faculty to gain efficiency in their work and explore teaching strategies that engage and support students. Some WTCS faculty are already incorporating AI tools to generate ideas for lesson plans, quiz questions, and class activities and assignments. For example, faculty can use AI tools to create roleplaying examples for students to practice problem solving scenarios they are likely to face in the workplace and to write dozens of quiz questions on a particular topic area and pick the questions they find will best assess their students. AI allows faculty to save time as they are generating these ideas and to work iteratively with AI tools to refine their instructional techniques in fractions of the time. For students, AI tools provide opportunities for individually tailored learning through question-and-answer prompts, quiz and flash card generation, tutorials, and the creation of goals and checklists. Some new learning software is embedding AI tools in ways that can help faculty manage grades and content and include interactive ways for students to engage with materials, such as questions embedded within assigned reading. WTCS faculty and staff not only need to have the knowledge and skills to use these AI tools themselves, they also need to be knowledgeable on how to guide and educate their students to use these tools.

While AI tools can add significant value to instruction techniques and student learning, they are also essential for ensuring curriculum remains industry aligned. As employer demand for
AI-related skills and adoption of AI technologies across a wide range of industries continues to grow, WTCS instructors will align their curriculum with evolving industry practices to best prepare students to be work-ready upon completion. As examples, the culinary industry can use AI to generate menus, modify recipes, manage inventory and tailor marketing; industrial maintenance, automation, CNC and welding can use AI for predictive maintenance; and healthcare can use AI in patient messaging, administrative tasks and analysis. For students to be ready for these tools in the workplace, they must become familiar with AI tools and techniques within the classroom. WTCS faculty and staff must be knowledgeable not only of the education-related AI tools and techniques, but also of the industry-specific AI trends. The pace at which the AI landscape is changing across industries will require continuous learning opportunities for faculty and staff to ensure their knowledge of industry remains up-to-date and relevant.

Importantly, as WTCS faculty and staff adopt AI technologies to support educational outcomes and workforce preparation, WTCS institutions must also be prepared to address the ethical considerations of AI to ensure they are responsible users of AI and are preparing students to be responsible users of AI within the classroom and workplace. To this end, WTCS faculty and staff must be prepared to account for and educate students on the limitations and risks associated with AI. For example, a student that is using AI tools to generate marketing ideas must also be aware of potential legal and copyright risks that may arise, depending upon the source of the content. Given these nuances surrounding AI technologies, WTCS faculty and staff need specialized training to foster ethical awareness and critical thinking among students.

Beyond the classroom, AI technologies present opportunities across functional areas, including student services, accounting and grant management, human resources, information technology, library services, enrollment and recruitment. AI presents opportunities to streamline operations, improve efficiency and increase opportunities for data-driven decision-making. For example, technical colleges can use Chatbot options to provide personalized assistance to students by answering questions and connecting them to resources; predictive analytics can evaluate student risk factors and inform student interventions; and data analysis can inform faculty professional development. Given the wide-ranging implications and uses of AI, college leadership’s understanding of AI tools and concepts is crucial for policy development, administration and evaluation. Foundational knowledge of AI allows leaders to better anticipate the impact of AI across areas and find an appropriate balance between innovation and safeguarding ethical, privacy and security considerations.

AI technologies are complex, nuanced and rapidly advancing. WTCS faculty and staff need ongoing professional development to stay current with evolving technology; keep pace with industry trends; learn effective, specialized pedagogical strategies to convey complex AI concepts and ethical considerations in an accessible manner; and operationalize the use of AI at the institutional level. Without dedicated funding to support professional development and tools at the technical colleges, students may adopt outdated or inaccurate information and have limited understanding of AI concepts. Dedicated foundational investment is needed in WTCS colleges to support professional development and tools for faculty, staff and leaders and ensure they are knowledgeable and prepared to incorporate AI within the classroom and beyond.

# Request

**$5 million GPR in 2025-26 and $5 million GPR in 2026-27 in s. 20.292(1)(f) to provide funding for professional development and tools to support technical colleges in their adoption of artificial intelligence.**