



## Memorandum

**To:** Michael Best Clients

**From:** Michael Best

**Date:** October 8th, 2025

**Subject:** Meet the State Leader with Wisconsin Technical College President Layla Merrifield

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### About President Merrifield (*Verbatim from WTCS website*):

Layla Merrifield was appointed president of the Wisconsin Technical College System in September 2024. Prior to her current role, Layla was the executive director of the Wisconsin Technical College District Boards Association, an organization representing the trustees of the 16 Wisconsin technical colleges' district boards, since 2015. Prior to that she served as a fiscal analyst for the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau then a Wisconsin Technical College System policy advisor.

Layla has an extensive background in System-wide leadership and advocacy, and intimate knowledge of local colleges' operations, student success goals and challenges. Having served in a System-wide leadership role for the past nine years, she is well-practiced in maintaining consistent communication between and among various stakeholder groups.

Layla has a bachelor's degree in politics from Hendrix College and is pursuing a Master of Education degree.

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The "Meet the State Leader" event, moderated by Pat Goss of Michael Best Strategies, served as a platform for clients and guests to engage directly with members of Governor Tony Evers' leadership team. The featured special guest was President Layla Merrifield of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WCTS), who shared insights into the importance of partnership and addressed areas of growth within the system.

President Merrifield provided a comprehensive overview of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WCTS), highlighting its expansive network of over 50 campuses designed to meet regional economic needs. As Wisconsin's largest higher education system, WCTS serves nearly 300,000 students annually and plays a central role in workforce development by partnering with employers, chambers of commerce, and K-12 districts.

The system offers more than 500 programs, each guided by employer advisory committees to ensure curriculum relevance. These programs are regionally specialized, with examples such as marine welding on Green Bay, industrial sawmill training in Antigo, nursing apprenticeships in Madison, midwifery in Southwest Wisconsin, and funeral services education in Milwaukee. Programs are regularly updated or phased out based on labor market data and employer feedback.



WTCS is an open-access institution, welcoming students from all academic backgrounds. The average student is 31 years old, and a significant portion are parents. Most students attend part-time and benefit from robust services, including childcare, transportation, emergency financial aid, and mental health resources. WTCS also serves special populations such as veterans, incarcerated individuals, and immigrants, offering tuition-free education for many community service roles.

The system partners with over 4,000 employers to provide customized training, and employer satisfaction is high—93% of graduates are employed within six months, and 94-95% report satisfaction with their education. Some colleges even feature commencement speakers sponsored by CEOs eager to recruit graduates.

WTCS is also the state's leading provider of dual credit opportunities, serving 63,000 high school students annually across 450 schools and saving families \$44 million in tuition. Dual credit academies, such as those focused on STEM and fire services, help address volunteer shortages and introduce students to technical careers early.

Financially, WTCS operates on a \$1.3 billion annual budget funded by tuition, state revenues, and property taxes. Tuition averages \$5,000 per year for full-time students, with additional costs depending on the program. Employer partnerships are critical for maintaining cutting-edge labs and providing scholarships and equipment.

WTCS is also integrating artificial intelligence into its curriculum, particularly in manufacturing, with early adoption in Waukesha County now expanding to other colleges. To address workflow shortages, WTCS collaborates with industry associations to expand programs like dental hygiene and launch new initiatives such as a dental therapist program in Wausau. Programs are prioritized based on employer demand, labor market trends, and community needs.

President Merrifield concluded by emphasizing the importance of continued collaboration with industry partners to ensure WTCS remains responsive, innovative, and essential to Wisconsin's economic future.