

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Executive Committee

From: David Barber, Chief Administration Officer

Meeting Date: 03/15/2023

Re: Resolution from recommendations Washington County Higher Education Task Force

POLICY QUESTION:

Over the last fifteen years the UWM at Washington County(UWM-WC) Campus has suffered devastating enrollment declines. While Moraine Park Technical College(MPTC) Campus has seen significant enrollment declines during the same time. Should the county pursue creating a pilot community college that would combine MPTC and UWM-WC under the governance of MPTC?

STRATEGIC PRIORITY/RESULT ACHIEVED:

Economic growth and Vitality

Well Governed and Administered County

DISCUSSION:

Recently the UW System shutdown Richland Center's two-year college program and collapsed the college into UW-Platteville. This was done with no warning or conversations with local leaders. With UWM-WC suffering enrollment declines, the county would like to have control over the future of higher education in Washington County. After eight weeks of meetings, research, and tours of the facilities by local educators, business leaders and county officials it was determined that a new combined UWM-WC and MPTC was the best way forward.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Hard to determine at this time, but we are asking for one time state funding of \$30 million to create an endowment facilitated by a foundation.

ATTACHMENTS:

Draft Resolution

RECOMMENDATION:

Motion to approve the resolution and move forward with a new pilot program.

**Submit this form in WORD format to CLKagenda_dg@co.washington.wi.us
ONE CALENDAR WEEK PLUS 3 WORK DAYS prior to the Committee meeting
WITH the Committee Agenda Preparation Form.**

Rev. 4/2019

WASHINGTON COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Date of enactment: _____

Date of publication: _____

2023 RESOLUTION ____

Advisory Resolution Supporting the Concept of Creating a Pilot Community College System

WHEREAS, in the last 15 years, demographic trends impacted both UWM at Washington County leaving devastating enrollment declines; and Moraine Park Technical College (MPTC) with significant enrollment decreases; MPTC is still sustaining strong programming with fiscal responsibility, despite these challenges; and

WHEREAS, the Washington County Higher Education Task Force (the “Task Force”), comprised of leaders from industry, K-12 districts, higher education, government and elected officials, was convened by the Washington County Executive to evaluate and provide recommendations for sustainable higher education in Washington County; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force conducted eight due diligence sessions to examine higher education in Washington County from the perspective of:

- Current and future state
- K-12 programs in collaboration with institutions of higher learning
- Financial structure and sustainability
- Current needs of industry and employers in Washington County
- Voice of the student
- What other states are doing in two-year college education; and

WHEREAS, representatives of the higher education institutions in the county, along with Task Force members, provided significant data that was examined by the Task Force; and

WHEREAS, an examination of models and trends of two-year campuses across the country was conducted; and

WHEREAS, both UWM at Washington County and Moraine Park Technical College now offer competing two-year liberal arts associate degrees; and

WHEREAS, UWM at Washington County and its students are supported by scholarships from the Washington County Foundation (the “Foundation”); and

WHEREAS, the Wisconsin Technical college System has five long-standing dual track community college concepts – Nicolet College in Rhinelander; Madison Area Technical College in Madison (branded as Madison College); Milwaukee Area Technical College in Milwaukee; Western Technical College in La Crosse; and Chippewa Valley Technical College in Eau Claire serving as precedents for a similar community college concepts in Washington County; and

WHEREAS, the investigation of the Task Force revealed that Washington County needs a new model for higher education that serves all relevant stakeholders and is a magnet to keep young residents in the community and this model must include the following characteristics:

- Affordable – Incredible value – Offering high ROI to students
- Accessible in-person and on-line
- Customizable to each student
- Strong K-12 partnerships
- Responsive to employer needs
- Unmatched direct pipelines to Washington County communities
- Gateway for further education; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force has determined that to ensure a sustainable higher education system in Washington County, it is in the best interest of the students, residents, employers, school districts, taxpayers and both higher education institutions in the county to combine the resources from UWM at Washington County and the Moraine Park Technical College West Bend campus to create a community college concept in West Bend under the governance of Moraine Park Technical College; and

WHEREAS, the Washington County Higher Education Task Force recommends the creation of a pilot community college concept combining the resources of UWM at Washington County and Moraine Park Technical College to be implemented via legislative and policy actions, creating a post high school educational model with the following assets, services and educational offerings:

- Dual credit access in participation with area school districts
- Open enrollment for all citizens of Washington County.
- Solid financials derived from tuition, GPR, referendum-approved bonding, property tax support and Foundation scholarships
- Connectedness to the community, four-year institutions, school districts, employers and their apprenticeships and internships
- Stackable and easily transferable credits
- Hybrid curriculum, stressing face-to-face based instruction, buttressed by on-line classes
- Intense individualized guidance for each student and counseling
- Foundation support for Washington County juniors and seniors
- Local administration and aggressive recruiting
- Powerful marketing efforts and resources
- Potential athletic teams and increased student activities pending funding and viability studies.
- Café and student union space
- Student government
- First generation student support
- Low-cost tuition as a differential
- 2+2 articulation agreements with regional universities, with locally taught classes, where applicable

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Washington County Board of Supervisors adopts the recommendations of the Washington County Higher Education Task Force and requests one-time state funding of \$30 million be granted to Washington County, by legislation, to create an endowment which must be used to:

- Lower student debt and provide tuition assistance

- Fund the startup, including athletics and student activities
- Fund comprehensive branding and awareness of the community college concept
- Support capital improvements as approved by the appropriate governing body

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a local support board chaired by the Washington County Executive or his or her appointee, with remaining board members appointed by the Washington County Executive and confirmed by the Washington County Board of Supervisors, shall be created to manage the endowment, and to support and advise Washington County in distributing funding in support of the community college concept.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Washington County, as it has for over 50 years with the University of Wisconsin System, will foster a partnership with MPTC West Bend Campus to support future facilities and needs of the community college concept as identified by the community and employers, and as approved by the Washington County Board of Supervisors and as approved, owned, and operated by MPTC.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution shall be sent to Governor Tony Evers, members of the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate and the Wisconsin Counties Association.

VOTE REQUIREMENT FOR PASSAGE: Majority

RESOLUTION SUMMARY: Advisory Resolution endorsing the concept of the creation of a pilot community college.

Approved as to form:

Introduced by members of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE as filed with the County Clerk.

Bradley S. Stern, County Attorney

Dated

Jeffrey D. Schleif, Chairperson

Approved:

Considered

Josh Schoemann, County Executive

Adopted

Dated

Ayes _____ Noes _____ Absent _____

☐ Veto

Voice Vote

☐ Partial Veto

(No fiscal impact.)

Subject:

FW: EXTERNAL:031423 WPR story: As UW System ends classes at Richland Center, other communities wonder if their 2-year campus is next

[As UW System ends classes at Richland Center, other communities wonder if their 2-year campus is next](#)
End of classes in Richland leaves students with few options, local officials seeking assurance

By Rich Kremer

Tuesday, March 14, 2023, 5:35am

County boards overseeing some two-year University of Wisconsin schools are delaying maintenance and upgrades until they get commitments that the university system won't close those campuses.

The uncertainty around local campuses comes three months after the UW System announced it would stop offering classes at UW-Platteville Richland. It's the first time the UW System has planned for instruction to cease at a campus in more than four decades.

The end of classes at Richland comes after seven years of steep enrollment declines. This semester's classes will be the last ones held there.

University administrators have stopped short of saying the campus itself is closing and say they're working with local officials to define UW-Platteville's presence in Richland Center. But the move is widely understood in the community as essentially shuttering the campus. Attempts by community members to change that have appeared to make little headway, though discussions with the UW System about what comes next for UW-Richland are ongoing.

Richland is far from the only campus that has seen enrollment declines. And in at least two other counties, leaders are debating whether to pull back on local investments into their campuses.

In Wausau, Marathon County Board Chair Kurt Gibbs took notice of the Richland announcement, as that county's campus, known as UW-Stevens Point at Wausau, has seen enrollment fall by almost 70 percent over the past decade.

"I'm not naive enough to say, 'If the enrollment falls again or continues to fall, that at some point the result of what happened at Richland Center wouldn't be the potential result at Wausau,'" Gibbs said. "But we're hoping to be able to forego that and not have that happen."

Before a merger in 2018, the campus was known as the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County. During the Great Recession, enrollment peaked at around 1,400 students. Last fall, there were about 400 enrolled. UW-Stevens Point has added new bachelor's and master's degree programs at the campus, but Gibbs said that hasn't stemmed enrollment declines. During this year's county budget cycle, he said, the Marathon County Board decided against approving parts of a \$6 million request for upgrades until it gets assurances from the UW System that the campus isn't going anywhere.

"I'm fairly confident that the board will continue (to stay committed) as long as the UW is committed to us," Gibbs said.

In the Fox Valley, two-year UW campuses in Menasha and Fond du Lac have seen similar enrollment declines. Those schools are affiliated with the four-year UW-Oshkosh campus.

During a recent Winnebago County Board meeting, Supervisor Steven Binder told his colleagues that being good stewards of taxpayer money means delaying their share of a \$4 million request for an engineering study of a proposed expansion of kitchen and dining facilities at UW-Oshkosh Fox Cities. There were 605 students enrolled at the campus owned by Winnebago and Outagamie Counties last fall. That's down from 1,600 in 2018.

Binder said that county board, too, needs a renewed commitment from the UW System.

"Neither Outagamie County nor Winnebago County want to invest money in a building if we're not guaranteed that we're going to be there for at least five years," Binder said.

Before the board pulled the funding, Fox Cities student Kiersten Lewis urged supervisors to reconsider.

"We have these young people here, and without this school, they may choose to leave, which is going to severely damage the economy and local atmosphere," Lewis said.

UW Oshkosh Chancellor Andrew Leavitt told Wisconsin Public Radio he's already let county officials know the university is in for the long term.

"I can understand that they want a commitment that we're going to be remaining on the campus through, certainly the initial life of the improvements that are made," Leavitt said. "I'm prepared to make it. I'm not quite sure in what form they want that commitment."

Heath Zumach will also finish his associate's degree at the end of the spring semester in Richland. Initially, he thought about dropping out last fall when he heard about classes ending. Now, he's thinking about taking online classes from home.

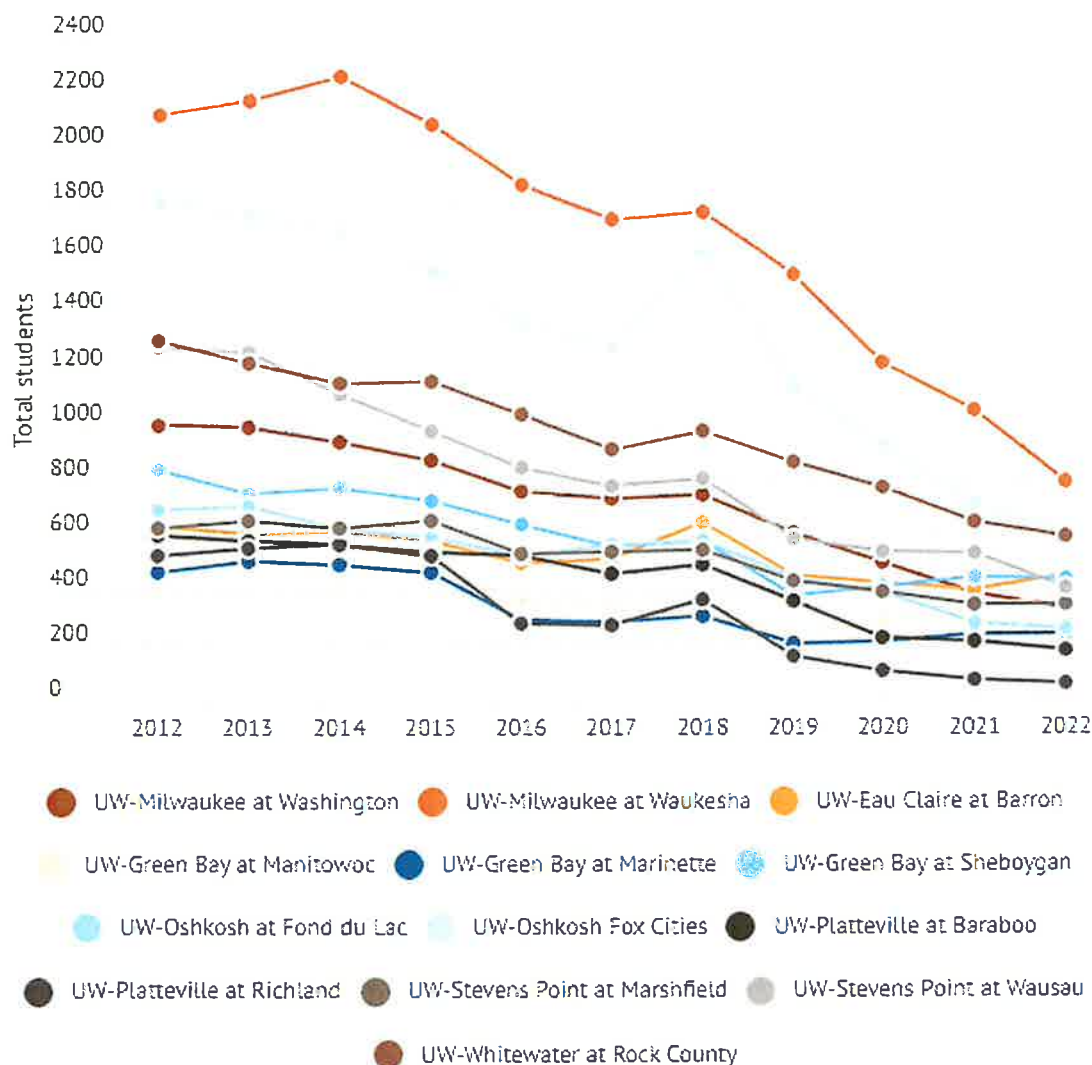
"If classes were to continue, I would come back here and do more," Zumach said. "Even if I had an associate's degree, I'd keep doing more classes and go from there."

The Richland campus once had more than 500 students. In the last weeks of classes on campus, it feels like a ghost town, with empty hallways and parking lots peppered with a handful of vehicles. On an otherwise bare corkboard in a hallway on campus, someone has pinned a local newspaper column with the headline, "Loss of campus is heartbreaking."

The colleges now referred to as branch campuses by the UW System have been around for decades and represent a unique partnership between state and local governments. Campuses and buildings are owned by counties, while instruction is provided by the UW System by way of decadeslong lease agreements.

Enrollment at the UW's two-year and four-year campuses hit a high water mark around 2010 as the Great Recession drove up the unemployment rate and more people turned to higher education for a leg up in a bad economy. The number of students has been falling ever since at most colleges and universities in the state.

Two-year campuses have seen steep enrollment declines



Share

infogram

In 2015, Republican state lawmakers and former GOP Gov. Scott Walker approved a \$250 million cut to the UW System's budget and continued a freeze on in-state undergraduate tuition increases. For UW colleges, the freeze has persisted for 14 of the past 16 years.

The funding cut, tuition freeze and revenue losses from declining enrollment presented an untenable situation for the state's two-year colleges, said former UW System President Ray Cross, who led the system from 2014 through 2020. He said there were talks about merging them with nearby technical colleges, but local boards governing those schools were not interested.

Instead, in 2018, Cross merged the colleges with the UW's four-year universities. He said one of the goals was reducing administrative costs by allowing campuses to share positions such as admissions staff and deans. Cross said he also hoped universities overseeing the campuses would be aggressive by offering new programming like four-year degree options at the former colleges. He pointed to UW-Green Bay, which has stabilized and even reversed enrollment declines at two of its former colleges, as an example. "That's the kind of vision we had hoped that would occur in other areas," Cross said. "It just hasn't happened as quickly or as successfully as I hoped."

A WPR analysis of UW System enrollment records reveals that enrollment declines have accelerated since the mergers. Between fall 2018 and fall 2022, the number of students at campuses in Richland Center, Wausau, Baraboo, Menasha, Fond du Lac, Waukesha and West Bend has fallen by 50 percent or more. Enrollment declined at most other UW schools during that time, too, but at slower rates. Nationally, two-year college enrollment fell by more than 17 percent during that timeframe. In Richland Center, many have pointed to the loss of a dedicated campus recruiter and international student program coordinator after the merger with UW-Platteville as a potential reason for why enrollment fell by 83 percent over the past five years.

Last year, the UW System Board of Regents approved eight new liberal arts associate's degree programs for technical colleges. These degrees have historically been offered by UW colleges and not by Wisconsin's technical colleges. Their approval marked a shift from recent years, when former regents and Cross worried that allowing tech schools to offer liberal arts degrees would hasten the demise of two-year UW campuses. As enrollment continues to decline, Cross thinks the Wisconsin Legislature should get involved. He said lawmakers should have a "serious conversation" about creating a unified community college system of technical and liberal arts campuses.

"Should we be like 95 percent of the rest of the states in this country and merge our technical and UW colleges?" Cross said. "Is that the best solution? And I think it is."

Yet Cross said he doubts that will happen without a concerted push by legislators and Gov. Tony Evers.

Strong feelings, contentious meetings persist in Richland Center

As some counties withhold funding for their two-year campuses, residents in Richland Center and members of the Richland County Board are making a last-ditch effort to keep classes going at UW-Richland.

In late January, emotions were high as dozens of people packed one of the campus's classrooms to pitch ideas on how to save the 55-year-old school. Marnie Dresser told the crowd she's taught there since 1992 but will retire along with in-person instruction this summer. She and others in the room accused UW-Platteville of mismanagement and diverting students an hour south to the university.

"I think there are too many strong feelings," Dresser said. "I don't see how good things can happen if this campus is still connected to that institution."

Others mentioned a recent Richland county board resolution seeking an additional \$4 million from the UW System to pay for things like a college recruiter. Some looked directly at state Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, and state Rep. Tony Kurtz, R-Wonewoc, seated in the front row. They said the two members of the state's Joint Finance Committee could surely get the money from the state's projected \$7 billion surplus. Kurtz faced the group and said he'd already mentioned it to skeptical GOP colleagues.

"So, I am being brutally honest with you," Kurtz said. "I could probably persuade a few, but I know it would be a fruitless effort. Because we would lose."

He also responded to calls by some in the audience for a blue-ribbon commission to study the future of UW-Richland. Kurtz said it should be an honest discussion about all UW colleges.

"Because if they did that, I think a lot of people would be surprised," Kurtz said. "(They could conclude), 'Well, maybe we don't need some of these two-year campuses.'"

In a statement emailed to WPR, UW System Vice President for University Relations Jeff Buhrandt said UW officials are having regular conversations with community leaders across the state about how the two-year campuses can continue serving their regions.

"In particular, we are very pleased to have local school districts and Southwest Technical College fully engaged in this process regarding Richland Center," Buhrandt said. "I believe these educational partners will play a key role in the long-term strategy for that campus."