



CASE STUDY

Local 212 FAST Fund at Milwaukee Area Technical College



Believe in Students
Empowering college student for success

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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The FAST Fund serves as a bridge. We on our own cannot solve this problem, but education can — to some degree — help move the needle on poverty, and that’s the part that higher education and our local unions can influence. So with every student we help, they will pay it forward. That’s the bridge. And I can only believe that they will in turn help someone in the same way.

LIZ FRANCYK, FAST FUND LEADER
AT MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE



It’s no surprise that educators who are given the encouragement and support necessary to take measured risks and use resources in ways that meet students’ needs also positively impact student outcomes at an institution. This has been key to the success and sustainability of the FAST Fund from the beginning, where engaged faculty and a rallying union local promote growth mindsets and directly influence campus change for students experiencing basic needs insecurity.

During the summer and fall of 2016, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab and her Wisconsin HOPE Lab research team interviewed students at the Local 212 offices at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) as part of a study exploring college student food and housing insecurity. This research underscored the ominous reality that for many MATC students, unexpected expenses such as car trouble, reductions in work hours, and/or delayed financial aid could often be the difference between attending classes and dropping out altogether.



Union Backing Brings Distinct, Powerful Influence.

This same year, Goldrick-Rab's newly formed Believe in Students invested \$5,000 at MATC to develop the initial FAST Fund model. She worked closely with Dr. Michael Rosen - who had spent 29 years as an economics professor at MATC, 17 of which were also spent as President of AFT Local 212 - to use the seed funding to provide rapid assistance to students experiencing financial emergencies at the institution. In its first year, Local 212 raised an additional \$2,500 from faculty and retirees who were deeply concerned about the volume of students that did not complete their courses due to housing or food insecurity as well as other emergencies. Altogether, this funding assisted 26 students, where nearly 40% of the need cited was preventing evictions and/or securing housing for homeless students.

By the 2017-2018 academic year, Michael and his colleagues further galvanized campus and community support in a number of ways. This included asking attendees to contribute to the FAST Fund in lieu of gifts at his own retirement celebration, matching dollars received from anonymous donors as well as Goldrick-Rab, faculty write-ins during MATC's annual Giving Campaign, and momentum from empathetic donors beyond MATC who learned about the program via the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. The collective dollars raised that year soared to \$47,000 and the program's impact grew by 319%, serving 109 students.

Undoubtedly, the structural backing of the union from the onset was powerful and proved critical for expanding the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund into a sustainable operation. From the start, the union has provided office space and other administrative support at no cost. Additionally, the union backing has augmented accountability and institutional legitimacy for the program, particularly among MATC faculty and retirees who want their union

Number of Local 212 FAST Fund at MATC student aid recipients



engaged in efforts that foster equity in student outcomes and community collaboration, and who are primary and longstanding sources of financial support. Further, union sponsorship made it possible for the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund to hold its first gala and silent auction in 2019, which attracted support from Wisconsin's major professional sports teams and local businesses.

The Local 212/MATC FAST Fund has blossomed into an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and is led by Liz Franczyk who, in addition to serving as Executive Director, is also a member of Local 212 and an adjunct Spanish instructor at MATC. Liz works closely with a group of volunteers that includes MATC retirees and former Local 212 members to manage the program and its finances. Building on Michael's legacy, Liz has continued to bolster support for the FAST Fund, which has steadily grown in financial contributions and programmatic impact. By the 2021-2022 academic year, the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund aided 765 students experiencing financial emergencies with \$220,000 in grants.

Liz emphasized that partnerships, both on and off campus, have been instrumental in not only operating the program, but also boosting the network of support available to students beyond the FAST Fund. This includes connecting students to external resources like Community Advocates and the Social Development Commission, both of which provide Milwaukee residents with a wide-range of basic needs resources (i.e. rental assistance, emergency shelter, nutrition services, etc.), and the MATC Student Emergency Assistance Grant program (formerly the MATC Dreamkeepers program), which shares the goal of assisting students with financial challenges to remain focused on their coursework.

When asked about the collective impact of the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund, Liz was clear that the primary purpose remains helping students overcome emergencies so that their progress toward completion is not derailed. Even so, she added that the FAST Fund is merely a bridge and cannot solve the more deeply rooted problems of poverty that impact our society. However, what it can do is "move the needle" by unearthing areas where policy, practice, and perception changes are warranted. And the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund has used its influence and experience to do just that - advocate for systemic and institutional change. This includes:

Worked to increase emergency allocations to students

Using the union's influence to get a seat on the campus committee that determined how the CARES Act emergency relief funding would be allocated. Through this involvement, per student allocations were raised from \$500 to \$1,000.

Influenced eligibility for institutional emergency funds

Lobbying to get MATC to include DACA and students impacted by the 150% rule² as eligible for emergency aid.

²Advocating for MATC's institutional emergency aid program to expand eligibility to include two key groups: DACA students, and those who are ineligible for federal financial aid because they have previously attempted more than 150% of the credits needed to complete their program, known as the "150% rule"

Advocated for changes in HEERF allocation formula

Collaborating with the Wisconsin Technical College System and other national organizations to successfully lobby Congress to change the formula used to distribute the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) that disproportionately awarded dollars to elite institutions, while overlooking working-class colleges, like MATC, with large minority student populations.



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My approach to supporting students has changed since I have joined (the FAST Fund). I really enjoy interacting with students and learning their stories. Each of them are in such different places and have very different needs. It has opened up my eyes to looking at things through different perspectives.

TORIE BERTAGNOLLI, FAST FUND TEAM MEMBER
AT WESTERN WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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