



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

February 29, 2024

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE:

I have approved Senate Bill 971 as 2023 Wisconsin Act 100 and have deposited it in the Office of the Secretary of State. I have exercised the partial veto with respect to sections 1 [as it relates to s. 20.255 (1) (fc) and s. 20.255 (2) (fc)], 2, 3, 4, and 5.

This bill would create two appropriations to fund the requirements imposed by 2023 Wisconsin Act 20, which created an Office of Literacy in the Department of Public Instruction that administers a literacy coaching program and early literacy grants. The bill also specifies that the director of the Office of Literacy is assigned to executive salary group three and would set a repeal date of July 1, 2028, with respect to the literacy coaching program appropriation.

I have exercised the partial veto with respect to sections 1 [as it relates to s. 20.255 (1) (fc)] and 2 to remove reference to "coaching" and the related literacy coaching statutory reference, in order to consolidate support for the office and all literacy program initiatives in one appropriation under s. 20.255 (1) (fc). I have exercised the partial veto with respect to section 1 [as it relates to s. 20.255 (2) (fc)] and section 4 to eliminate the creation of s. 20.255 (2) (fc). I have further exercised the partial veto with respect to sections 3 and 5 to remove the July 1, 2028, repeal of s. 20.255 (1) (fc).

Ensuring our kids have the reading and literacy tools and skills to be successful both in and out of the classroom is critically important, as is improving reading and literacy outcomes for kids across our state. I am partially vetoing this bill because I object to overly complicating the allocation of funding related to literacy programs in Wisconsin by creating multiple appropriations for what could be accomplished with one. By consolidating funding into one appropriation, the department will have the flexibility necessary to utilize the appropriate amount of funding for various literacy needs based on the needs of Wisconsin schools. The department would not be able to do so with funding divided between multiple appropriations. Promoting early literacy and learning is critical for future academic achievement, and flexibility is crucial to meet investment needs for coaches, grants, and professional development alike. Consolidating funding into a single continuing appropriation will support this important goal and simplify the administration of funding for the department.

Further, the proposed appropriation structure under the bill does not align with the expected implementation timeline for early literacy interventions under Act 20. Furthermore, removing the July 1, 2028, repeal of the appropriation will create flexibility to invest in literacy programs for as long as the state has funding available and as long as decisionmakers invest in improving reading instruction in Wisconsin, and I object to potentially prematurely ending this investment.

Further, I object to signing a bill with an apparent error that benefits only private choice schools and independent charter schools. Private choice schools and independent charter schools are eligible for grants to purchase approved early literacy curriculum, and independent charter schools are eligible for funding to support the mandatory early reading instruction professional development. As drafted,

either intentionally or inadvertently, these entities could also receive an increase in per pupil funding because the bill does not contain standard provisions to exclude the newly created categorical appropriation from the indexing formula used to increase per pupil payments for private choice, independent charter, Special Needs Scholarship, and open enrollment students. Consequently, a private choice or independent charter school could receive both a grant for curriculum and an ongoing increase in per pupil funding. Contrastingly, no such funding increase would be provided to public school districts under the bill.

The single appropriation created through my partial veto will allow the department to administer the literacy coaching program, curriculum grants, and financial assistance for early literacy professional development effectively and efficiently. I am hopeful that the department and the Joint Committee on Finance will work quickly to release funding from the committee's supplemental appropriation to support the important work of improving reading and literacy outcomes for our kids.

Respectfully submitted,



Tony Evers
Governor