



Stephen L. Nass

Wisconsin State Senator

SB 483 Wisconsin Robotics League Participation Grants

Testimony of Senator Steve Nass

Senate Committee on Education

December 19, 2017 • 411 South, State Capitol

Thank you Chairman Olsen for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 483. This bill enhances legislation we introduced and passed last session that created a grant program through the Department of Public Instruction to encourage Wisconsin students to participate in robotics competitions. The legislation from last session (2015 Act 280) applied to high school robotics teams containing only students in grades 9-12. SB 483 would expand the statute to apply to high school robotics teams that also include students in grades 6, 7, and 8.

In order for our students to compete and succeed in the 21st Century, it is imperative that school curriculums include more opportunities for students to participate in activities related to science, technology, engineering, and math. Participation in robotics competitions helps foster students' interest in these fields and provides additional opportunities to improve their technical skills and knowledge in these vital subjects.

The law allows a robotics team to apply for a grant of up to \$5,000 that can be used for expenses related to a robotics competition. Allowable expenses are limited to fees, kits, supplies, or travel expenses required to participate in competitions, and a stipend for the mentor of an eligible robotics team. The applicant must provide matching funds in an amount that is equal to the amount of the grant awarded.

Robotics competitions for students are increasing in popularity across the country. The grant program helps to provide the seed money for students to assemble teams to compete in competitions, and facilitate independent fundraising efforts to supplement the grant funds provided.

The total amount of grants awarded is limited to \$250,000 annually for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. All students in the state who meet the criteria are eligible to apply for a grant, regardless of where they are receiving their education, including traditional public school, charter school, private school, homeschool, etc.

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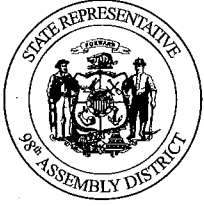
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The Robotics League Grant Program was very popular and well utilized in the first year of its existence. During the 2016-17 school year, 125 teams from around Wisconsin received grants for Robotics League participation. Because participation grant requests exceeded total available funds, grant awards were prorated to each eligible applicant.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation that increases Wisconsin students' opportunity to participate in STEM programs and activities. If committee members have further questions, I am happy to answer them at this time.



Adam Neylon

State Representative • 98th Assembly District

DATE: December 19, 2017
FROM: State Representative Adam Neylon
TO: Senate Committee on Education
RE: Supporting Senate Bill 483

Good afternoon, Chairman Olsen and members of the Committee on Education.

I am State Representative Adam Neylon from Pewaukee, and I am here in support of Senate Bill 483.

Last session, Senator Nass and I authored legislation which became 2015 Wisconsin Act 280. Act 280 directed the Department of Public Instruction to create a grant program to award monies to high school robotics teams who participate in competitions. The grant program appropriation was \$250,000, which required matching funds for applicants to be eligible. DPI received so many eligible applications (125 teams) they had to pro-rate grants to ensure every eligible team received some funding. The matching requirement ended up supplying Wisconsin high school robotics teams with more than \$468,000. Combined we are talking about nearly \$720,000 going toward robotics teams in Wisconsin.

This grant program has helped promote a spirit of teamwork and partnership with people surrounding communities for students across the state, not to mention encouraging young students to get interested in robotics, which ultimately ends up being an investment in Wisconsin's future.

If we fast forward to the 2017-19 budget, you will see the program was extended each school year of the budget at the same funding level of \$250,000.

Now, the reason for this bill today. It has come to my attention there are teams who have been excluded from receiving a grant simply because they have students on their team who are in a grade lower than high school, mostly 6th, 7th and 8th graders. I contend this is exactly the type of participation Wisconsin wants in STEM type extra-curriculars.

A high school team with an advanced 7th grader who wants to participate on their high school's team should be able to participate and add value to the team without making the team ineligible for these grant monies.

This bill simply corrects this oversight, by making eligible for a grant, a high school team that has one or more students in grades 6 through 8.

Thank you for your time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.