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CO-CHAIR, JOINT COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

41st ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Assembly Bill 375: Family navigator program in the Department of Workforce
Development and making an appropriation.**

**Testimony of State Representative Joan Ballweg
Assembly Committee on Workforce Development
September 24, 2019**

Thank you, Chair Petryk, Vice-Chair Dittrich and members of the committee for holding this public hearing on AB 375.

In 2013, Wisconsin was one of six states awarded a 5-year PROMISE demonstration grant. This program was used to test strategies to improve employment and educational outcomes for youth and their families who were receiving social security income (SSI). Through this program, family navigators were hired to meet with those youth and their families in the community to determine their specific needs and connect them to services, supports and strategies that increase education, employment and self-sufficiency.

Since the launch of the program, nearly twice as many PROMISE youth (73%) who met with a family navigator have worked, as opposed to those who have not (42%). Providing higher levels of education and employment support to these youth is shown to have positive impacts on earnings and employment throughout their lifetime.

With the PROMISE demonstration grant ending, I believe it is important to continue the proven benefits of family navigators. Connecting both youth and their families to education and employment services results in an increased household income, higher educational attainment and less reliance on public benefits, ultimately resulting in a cost savings to the state. By creating and funding the family navigator program, we can ensure that disabled and low-income youth and their families across the state will have access to these proven results.

Thank you for considering this bill, and I am happy to answer any questions.



PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: September 24, 2019

RE: **Testimony on 2019 Assembly Bill 375**

TO: The Assembly Committee on Workforce Development

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Thank you members of the Assembly Committee on Workforce Development for accepting my testimony on Assembly Bill 375.

Assembly Bill 375 will establish a family navigator program at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to provide services to individuals who receive federal supplemental security income. This bill funds family navigator positions to help eligible individuals gain access to employment training, housing assistance, medical assistance, vocational rehabilitation services, and long-term support.

Wisconsin was one of six states in 2013 that received a five-year PROMISE demonstration grant from the Social Security Administration to test strategies to improve integrated employment and educational outcomes for youth and families receiving social security income (SSI).

Family navigators were hired to meet with low-income youth and families within their homes or communities to assess needs and overall family employment. The navigators focused on connecting youth and families to schools, long-term support, integrated employment, housing programs, financial literacy, and vocational rehabilitation services.

The PROMISE project has resulted in increased household incomes, higher educational attainment for youth and families, lifelong wage earners, and less reliance on public benefits among the participants. Nearly twice as many PROMISE youth who met with a family navigator have worked compared to those who have not met with a family navigator. Additionally, youth who met with a family navigator had twice the amount of jobs since joining PROMISE project as youth who have not met with a family navigator.

The PROMISE project has demonstrated that family navigators play a critical role in getting youth and family members employed, while changing their trajectory out of poverty. With the five-year PROMISE demonstration project ending, we are introducing this bill to ensure funding for family navigator positions covering each of Wisconsin's Workforce Development areas.

Thank you again for listening to my testimony and I hope that you will join me in supporting this bill.

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Insert Date Here



Tony Evers, Governor
Caleb Frostman, Secretary

Testimony on Assembly Bill 375
Assembly Committee on Workforce Development
September 24, 2019

Thank you, Chair Petryk and Committee Members for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) regarding Assembly Bill 375.

I also wanted to thank Representative Ballweg and Senator Testin and their staffs, for meeting with us and then responding to a couple of technical concerns by introducing Senate Amendment 1, which was unanimously approved by the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism and Workforce Development.

The Department played a key role in the Wisconsin Promise Project through our Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The navigator model, importantly, involves direct support linking individuals to a variety of public and private sector programs and services available in the surrounding community that may be useful, and, just as importantly, helps those individuals maneuver through those to ensure access to those services that can help lead to self-sufficiency. The approach is comprehensive, and the assistance is sustained. It can be, as we will hear today, an effective and worthwhile effort.

I would like to focus on the fiscal portion of the bill this afternoon. The current bill language would allocate approximately \$1 million per year to build and sustain the Family Navigator Program within DWD.

When asked to develop a fiscal estimate, Office of Policy and Budget staff at DWD closely analyze the requirements in the proposal and consult with staff in the relevant division to determine the true costs of implementing that proposal. In this case, the new program may be housed within our Division of Employment and Training.

The Department's fiscal estimate indicates that start-up costs of \$260,500 would be incurred. These include costs related to enhancing existing case management IT infrastructure, developing and printing publications related to the program, and staffing the positions.

The ongoing annual cost to administer the program as required in the bill is estimated at just over \$1.7 million. This includes the salary and fringe for the 13 full-time employees, operational costs including training and travel, as well as staffing resources to meet the bill's implementation and reporting requirements.

While the bill aims to continue in some respects the Wisconsin Promise Project, it is important to note the differences between the two. The Wisconsin Promise Project was a time- and participation-limited federal grant-funded demonstration project, available to 1,000 14- to 16-year-olds receiving Supplemental Social Security Income. The eligible pool of participants under AB 375 is much larger, including those 14-21. As an ongoing program, there will be participants entering and leaving the program on a regular basis as well—it won't be limited in time or participation level, by design. An estimated 6,000 individuals and their families would be eligible for services.

Our staff has looked closely at how the Department could overcome the nearly \$700,000 difference every year and there are very limited options. Many of the state and federal funding sources within our Division of Employment and Training and the Department generally are targeted, by law, to specific populations or services to be delivered, and those funds cannot simply be transferred to cover the costs of another program. Also, we have already been experiencing and adjusting to formula-based reductions in our federal funding.

The navigator model is an exciting one, and we support the idea of being able to continue and expand that experience and those opportunities to more Wisconsinites. We hope to work with you and your colleagues to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to make this program a reality.

John Keckhaver, DWD Legislative Liaison



WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

September 24, 2019

Representative Petryk
Chair, Assembly Committee on Workforce Development
Wisconsin State Capitol, Rm 103W
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Rep. Petryk and Committee members:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 375.

BPDD has been involved with the five-year federal PROMISE grant since its inception, is a member of the PROMISE steering group, and has administered several PROMISE contracts, including the Family Training contract that has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Family Navigator model. Our previous experience with the federal Let's Get To Work grant—which focused on improving community employment outcomes for transition-age students with disabilities—demonstrated that elevating family expectations was critical in determining whether the student with a disability would enter the community workforce¹.

In the PROMISE grant, BPDD applied what we learned from Let's Get to Work and suggested testing a peer to peer model who could work with not only the individual, but their family. Both in the disability and in the mental health fields, the use of family navigators has been found effective in connecting families to necessary supports. Navigators are typically someone from the community, who is experienced with disability, who has similar experiences to the families they are developing relationships with and is knowledgeable about local resources and supports. This peer support model has been shown to be an effective way to help families address the barriers interfering with obtaining or sustaining employment. This model changes the trajectory from a lifetime of public benefits to a lifetime of work and career.

Family navigators build relationships over time. Investment in relationships and connection to community members are unique to this approach, and key to transforming what families feel is possible and ultimately employment success. Often, low-income families are dealing with many daily challenges that impact employment—including lack of transportation, housing instability, food insecurity, caregiver shortages, childcare access, health or chronic conditions that require appointments and ongoing therapy, and other issues. Many people with disabilities and families do the best they can to cobble together a patchwork of fixes to stabilize their lives, and often that includes relying on means tested benefit programs that have strict income, asset, and other requirements. Fear of losing access to programs that are critical to survival—including Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Medicaid, FoodShare, Housing Assistance, etc.—if they work at all or too much is a huge barrier to overcome.

1 After three years 60% of these youth with disabilities were working in the community, compared to an overall 19% employment rate for people with disabilities .<http://www.letsgettoworkwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Outcomes-Recommendations-June-2014-final.pdf>

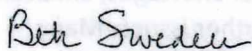
Family Navigators work with families to solve real life problems in order to create a path to employment. The relationships Family Navigators have with families are personal, and that is critical to understand and address the unique set of circumstances and challenges that each family faces before they can take the next step to employment. Family Navigators are not a referral service, they are trusted folks with established credibility who are meeting people where they are and figuring out how to help individuals to find their path. Sometimes, it means connecting families to information and public resources that provide more stability. Sometimes the solution is not a government program or service, but a connection to another person in the community who has a job referral, is looking for a carpool partner, who can provide childcare. Simple things that are not part of a service system can make an incredible difference, but that demands a knowledge of what people need and people on the ground with the knowledge of the community who can make it happen.

When people with disabilities and their family members are employed, the state benefits in three important ways; our workforce capacity is increased, state tax revenues are increased², and employees contribute (through payroll taxes) into major federal programs (Social Security and Medicare) that support many Wisconsin citizens. Wisconsin is experiencing a workforce shortage. We have people who want to work or who want to work more; Family Navigators can help resolve the barriers faced by low-income populations that can keep them out of the workforce and connect them to a job that fits for them in an area that is accessible to them³.

The PROMISE project was limited to transition age (19 to 23) youth with disabilities receiving SSI and their families. That description fits 8000 transition age youth in Wisconsin. Continuing the demonstrated best practices documented by Promise can move more youth and families to financial independence while reducing the dollars spent on public benefits by the state⁴. Even small improvements to employment and earnings can result in significant cost savings. If just 5% of PROMISE youth earn a little more than \$1000 a month, this results in annual cost savings to SSI and Medicaid of ~\$2.7M per year. If just 5.4% of PROMISE youth are employed with health insurance through their employer, the public health care savings will have funded the entire 5-year Wisconsin Promise grant (\$32.5 million).

BPDD is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities⁵. Our role is to seek continuous improvement across all systems—education, transportation, health care, employment, etc.—that touch the lives of people with disabilities. Our work requires us to have a long-term vision of public policy that not only sees current systems as they are, but how these systems could be made better for current and future generations of people with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration,



Beth Swedeen, Executive Director, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

² According to the National Governor's Association, states forego nearly \$6.5 billion per year in state tax revenue when working-age people with disabilities remain unemployed. Extrapolating across the lifespan, that number grows to \$195 billion over the course of 30 years. Even modest gains in employment and hours worked stand to increase state revenues.

³ 507 PROMISE youth started at least one new job and are projected to work an average of 26 hours per week earning an average of \$12.94 per hour (\$16,822 annually). 5% of PROMISE youth earned at least \$1,180 per month (Substantial Gainful Activity level), resulting in annual cost savings to Medicaid and SSI of ~\$2.7M per year. 306 PROMISE family members started at least one new job.

⁴ There are 8000 transition age youth in Wisconsin receiving SSI benefits, SSI state supplement, and Medicaid at a cost of \$196M annually

⁵ More about BPDD https://wi-bpdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Legislative_Overview_BPDD.pdf

RE: AB375

September 24, 2019

My name is Tricia Thompson and I live in Menomonie. My family consists of my husband Pete, our 9 and 13 year old sons as well as my brother, whom we adopted following the untimely death of our parents. For the past three years I have been honored to have worked as a Family Navigator for WI Promise. I am here today because it's important for me to share my experience about why I believe this is the bill all of you should enthusiastically support.

1,253 days was not enough and there is so much more to do. My job as a Family Navigator never felt like just a job. Rather, it was a mission to show the rest of the world what I already knew; when individuals with disabilities and their families develop rapport with someone they trust they will also accept their information and guidance. When respected and empowered; there is no limit to what someone can accomplish. Rapport doesn't just happen. It's a process that occurs when there is trust and authentic communication. It's the difference between someone opening the door and inviting you into their life or watching from inside as you step back into your car and leave; thankful they avoided additional criticism. I learned from a young age the difference between professionals who were brave enough to sit on the couch and those who stood in the corner with their judging eyes and county-issued clipboard. Those who sat on the couch were invited in for a second visit. The lesson learned: I always sit. Dignity matters.

I wish so much my parents were here today. In addition to both having physical and mental health disabilities, they also spent their entire adult lives addicted to prescription opioids. The vast majority of their money from welfare and social security was gone by the middle of the month. As the eldest of nine I can't begin to explain how painful it was knowing we could have avoided going without food, housing, electricity and other necessities if they would have trusted the intentions of the numerous professionals they were involuntarily introduced to. Social workers who were masters at instruction and failed at empowerment. I was 27 when my mom died and in all those years, no one spoke with her about the option to work and keep her medical benefits. It was a missed opportunity that had negative consequences on the lives of her children as well. The lessons learned from witnessing my parents and their lives deteriorate has provided me with the inspiration to approach individuals and their families differently.

I have many stories I could share of the direct impact made while working with the Promise youth and families. One in particular I will never forget is a mom who moved to Wisconsin from Illinois. She has a son who is diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and doesn't use spoken language to communicate. During one of our final visits, I shared a video with her of Adam and his business, "Adam Can Recycling." As tears formed in her eyes she explained she didn't realize technology could help her son work in the community. Watching this mom cry tears of happiness because she realized her son's options for employment had expanded was a moment I felt proud to be a part of.

The Family Navigators were brought on board three years into the project. Several of the individuals I worked with were labeled "cold cases" because the service provider had lost contact. This meant reaching out to the individual and eliminating barriers. I knocked on several

doors only to learn it was not their intention to lose contact but they had moved and in the chaos forgot to mention it to the DVR counselor. Sometimes I learned the loss of contact happened when a service provider failed to return their calls, e-mail or text messages. No matter the reason, I helped re-build the bridge and we moved forward.

My approach when working with youth and families is to embrace empathy as well as remain cognizant of the fine line that exists between empathy that is a strength and when it can be a hindrance to long term change. There's no doubt I care deeply about those I work with and empathy is in my DNA. As much as I often want to, I have learned to resist the urge to rush in and fix the problem. Even if that's the easiest solution. Instead, I trust the abilities that lie within these individuals and make sure they have the information they need to make the choices that are best for their family and without judgment. Life and professional experience has taught me when someone is an active part of a solution they take ownership and feel more confident about the outcome. They then take on the next challenge with confidence. The Family Navigator model works. It works because like me, all of us have faced enormous challenges in life and have felt the same feelings of grief, sadness and loss. The individuals of WI Promise trusted our word because they knew our shared experience meant we believed their success was just as important to us as to them.

This bill provides essential information, guidance, and support to those who want to be independent and work in the community. Not just for those who have a disability. It makes the correct assumption the majority of people want success and sometimes need someone to help them fill out paperwork like an energy assistance application or give them information on local section 8 housing vouchers and accessing waitlists. Sometimes they don't need a long term case manager to help on their path to independence. What individuals with and without disabilities always need is someone to demonstrate trust through following through and keeping their word. Returning phone calls on the weekend should never be out of the question.

While it's too late for my parents, I decided a long time ago I would always treat people the way they deserved to be treated. In my parent's memory, I vowed to value relationships and empower positive change. I do my best to refrain from judging others actions and instead work to remove the barriers preventing their success. No system or program is perfect or fits everyone's needs. What matters is that there is someone who can connect the dots for people and provide guidance and support through whichever system they are collaborating with. This is why I am here today and I hope you will support AB 375 and make it possible for many others in this state create a successful employment and life path for their family as well.

Sincerely,



Tricia Thompson

N4917 567th Street

Menomonie, WI 54751

My name is Julie Hallam and am from Necedah. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony on the Family Navigator bill.

Five years ago this month, I found myself in in a different important building in Madison - UW Hospital. My husband, J, and I spent the morning getting our four children ready and off to their first day of school. We sent our youngest baby to 4K and we joked that it was definitely time to have another. There was nothing in this world we loved more than raising those children and we were really good at it. At the time, my kids were 15, 12, 11 and 4. Our 12 year old son, Draven, was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. J was absolutely amazing and much more patient with him than I could ever be. He stayed home to raise our children. He would read and listen to music with them for countless hours... my children are experts on Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Nirvana and unconditional love.

After the kids were dropped off, J asked me to take him to the hospital because he felt off, which was extremely unusual. The doctor checked everything out and decided it must be a viral infection. He prescribed anti-nausea medication and we left.

The next part of the story I hate to tell. Not because it reminds me of what happened, it's in my head every day. But there aren't enough words to describe the trauma of it all. J had a seizure while I was driving. He was pushed up against me and kept shifting the car into neutral so I couldn't get anywhere. When I managed to push him away enough to drive, we got trapped waiting for a slow moving train and the hospital was a mile on the other side of it.

I remember that moment so clearly thinking, "There is no way I can do this. I need him." We worked so hard to be great parents for our children. It made no sense.

They couldn't stop J's seizures at the hospital in Mauston. He was brought down to UW and a volunteer drove me. I didn't know if he would be alive when I got there. He survived for four more excruciating years as he battled a tennis ball sized cancerous brain tumor. Craniotomies, resections, blood infections, radiation, pressure ulcers, memory loss, mood swings, incontinence, paralysis, seizures... all while losing what J coveted most... his intelligence and ability to express his emotions.

J died February 10th.

Not only did I care for him, I had to take on the role as both parents to our children. Remember Draven, our autistic son that he was so great with? If you don't know much about autism, change is extremely difficult. Throw in some puberty and you find yourself in a real situation.

A year after J's diagnosis, we were accepted to be participants in the Promise program. I had no idea what that meant except Draven would get an iPad and I'd have another person asking me questions I didn't have time for. We began the program and I was pretty much correct in my assumptions. The person I spoke with was pleasant but didn't relate in any way to my situation.

A year later, Promise introduced us to a family navigator named Trisha. She had been there. She had experienced what it was like to spin your wheels when you're just trying to get help for the

people you love. She was non-threatening. Understanding. Compassionate. Patient. Funny. She made everything so much easier. She wasn't another person asking me questions. She met me wherever I was at and became an intricate part of our journey, helping me connect the dots.

She believed in us. She believed that our lives would not be defined by all of this tragedy.

When I met Tricia, we were on food stamps, living in a two bedroom apartment and surviving, at best. Today, I am a case manager in disaster recovery, a homeowner, a taxpayer, a worship leader and an advocate. I drive a car that doesn't break down. I don't worry about how I'm going to get enough food to feed everyone for the week. I am able to help other people utilize the resources they need because I was shown how. Before this program, I had no idea being a homeowner was even an option for me. But money management and credit counseling was a part of it. I can promise you our family would not be where we are today without the Family Navigator model provided to us through the Promise grant. People don't know how to do better when they are not shown better. This showed us.

There are a lot of Tricia's and there are a lot of Julie's in this state. Seemingly hopeless situations that have the potential to be turned around. We still experienced the tragedy. Our hearts were still broken. Every bit of it was still terrible. But we came out the other side stronger... not more broken. We did not become victims of our circumstances. I needed that example of hope and triumph. I needed someone who had experienced all the barriers I faced or who at least had the motivation to sit with me and help me figure it out. I didn't need someone from the top who had never been there offering suggestions. I needed someone in the trenches with me and that's exactly what a Family Navigator does.

Today, my oldest daughter is 20 absolutely brilliant and in her third year of college and the campus English tutor. Draven is 17, loves school, loves to work and loves having the ability to save his own money. My 16 year old son starts his junior year today. He spends too much time with his girlfriend and too much time playing magic with "the boys." Aka - a typical teenage boy. My nine year old daughter is in fourth grade and is already set to tutor the third graders from her old school on the days she has off. They are brilliant lights in this world.

I believe in this bill so fiercely. Please continue to support it and fight for in on behalf of our families. Regardless of party affiliation, I believe we all have similar goals for our citizens. To live happily, be financially free and to contribute in positive ways in our communities. This bill promotes all of these things and more. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Julie Hallam

202 N. Harvey Street

Necedah, WI 54646

Amber Russell
1605 Birney Street
Eau Claire, WI. 54701

To whom it may concern,

My name is Amber Russell and my son is Montana Sullivan. My son has been involved with the Promise program for a couple of years. Prior to Promise, Montana had sort of a tough time engaging socially and acquiring the skills needed to progress in life successfully. There was a point in time that I grew worried for Montana as I wasn't sure if he would be able to socially engage with his peers, led along be successful in society.

Since joining the program and working with his family navigator, Tricia Thompson, Montana has opened a bank account of his own, which he did not have prior to the program. Montana was also able to work at the Walmart Distribution Center, gaining not only the confidence to be in the workforce, but skills needed to further his success with future employment. He also started school at CVTC enrolling in the Criminal Justice Program.

By being a part of the program Montana has went from needing assistance to assisting others in need. He has through saving money purchased a vehicle, gotten hired full-time at Walmart in Eau Claire, and helps others in need of finding employment. Montana has also engaged himself in helping out the community for others by taking it upon himself to help better the public transportation system and its access for the handicapped. The Promise program helped not only Montana, but our family as a whole. My husband Edward also enrolled at CVTC and acquired his Associate Degree in Criminal Justice with the help of the program. He is now a law enforcement officer with the Lake Hallie Police Department.

The Promise program has helped our family in ways that I don't think would have been possible without the assistance and resources that were provided. I think the program has been a success and I am truly grateful to have been a part of in what in my opinion is a great resource for families in need. The Promise program and its family navigators not only assist in planning goals and success for the future, but they take part in bringing those goals to life and making a dream a reality. I am truly thankful to all that took part in my family's success and continue to be a help to others.

Respectfully,

Amber Russell

amber.russell1029@gmail.com

Why High School Graduation is Important to Me!

I want to graduate high school and college because I want to be able to control my own *destiny*.

Now is the time to make a decision about your future.

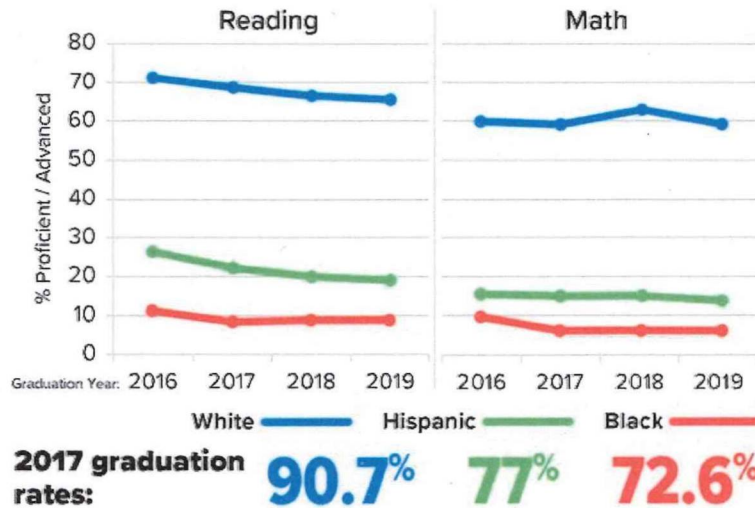


You can't go to college unless you graduate High school first!!!

Why college is important for all races

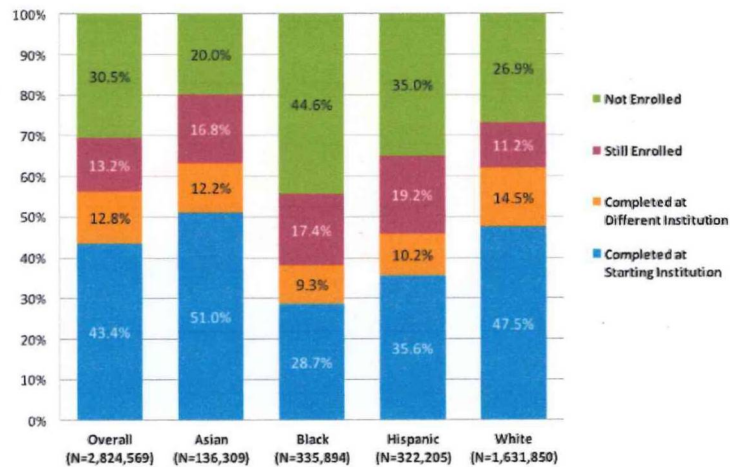
Average income for a High School dropout is **\$24,000** per year (Chron.com 2018)

11th Grade Proficiency (ACT) of Madison students:



Average income for a high school graduate is **\$30,000** per year (Chron.com 2018)

Figure 6. Six-Year Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity (N=2,824,569)*



Average income for a College graduate with a Bachelor's degree is **\$49,000**
(Chron.com 2018)

<https://isthmus.com/opinion/opinion/madison-school-district-touts-graduation-rates-but-academic-proficiency-in-question/>
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/26/college-completion-rates-vary-race-and-ethnicity-report-finds>

Chron.com <https://work.chron.com/average-salary-college-degree-1861.html>