



# Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator · District 8

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education**  
Senate Bill 567: Credit Recovery Course Report  
10/14/2021

Thank you committee members for hearing testimony on Senate Bill 567.

Senate Bill 567 requires a school board annually report to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) the number of pupils who attended a credit recovery course and the subject of that course.

According to a survey conducted by the USA TODAY NETWORK, of the 60 school districts surveyed, 90% have seen a rise in failure rates. In the same survey, one school showed 2 out of 5 high school students failed a class during first semester. Another school's fall failure rate was four times what it was in previous years. With passage of this bill, this information would be readily available without having to send surveys to every school district.

The facts above should concern every member of this committee. These facts are more alarming when we know schools across Wisconsin loosened grading standards last year. While some chose to freeze grades, others avoided giving failing grades at all. The Wisconsin State Journal highlighted this in an article and included some data from the Madison School District. At the middle school level, 3,608 failing grades, or 4.4% of the total, were assigned in the fall semester of 2019, but there were less than 60 for the fall semester of 2020, likely the result of grading mistakes or other special cases.

In April, FOX6 Milwaukee did a story about students struggling across southeast Wisconsin. Much of the devastating information highlighted above is documented in their findings as well, but a quote from one student continues to stick with me. She said, "We all stopped doing work because our teachers told us it didn't affect our grades either way unless they were getting better." We should be heartbroken by statements like that.

As policy makers we must continue to gather important and relevant information to try and fully understand the negative impacts and disruption COVID-19 has caused students in Wisconsin. Knowing how many kids in our schools attended a credit recovery course will be helpful, but we know it is only one piece of the puzzle.

Thank you for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 567. I hope to count on your support for the important bill.



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Assembly Committee on Education  
SB 567 – Credit Recovery Classes  
October 14th, 2021

Thank you Chairwoman Darling and members of the Committee for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 567. This legislation aims to make public the information regarding the number and grade level of students that attend credit recovery courses along with the subject matter of the course.

While current law allows schools to provide credit recovery, or “alternative education” courses to help ensure that students are provided with a means to receive a diploma, there is no mechanism for the state to collect information on students who are struggling in school.

Senate Bill 567 addresses this issue by requiring school boards to report to the Department of Public Instruction the number and grade level of pupils who attended a credit recovery course, as well as the subject of which recovery course was attended. Additionally, the Department of Public Instruction would be required to submit that information to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature.

Additionally, a provision has been included in the Assembly bill that expands the bill to include private schools who receive state funds.

This common sense legislation will give both the Department of Public Instruction and the State Legislature a more complete view of how Wisconsin’s students are performing. As a result, the state will have a more in depth understanding on how to best serve Wisconsin’s current and future students.

Thank you Committee members for your consideration of Senate Bill 567.

Representative Cindi Duchow



**Senate Committee on Education**

**October 14, 2021**

**Department of Public Instruction**

**Statement of Information on Senate Bill 567/Assembly Bill 561**

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Thank you, Chair Darling and members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide information regarding Senate Bill 567 and Assembly Bill 561 (/SB 567/AB 561). This bill requires school boards to annually report to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) the number of pupils who attended a credit recovery course during the school year and, for each pupil, the pupil's grade level and the subject of the recovery course the pupil attended. The report would be due to DPI no later than 60 days after the end of the school year. Under the bill, DPI must compile and submit that information to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature annually, by January 1, beginning with a report for the 2022-23 school year (i.e., first report would be due January 1, 2024).

**Background and Analysis on Senate Bill 567**

As required under state and federal law, DPI collects student level data related to a variety of demographic categories, student achievement, course completion, etc. This data collection is accomplished with the Wisconsin Information System for Education, which is comprised of multiple tools that support ID generation and data collection to meet all required district and school state and federal reporting mandates.

**WISEdata**, is a multi-vendor, open data collection system that allows school districts, charter schools, and private schools participating in a parental Choice program to submit data to DPI from the student information system (SIS) vendor of their choice.

**WISEdash** is a data portal that uses dashboards, or visual collections of graphs and tables, to provide multi-year education data about Wisconsin schools. Within WISEdash, data can be displayed for multiple years, and it can be grouped and filtered by a variety of demographics. As a public reporting tool, WISEdash is used by districts, schools, parents, researchers, media, and other community members to view data published by DPI.

The bill would require that data be collected about the number of students (by grade level and subject) who attend credit recovery courses, which is defined in the bill as “a program or course, including an alternative education program [under s. 115.28(7)(e)1.], that allows a pupil to retake a course or make up course credit for a course that the pupil took but did not pass and that is required for high school graduation.” While the WISEdata student data collection includes information about student coursework, including course subject and grade level, it does not

include an indicator that allows a user to specify whether the course was taken as a “credit recovery” course, as defined in the bill.

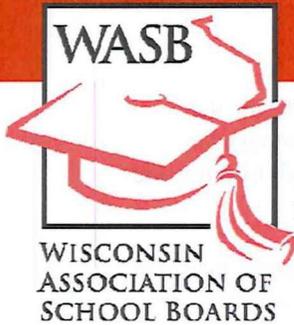
To fulfill the directive of the bill, DPI would need to facilitate the collection of coursework data that has an indicator for credit recovery. This would include making program changes to WISEdata to create a credit recovery indicator within the coursework data collection. DPI would then provide technical assistance to school districts to ensure there is a common understanding of the term “credit recovery” and consistency in reporting by school districts.

### **Assembly Bill 561**

As amended, AB 561 would be substantially more challenging to implement. Assembly Amendment 1 changes the implementation to the current 2021-22 school year instead of the 2022-23 school year. Since the school year has already started and data collection is in progress, DPI would be unable to collect this data in the 2021-22 school year.

Assembly Amendment 2 expands the reporting requirement so that it applies to school districts, independent charter schools, and private schools participating in a school choice program or the Special Needs Scholarship Program. Private schools participating in one of the parental choice programs do not currently submit coursework data to DPI. Implementing a coursework data collection for private schools participating in the school choice program would take a significant number of resources for DPI, choice school student information system vendors, and the choice schools themselves.

Assembly Amendment 3 expands the types of credit recovery course information that school districts must report to DPI. In addition to categories required under the bill, the amendment also requires districts to report a student’s ethnicity, whether the student is a limited-English proficient student, and whether the student’s rate of truancy during the school year was 20 percent or more of the days on which school was held. For public schools and private schools participating in the school choice program, we already collect ethnicity, limited-English proficiency of a student, and absenteeism which is a different measure than truancy referenced in the amendment. If the truancy data is needed at the student level, significant time and resources would be needed to complete the project. At this time, we do not collect ANY student level data for private school students who are non-choice or who have not opted in to an all-school report card.



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TO: Members, Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director  
DATE: October 14, 2021  
RE: OPPOSITION to ASSEMBLY BILL 651, relating to: requiring school boards to report information regarding credit recovery courses.

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) is a voluntary membership association representing all 421 of Wisconsin's locally elected public school boards.

During each legislative session numerous bills are introduced to impose additional, new mandates on schools. The WASB generally opposes those bills when they impose unfunded mandates on local school districts. Assembly Bill 561 is such a bill, imposing additional reporting burdens on schools but providing no additional funding or spending authority to districts.

While we did not state a position on Assembly Bill 561 when a hearing was held scarcely a week after the bill was introduced, the WASB has reviewed this bill and has strong concerns about Assembly Bill 561, as introduced, and equally strong concerns about the way the bill was amended by the State Assembly to place additional reporting requirements on school districts. Those concerns lead us to oppose the bill in its present form.

The co-sponsorship memo for this bill indicates the stated intention of the authors of Assembly Bill 561 is to make public information from schools regarding the number and grade level of students that attend credit recovery courses along with the subject matter of the course "in order to fully understand the effect that (pandemic-related) school closures have had on Wisconsin students."

However well-intentioned and sincere the authors of the bill may be in their interest in credit recovery data, in order to fully understand the effect that school-related closures have had on Wisconsin students, it would be necessary to have both baseline data and information from all schools that were subject to the mandatory school closure order during the 2019-20 school year.

This bill accomplishes neither of those objectives. Without pre-pandemic baseline data, the bill will result in a round of mere speculation and unfounded conclusions about the actual impact or effect of the pandemic and related school closures.

Assembly Bill 561 was amended by the Assembly in three concerning ways:

- 1) The initial applicability date was changed from next school year to the current school year. (Under the amendment, school districts must begin reporting credit recovery course information for the 2021-22 school year.)

- 2) Private schools were exempted from the bill's requirements. (As amended, the bill now limits the reporting requirements in the bill would apply only to public school districts, independent charter schools, and private schools participating in a school choice program or the Special Needs Scholarship Program, rather than applying to all public and private schools.)

To the extent that private schools met in-person during the 2020-2021 school year, including data from those schools could have served as a control group against which to measure the impact of online instruction in schools that did not meet in person.

- 3) The types of credit recovery course information that school districts must report to DPI are greatly expanded and the information reported must be disaggregated by student group. In addition to categories required under the original bill, the amended bill would also require districts to report a student's ethnicity, whether the student is a limited-English proficient student, and whether the student's rate of truancy during the school year was 20 percent or more of the days on which school was held.

The WASB is concerned that not only will the new requirements impose additional work for districts, but in smaller schools or districts, such reporting could result in the release of personally identifiable data about particular students within the subgroups for which disaggregated data must be reported.

The WASB opposes each of these changes.

For the above reasons, the WASB opposes Assembly Bill 561.