



# JESSIE RODRIGUEZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 21<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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## SB 597

Senate Committee on Education

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

Under current law, if a child in 4k, Kindergarten, or First Grade is attending a choice school in the State of Wisconsin and is performing at a higher grade level in a certain subject or even all subjects, that child is not allowed to move up a grade. If the child were in a public school, this would be not be a problem and it would be legal to move that child up one grade to where they are at the same level as his or her peers.

This is because while public schools have the ability to set standards for “early admission” in 4k, Kindergarten, and First Grade, school choice schools do not have that flexibility. School choice students must remain in their statutorily-set age appropriate grades.

Parents have a variety of reasons for wanting to enroll their child in a parental choice program. That reason might be that they feel their child will have a better chance or an easier time learning in that environment versus their assigned public school. Current law is making it more difficult for students in 4k, Kindergarten, and First Grade to succeed.

SB 597 allows choice schools in Wisconsin to also set early admission standards so that their students are allowed the same advantages to move up a grade if they are able to, based on their academic ability by creating an exception to the minimum age requirement for admission. This bill also would allow a student, if they are especially proficient in math, for example, to move up one grade in math and remain in their current grade for all other subjects. Again, this is something that is available to students enrolled in a public school but not for students in choice schools.

This bill was brought to us by a family who has encountered this exact situation and is seeking to change the law to help other students around the state.



# Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

## TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 597

Thank you Madam Chair and committee members for today's hearing on Senate Bill 597.

Senate Bill 597 (SB 597) allows the governing bodies of schools that participate in the school choice program to set guidelines for early admission to 4 and 5 year old kindergarten and first grade. This would give private schools in the choice programs the same ability as public schools.

Under current state law, a child must be 4, 5, or 6 years of age on September 1 of the school year to be admitted to 4K, 5K or 1<sup>st</sup> Grade. Public schools may develop early admission policies allowing students to be admitted even if they do not fit the statutory age limit. However, this same capability does not apply to choice schools. Children enrolling in choice schools have no flexibility in the enrollment guidelines.

This issue came to my attention thanks to a constituent who is the parent of a gifted child. The child, I'll call her Jane, enrolled in a choice school kindergarten as a five-year old. It quickly became apparent that the typical 5K curriculum was not challenging enough for Jane, stunting her academic growth.

The parent asked the school to place her in 1<sup>st</sup> grade so that Jane's learning would continue to grow and that Jane would be challenged. The school's administrators cited state statute prohibiting choice schools from advancing children beyond the statutory age minimums, stating that their hands were tied.

I don't need to tell you that fostering academic achievement and productive learning at an early age is critical. A child who isn't challenged in school, and/or learning in school, or growing in academic knowledge leads to stunted and capped achievement. For gifted children, for whom many subjects come easy early in their careers, this leads to struggles later on. The fact that they weren't challenged earlier means they struggle when challenged later on. In essence, they have to "learn to learn" at a time when they should have already gained that skill and be learning new subjects.

Public schools have the capability and discretion to advance young children according to the child's academic ability and their own guidelines. SB 597 gives that same ability and discretion to choice schools, and it deserves your support.

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E-Mail: [Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wi.gov) • [SenatorWanggaard.com](http://SenatorWanggaard.com)

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Support for AB 617

Under current law, public schools are allowed to create standards for “early admission” in 4K, Kindergarten and first grade. However, private schools in the Parental Choice Programs must follow age limits with no flexibility.

Assembly Bill 617 allows private schools to create similar standards for students to move upward to match their abilities without constraint on age. This will allow advanced students to move with their ability.

We support AB 617 so students are allowed to progress through our schools based on their skills at the younger ages. Matching the flexibility of the public school system is a win for our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edward DeShazer".

Edward DeShazer  
Executive Director



December 13, 2021

Re: Support for AB 617

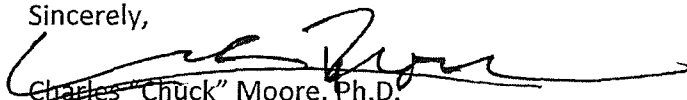
Members of the Assembly Education Committee,

Under current law, public schools are allowed to create standards for "early admission" in 4K, Kindergarten and first grade. However, private schools in the Parental Choice Programs must follow age limits with no flexibility.

Assembly Bill 617 allows private schools to create similar standards for students to move upward to match their abilities without constraint on age. This will allow advanced students to move with their ability. Often, the arbitrary birth before specific date ignores natural developmental differences in children.

We support AB 617 so students are allowed to progress through our schools based on their skills at the younger ages. Matching the flexibility of the public school system is a win for our students.

Sincerely,

  
Charles "Chuck" Moore, Ph.D.  
Principal



WE ARE:  
GRACE.

**To:** Assembly Committee on Education

**From:** Kimberly Desotell, President, Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE)

**Date:** December 13, 2021

**Re:** Support for Assembly Bill 617

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Dear Members of the Committee:

This letter is in support of Assembly Bill 617 in regards to proper academic grade level placements for students in grades kindergarten and first grade.

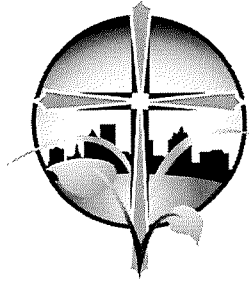
Under current law, public schools are allowed to create standards for “early admission” in 4K, kindergarten and first grade. However, private schools in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program must follow age limits with no flexibility and no opportunity to assess and offer appropriate placement based on the student need.

Assembly Bill 617 allows private schools to create similar standards to our public counterparts for students to move upward to match their abilities without constraint on age or following such a rigid practice. This will allow advanced students to move with their ability and allow principals and school leaders the opportunity to determine the best academic placement for children in these early, critical, formative years. In our Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE) Schools, we know children best and should be given the ability to establish procedures, standards and conditions for entrance and admissions into kindergarten and first grade. From time to time, the student age does not match their needs academically.

We support Assembly Bill 617 so Wisconsin Parental Choice students are allowed to progress through our schools based on their skills, abilities and needs at these younger years. We are merely asking for these options to match the same requirements of public school students throughout our state.

Thank you for consideration of this testimony.

Kimberly A. Desotell  
President, GRACE



**GARDEN  
HOMES**  
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December 14, 2021

Support for AB 617

Under current law, public schools are allowed to create standards for “early admission” in 4K, Kindergarten and first grade. However, private schools in the Parental Choice Programs must follow age limits with no flexibility.

Assembly Bill 617 allows private schools to create similar standards for students to move upward to match their abilities without constraint on age. This will allow advanced students to move with their ability.

We support AB 617 so students are allowed to progress through our schools based on their skills at the younger ages. Matching the flexibility of the public school system is a win for our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Evan Woody". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Evan Woody  
Director of Operations  
414-444-9050  
[ewoody@gardenhomeslutheran.org](mailto:ewoody@gardenhomeslutheran.org)