



November 1st, 2023

Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 271

Relating to: a grant program for recovery high schools and making an appropriation

Committee Members – I want to start by painting a picture of Wisconsin for you.

According to the 2022 annual report from the Office of Children's Mental Health, 22% of Wisconsin high school students reported self-harm, 34% felt sad or hopeless, 1 in 4 females seriously considered attempting suicide, and the number of students reporting they feel "sad and hopeless almost every day" increased by 10 percent over the last decade. Even more – our children are now turning to substance abuse to cope. Numbers from the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics show that Wisconsin teens are more likely than the average American teen to have used drugs in the last month. It's clear our Wisconsin teens are suffering right now. Thankfully, we have an underutilized tool at our disposal that can help.

Recovery schools, or sober schools, are institutions designed specifically for students in recovery. They provide young people with essential resources and support who are battling addiction, and they do so at a fraction of the cost. Recent numbers from the CDC suggest opioid use disorder alone costs approximately \$221,219 per year per person, and this figure does not include other dependencies like alcohol. Horizon High School, Wisconsin's only currently operating recovery school, spends approximately \$30,000 per year per person. That is nearly \$191,000 in savings per person per year.

Yet students at Horizon will tell you the school is so much more. Not only does the school push them to rediscover their passion for learning and graduate, it frankly saves their lives.

Unfortunately, these institutions are struggling financially. While Horizon just celebrated its 19th year of operations, the average lifespan of a recovery school is just 9.5 years because they never achieve financial stability due to the lack of resources available to them and the uniquely expensive costs associated with serving students in recovery.

Assembly Bill 271 builds off of funding approved in the 2023-25 state budget to provide some security for recovery high schools in our state. Particularly, I would like to focus on Substitute Amendment 1, which was inspired by the recovery school grant program in Massachusetts. This amendment outlines how the grant program will work.

The first part of the program creates planning grants to help interested parties get recovery high schools up and running. The amendment allocates \$300,000 of the \$500,000 annual appropriation for up to four grants. To apply, interested parties must request a specific amount from DPI and provide a proposed budget for how they will spend those funds. DPI retains discretion to disperse those funds, but they must provide an explanation if they chose to award lower than the amount requested.

Planning grants may be allocated until DPI determines there are three recovery high schools in the state. There may be some confusion as to why this number was chosen. There are 42 active recovery schools in 20 states across the country currently. That averages out to approximately 2.1 recovery schools per state.



Some states have more, such as Minnesota which has six currently. Three is a solid benchmark for the time being while we are able to better integrate these tools into our larger mental health framework. If there is ever a time when there are less than three recovery high schools operating in the state, planning grants can be allocated again, and the amendment allocates \$100,000 from the allocation for that purpose.

Operational grants operate similar to the planning grants. Existing recovery schools must request a specific amount from DPI and provide a proposed budget for how they will spend those funds. DPI retains discretion to disperse those funds, but they must provide an explanation if they chose to award lower than the amount requested. This model ensures accountability and transparency at all levels from all actors. That is why we chose it for our model here in Wisconsin.

Both the planning grants and the operational grants are also structured to gather as much information as possible. Recipients of the planning grants are required to submit to DPI how the grant was actually used, their plans for opening a new school, or reasons for why a new school is not feasible. These reports will help us identify barriers to creating recovery schools that future legislation would be able to address. Similarly, recipients of the operational grants are required to report how they actually spent the grant funds, along with several pieces of information, including: the number of pupils that apply and enroll, basic demographic information, substance use information of the students, academic information, among other things. This data will be crucial for the state to better understand how these institutions can be fully utilized going forward.

Quickly, I would like to address some potential concerns some may have. No, this bill does not support failing schools and is not meant to be their primary source of income. Recipients are required to show at least one other funding source and must undergo financial audits. No, these funds are not susceptible to fly-by-night schools. Again, recipients are required to breakdown how they plan to spend the money, they must show another source of income, DPI retains discretion to disperse funds and the department can deny an application if they do not see it as reputable, and any school that fails mid school year is required to return any unspent funds.

We have a moment here in Wisconsin where we can make great strides for young people battling addiction. The state legislature has made mental health a priority by the state assembly combining mental health and substance abuse prevention into a single committee, the state senate creating its first ever committee on mental health, substance abuse prevention, and children and families, and both chambers setting funding aside in the state budget for a recovery high schools support program. The executive branch named 2023 the "Year of Mental Health". If both sides are serious, this is a commonsense proposal that should receive bipartisan support. Let's not waste this opportunity.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse James".

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District



BARBARA DITTRICH

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 38th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

November 1, 2023

Rep. Barbara Dittrich Testimony on AB 271 – a grant program for recovery high schools and making an appropriation

Assembly Committee on Education

Thank you Chairman Kitchens and committee for taking up Assembly Bill 271 today. I want to express my gratitude to Senator James as well, who has worked on this issue with dedication and compassion for our youth struggling with addiction and mental health issues. I am grateful to be able to work together with him and his office to tackle this topic and bring help to our kids.

Recovery high schools are institutions designed to specifically address the needs of students in recovery, providing young people with essential addiction resources, services, and support. Often times, these schools are separate from traditional schools in order to avoid the circumstances and triggers that might cause students to relapse into addiction.

According to a 2022 annual report from the Office of Children's Mental Health 22% of Wisconsin high school students reported self-harm, 34% felt sad or hopeless with the number of students reporting feeling sad or hopeless almost every day increasing by 10% over the last decade. Sadly, it has been my personal experience that many of our students facing these mental health challenges are self-medicating through the abuse of illegal substances.

The reality is the cost of addiction recovery can be substantial. Recent data from the CDC shows that costs to treat opioid addiction cost over \$220,000 per year per person. The existing recovery high school in our state estimates they spend approximately \$30,000 per year per student. This is a dramatic cost savings. However, this doesn't come down to just finances. I believe that not only is it important to try to save taxpayer's dollars but when mental health issues are addressed early, as they would be in a recovery high school, these individuals are less likely to need treatment at such an intense level later in their lives. Problems treated early are less likely to become bigger problems later in life.

As far as background on the bill, AB 271 was initially introduced as a budget motion as a way to secure funding and educate members on recovery schools, since the concept is not well-known around the state. Following the budget, we entered into discussions with DPI, and based on some of their recommendations, along with other grant programs across the country like the one in Massachusetts, we amended the bill, reflected in the substitute amendment.

The amendment addresses BOTH planning grants to help establish new school and grants for schools currently operating in our state. In fact, in the initial stages of implementation, 60% of the allocation (\$300,000) is devoted to planning for new recovery high schools. The remaining 40% (\$200,000) is allocated for existing schools, for a total of \$500,000 funds being allocated.

This funding for this new grant program has already been approved in our 2023-2025 state budget; the policy in this bill reflects the policy intentions in the budget motion as previously mentioned.

Setting up recovery schools can be expensive, which is why, in part, there is only one recovery high school currently operating in our state. However, these grants are not meant to be the recipient's primary source of funding. The bill requires applicants to have proof of at least one other source of income to support operations. Financial audits are also a requirement in this legislation.

Given the challenges these students are facing, it is my hope we can come together to help them in their recovery process, especially in the Year of Mental Health. We have a great opportunity to step up and see this legislation become law. I would encourage the members of this committee to support this legislation and help our kids struggling with addiction and mental health and substance abuse challenges to have the best possible outcome in these specialized settings.



November 1, 2023

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2023 Assembly Bill 271
Assembly Substitute Amendment 1,
to Assembly Bill 271**

Thank you to Chairperson Kitchens and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Kevyn Radcliffe, and I am the Legislation Liaison for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). With me today is Tom McCarthy, Executive Director for the Office of the State Superintendent. We are here on behalf of the department to testify for information only on 2023 Assembly Bill 271 (AB 271) and Assembly Substitute Amendment 1 to Assembly Bill 271 (ASA1-AB 271).

By now, we are all aware that our young people are facing mental health challenges brought on by a myriad of family, school, and societal pressures. I could list statistic after statistic demonstrating the extent of the problem. How many kids are experiencing depression or anxiety; prevalence among males and females, by race, and the list goes on. But at the end of the day, there are real people behind those numbers. Kids who are scared and confused, who may seek relief from their pain with alcohol or drugs. We know that young people who become alcohol dependent or drug addicted may tend to engage in risky behaviors, skip or drop out of school, and may continue those addictions into adulthood. With opioids ravaging our communities, teenagers have access to these drugs that can damage their brain development and potentially kill them. Fentanyl laced street drugs can kill a young person with just a single dose. Alcohol dependence and drug addiction can ruin a teenager's future or end their young lives.

Students who have become drug or alcohol dependent and want to become clean and sober may face a daily gauntlet at school of peers pressuring them to drink or use drugs. The recovery high school grant program will give school districts another tool in their toolbox to help chronically alcohol and drug addicted students overcome their addictions through regular drug testing, treatment, and schooling in a supportive, alcohol and drug free environment.

I'll turn it over to Tom now to talk about the substitute amendment and the policy implications of the grant program being proposed.

ASA1 to AB 271 creates a definition of a recovery high schools that is broadly defined as meeting all the following conditions:

- Operates only high-school grades,
- Is specifically designed for recovery from substance abuse,
- Awards credits which count toward a diploma,
- Is governed by a board,
- Demonstrates it is capable of self-support,
- Employs an individual responsible for operations,
- Requires pupils to stay sober as part of the program,
- And provides evidence-based programming to students.

The bill specifies that all types of schools operating in Wisconsin can qualify (public, private, charter, and tribal). Meeting the above conditions allows a qualifying school to submit a grant application to the department to receive funding. The application must include a budget and specific uses for the grant funding. If more requests exist than the one million dollars over the biennium, allocated through the 2023-25 biennial budget, the department will prorate the funding in accordance with the total amount requested through individual grant applications. Additionally, the department is permitted to reduce award amounts with explanation to the grant applicants.

The department is also directed to run a start-up grant program, repurposing \$300,000 of the allocated one million dollars until there are at least three qualifying recovery schools providing services to Wisconsin students. These grants would be targeted at helping to plan and develop programs that would subsequently be eligible for the recovery school grant program.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the bill authors for their willingness to work on this proposal to satisfy the department's concerns. DPI believes the changes proposed through the substitute amendment are a big move in addressing issues identified in the original bill. We believe that making the qualifying criteria for recovery high schools less specific will allow for greater flexibility in design. And we greatly appreciate the changes that create a start up program, removing a common stumbling block for many new school types.

The department remains concerned about our agency capacity to administer new programs with no additional administrative funding or position authority. The recent biennial budget reduced position authority without removing any additional requirements. As requests for technical assistance in mental health programming continue to increase, the staff most likely equipped to be able to run this grant program will be faced with competing – and untenable – demands for their time. The department is

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also requesting direct authority to craft administrative rules to provide transparency and consistency for grant applicants. We have communicated both of these concerns to the bill authors, and they have been open to a continued discussion on these concerns.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison, at kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov or (608) 264-6716.

To Whom it may concern,

I want you to know what the Horizon Experience Means to me. First of all let me tell you my story. My substance use started when I was 12 years old, I would use almost everyday. At first my substance use was strictly marijuana. I finished middle school and went on to West High School. I struggled with the way West taught their academics, they had big work loads, classrooms with large amounts of students, barely any Student to Teacher time. West was extremely fast paced for me and as the school year progressed my mental health declined, I completed freshman year with a 2.65 GPA. Sophomore year came around and the school work hit me like a truck. I wanted so badly to do well in school, but I was not able to focus, sit still, and pay attention to the curriculum, so I bought some Adderall from a friend to help me focus. My mental health was still terrible and I was still using Marijuana at the time, I had grown a strong tolerance to Marijuana and was looking for a new high. I found that you could get high off the Adderall I was using. I ended up loving the feeling and kept on abusing the Adderall. At this point I had given up on trying in school, I found it was causing me too much stress, I went from wanting to do well in school to not caring in the span of a couple weeks. I started exploring different drugs like, xanax, cocaine, LSD, shrooms, oxycontin, hydrocodone, ketamine, and fentanyl. I would hide my drug use from my friends and family, I would strictly use on my own, I often skipped school, and occasionally ran away from home to use. I completely isolated myself. My heavy drug use lasted for 6ish months. I finally had enough and knew I needed to get sober. I reached out to my mentor (a Dane County Human Resources Worker) . I had been working with him since the 7th grade so we knew each other well. After I talked to him was the first time I tried to get sober. I managed to get 90 days sober my first time around, but eventually ended up relapsing. Wanting to be sober was never a problem for me, I knew I needed to get sober, I had identified my disease of addiction. In early recovery I was doing it all alone, I didn't have the 12 step program, Rehab, Addiction Counselors. It was safe to say I was hopeless. I kept trying to get sober and then relapsing again. It was to the point where I was accepting the fact that I might not wake up the next day. The scary part is that I was at peace with it, I almost wanted it to happen. My family found Horizon High School, while reading their online website. Horizon looked like the ideal place to learn, small classes, lots of support, the curriculum was based on things I can apply to real life. It was my dream school. We applied and I got in!

Now that I am at Horizon I feel extremely supported. At first I was extremely nervous, I still am to some extent. Our teachers make sure each student gets the help they need and each student is supported mentally. On Mondays and Fridays we have a group therapy session. I feel that I can be open about my feelings and tell my classmates and staff the truth about how I am doing mentally. Horizon feels like a safe place for me to learn. I have made good relationships with some students and staff. I now go to at least 3 N/A meetings a week and have found a therapist, along with a substance use counselor. Being at Horizon makes me feel like I have a future. Before horizon I didn't think I'd live to see 18 years old. Now I have dreams and ambitions to graduate, join the marines, and eventually go to college for business. Horizon truly saved my life. I feel blessed to have this opportunity. It makes me sad to know this is the only recovery school in Wisconsin. I believe that everyone like me should have the opportunity for a second chance at education. I am now 57 days sober and feel better than ever. I am excited to graduate Horizon. Horizon is important to me because I am finally getting my life back. Seeing all my peers recover puts a smile on my face everyday. I thought i'd never say this, But I look forward to school every day!

Thanu Stephens
October 31, 2023

To whom it may concern,

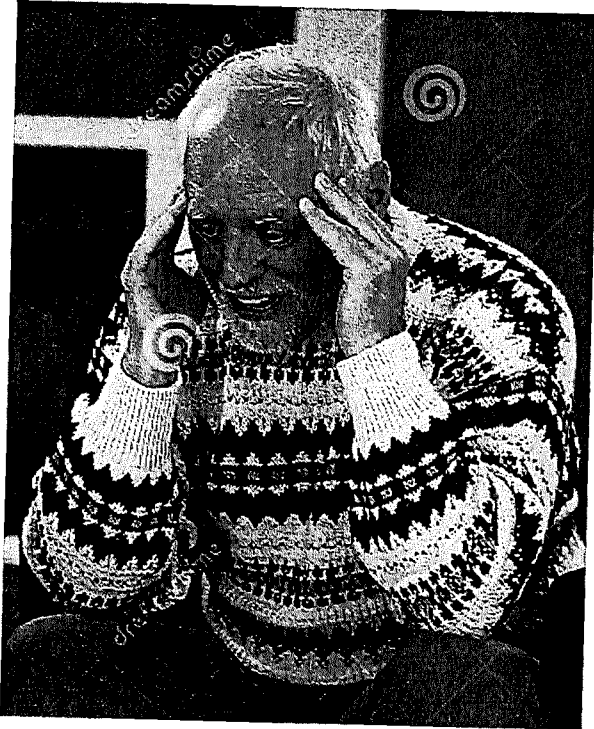
I have come to speak at the capitol two times now about Horizon and what it means to me, but I will always be willing to share more. I cannot stress enough how much Horizon has helped me. I've struggled with mental health issues my whole life, and I started abusing substances at the age of nine. I had severe depression and anxiety that made it almost impossible to get out of bed, let alone work towards goals. While I went to public schools I would rarely go to class and if I did I was never sober. I haven't been present in public schools for any length of time since the 7th grade. Being in treatment programs, inpatient or otherwise, is helpful until it isn't. As soon as you leave you're thrust back into reality, with all of the same temptations and triggers as before. While treatment programs may be able to shield you during your stay, once you go back to the environment you were living in before, nine times out of ten you'll go back to the same destructive behaviors. I have seen a dozen different therapists, attended outpatient programs, inpatient programs, rehabs, psych wards, and group homes, and nothing helped to keep me sober or improve my mental health. I was a member of AA for three years, but could never string together more than 30 days of sobriety before a relapse.

The difference with Horizon is that you don't have the opportunity to slip back into old habits. You are held accountable every day you're here, and even when you're not. You can't just not show up to school, you'll be getting calls, texts, emails, and parent notifications. You can't be using substances because we get drug tested weekly. If you're having a bad day, or a bad week, or just going through a rough patch, you have people there to talk to you and check up on you no matter what. Before Horizon, I was barely surviving. I was using substances every day, had terrible mental health, didn't go to school, no relationships in my life, poor physical health, and I couldn't work. Now with Horizon, I have been sober almost two years, I am a very happy person, I look forward to school and show up every day, I have amazing relationships with my family and friends, I'm healthy, and I have a steady job that I'm really passionate about. The Horizon staff and students go above and beyond to make you feel loved, accepted, and valued. The people at Horizon are like a family to me and everyone here has made me who I am today. I am eternally grateful for the second chance at life this place has given me and so many others.

Alex

October 31, 2023

To whom it may concern,



Before Horizon:
Did not attend school
Failing class
Substance abuse



After Horizon:
Attend school
Passing class
Sober
Working

Sincerely,
Noah

October 31, 2023

To whom it may concern:

Horizon changed my whole life. School was so hard before I came here. I went to 3 different schools. It was horrible. I hated going to school. I would skip every single day. I got into fights. I was an aggressive person. I was also addicted to using a substance that I would use for years and years and it was hard. I felt like school was stupid, it wasn't helping anyone but just making student's life difficult and ruining everyone. I wanted to drop out and I'm a senior now.

The first time I heard about Horizon I was actually excited to come. I was calling all the time, bugging my counselor at East High School. I even kept showing up to school just to know about Horizon.

This school made me happy, stop using and do work. I'm actually happy with myself. They made me love myself again, love going to school and doing work, the 3 things I never would've thought I was going to say again, but everyone there changed that.

Not all schools actually care, Horizon is different. Public schools don't care, all the kids there are so much work. The teachers just show up to get the money. They don't care if you graduate or not, they don't care if you walk out of the class or not, they don't care if you show up towards the end of class. When I first came to this school, I thought that I might not be able to stop using a substance, before I would be using it like every hour. I wasn't going to change for myself. I hated myself for how I would act, how I would see things and my life wasn't going to change, no matter how hard I tried, but as soon as I walked into that door at Horizon. It was hard, but I gave it a shot for myself and I'm so glad I took it.

The first week was hard but I knew I wasn't going to be alone and they were going to be there for me and they helped me. It showed me that they actually care about me and everyone in here. After that I knew I was going to love this school and I do. Horizon saved me and my brother.

Sincerely,
Cassidy Campechano

October 31, 2023

To whom it may concern,

I want you to know what the Horizon High School experience means to me. Horizon High School has affected my life in a positive way. 7th grade is when I first started smoking marijuana but I didn't start smoking heavily and constantly until 8-11th grade. My life before Horizon was filled with lies, anger, sadness, rebellion and doing things that I wasn't supposed to be doing at the time and age. I would always smoke multiple blunts in one day, and eventually it started to catch up to me. Smoking Marijuana everyday all day took a toll on my personal relationships, and my relationship with my mother. I hid smoking weed from my mom for the longest time until she eventually found out and our relationship went further downhill. She never approved of me smoking marijuana, the "addiction" was getting so bad that I was still going behind my mothers back just to smoke knowing she didn't approve. I would spend a lot of money just so I can smoke with either myself or friends. I started skipping all my classes, just sitting in the bathroom, because I couldn't focus and all I was thinking about was marijuana, then skipping classes went into me and my friends skipping school just so we can smoke. Out of all my years in high school from 9-11th my mom has gotten two truancy letters from my home school, and the second one she got was the last one she's gotten. This is when I transitioned from my home school to Horizon. My life now since going to Horizon has been much better, my personal relationships have been better kind of, but the most important thing to me is the relationship I have with my mom. MY relationship has gotten so much better ever since I started going here and actually being able to hold myself accountable and not just my mom trusting me to hold myself accountable without that extra help/push. I've started to open up to my mom more, because I really feel that's what our relationship needs. My best experience at Horizon was finally being clean from Marijuana and being able to tell my mom and just seeing her face light up with pride. That has to be the best experience I had here. My favorite experience at Horizon High School is group time which happens every Monday and Friday. It's where we talk about our high's and low's of the week, basically talking about how we are feeling and is there anything that we are struggling with and would like to talk about. Group really helped me open up to my mom, my friends, my classmates, and just in public. I think other teens would enjoy being here at Horizon, because they may have nobody to talk to or hold them accountable for their addiction, and I feel it's a second chance while in your teenage years.

Sincerely,

Orlandra Larry

October 31, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I want you to know what Horizon High School means to me.

My name is Tiah Meigs and I am a senior at Horizon High School. I have been here for three years now and I couldn't imagine spending my high school years anywhere other than here. Before attending Horizon High School I spent most of my days locked in my room feeling worthless. I stayed in that depressive state for a whole year, skipping school to get high and on the days I did attend school, I had to get high just to make it through the day. I lost relationships and friendships, but worst of all, I lost all respect for my own life. I didn't care if I lived or died. I was failing school, I couldn't keep a job, I treated my family poorly causing me to have to move away from my mom.

After a year of running from my addiction, my mental health issues and pretending it wasn't a problem, my mom found Horizon. If I am being honest, when I found Horizon I wasn't ready to change my ways. But the minute I walked in for my interview, I immediately felt like I was at home. The staff and students were so welcoming and truly brought the warmest feeling to my heart.

If I can tell you anything about my school, it would be that it saved me. Horizon gave me my smile back, it gave me a family, it gave me a reason to live. Horizon has taught me so many things from how to be confident in my education to how to be a contributing member to society. I am now an A-B student and I am sober and on track to graduate and go to college in the fall. I can truly say that without Horizon I would not be where I am today. Horizon gave me my spark back after being kept in the dark for so long. It not only gave me friends and staff that I could trust and feel safe around, but it gave me a family and people to love me even on my worst days.

My story is only one of the many stories of students who have been truly changed by our school. I hope that you've read this with an open heart and open mind and one day we can give more kids like me a chance to experience the true happiness that comes from being a part of our horizon family.

Tiah Meigs

October 31, 2023

To Who it might concern,

I would like you to know what Horizon did for me and what it could do for others.

The beginning of the school year in 2022 I was supposed to attend Memorial high school.

My mom tried to get me out of the house and to school for 3 months but I just wouldn't go, I would stay in my room

getting high all day because I had lost my older brother due to pills. So I would get high so I wouldn't feel my emotions. But then

my mom came up with a solution to come to Horizon, she had told me I had to be

sober but I wanted to start fresh so I ended

up going. When I first arrived I did not

like it but over time I kinda just stuck

With it. Traci and Madeline were a huge help with my sobriety and I'm real Thankful. Traci made me open my eyes to new things that I've never tried. I still was nervous about this school but Traci made it to the point where I could open up and talk to people just like me or people in the same route as me. But coming this year I've made a huge difference. I come to school make friends got sober and now I actually feel good about myself. But moral of the story Horizon is a great place for any teen's dealing with mental health and substance abuse.

Sincerely, Shuan Jr.

Recovery Schools Save Lives: Wisconsin Needs More

Experiences from National Experiences and
from Horizon High School,
Wisconsin's only Recovery High School

Presentation by John Fournelle,
Horizon High School Board President
to Wisconsin Assembly
Committee on Education

November 1, 2023

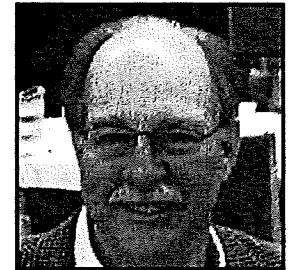
Why recovery schools?

- The Problem: Kids start to change drug/alcohol behavior, from a rehab program, but then they return to their old school—and to the old crowd and habits— and inevitably relapse.
- Recovery schools are separate, distinct schools that provide education, but critically are explicitly sober, and provide both individual and group therapy to support sobriety and address co-occurring mental health issues.
- Students must want to be there, to agree to drug testing and to engage with the school staff (group and individual counseling).
- The smaller, intimate nature of recovery schools provides a real way that young people can start to change their behaviors.

Nationwide Research on Recovery Schools*

Promising evidence is emerging that shows, compared to students in non-recovery high schools who have already some received substance use treatment, students in recovery high schools:

- have higher graduation rates
- report significantly lower absenteeism
- are more likely to abstain from using substances, and
- have significantly fewer days using marijuana and other drugs



Paul Moberg
(1949-2022)
UW-Madison

*Finch, A.J., Tanner-Smith, E., Hennessy, E. & Moberg, D.P. (2018) Recovery high schools: Effect of schools supporting recovery from substance use disorders. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 44(2), 175-184.

Recovery Schools in the U.S. – and Wisconsin

- 2021 statistics: 45 recovery high schools (members of Association of Recovery Schools)
 - Public/Contracted Alternative School – 21 (47%)
 - Public/Charter School – 12 (27%)
 - Private – 12 (27%)
- In most states, funding for recovery schools is minimal, and survival is tenuous (education dollars are not enough); average survival time is 9.5 years (though many only survive a couple of years).
- A decade ago, there were 2 other charter recovery schools in Wisconsin (Janesville, Waukesha), but they closed due to local school district budget crunches
- Alternative model: Massachusetts uses state revenue to support 5 recovery schools, with \$500k/yr/school, on top of education \$ and grants. \$1-1.5M budget/school. Very successful, with 3 oldest schools 17 years old. New York and New Jersey are following their lead now. Minnesota now provides recovery schools with \$125K/year for mental health counselors

Biggest Challenges to Recovery Schools

- Enrollment variability and smaller school size make the schools challenging and more expensive than traditional schools
 - Typically 1 staff member per 2-4 students
 - Many/most students have IEPs/learning disabilities
 - Presence every day of SUD/mental health counselor
- Thus it costs typically \$30-35K/student/year
- Recovery schools cannot operate on the normal educational funding model of counting students in seats on a certain day of the school year – new students start any day of the year.

Horizon High School's history:

- Horizon started operation in January 2005 as a private, non-profit, incorporated recovery high school following DPI rules
 - with a \$10K family donation
 - 6 students @\$5K tuition
 - For first 6 years, barely survived financially
 - In 2011, signed MOU with MMSD for \$ for up to 15 students
- Now we are a public-private collaboration
 - From 2011 to 2022, MMSD paid HHS between \$640-\$760/month/student
 - Starting 2022-23, MMSD is paying between \$960-\$1000/month/student
 - Other districts pay \$1000/month for students from their districts: DeForest, Middleton, Monona Grove, Mount Horeb, Oregon, Sauk Prairie, Verona, Waunakee, Wisconsin Heights
 - The majority of our funding comes from donations & grants from individuals, family foundations and local businesses
 - Small amount from Dane County Comprehensive Community Services

Evidence-based practices/interventions at Horizon High School:

- Smaller class size
- Peer-to-peer suicide prevention
- Self-care planning
- Life skills

And with increased funding, we would implement addition evidence-based practices

- Motivational interviewing
- Cognitive behavioral therapy

Results:

- Horizon's personalized approach, with daily check-ins, drug tests, immediate attention to mental health crises, all provide the basis for most students turning their lives around.
- Horizon succeeds in graduating students who otherwise would not have graduated (e.g., 9 MMSD students graduated May 2021, 3 in May 2022 and 4 in May 2023)
- 225 students have attended Horizon over the past 18+ years
- Students come back to Horizon after graduation—for some, it is a new family

Results of Recent Study:

The MMSD Institutional Research & Evaluation Office provided an analysis of administrative data on the 52 unique MMSD students served from 2017 through Spring of 2021.

Many if not most of the MMSD students were no longer attending classes. The documented 62% graduation rate is phenomenal.

MMSD Data Summary 2017-2021	Total	Percent
Average days enrolled during a school year	135	
Attendance rate		96%
Average GPA	2.70	
Average credits earned	6.84	
Suspensions before HHS	569	
Suspensions during and after HHS	8	
Graduation in cohort year*:		
Direct from HHS	16	31%
Subsequent to HHS	16	31%
Not a Graduate	20	38%
*N=52		
Asian		3%
Black		17%
Hispanic/Latino		25%
Multiracial		17%
White		39%
Female		64%
Male		36%
Percent Low Income		52%
Percent English Language Learner		25%
Documented Disability		71%

Horizon High School Numbers (October 2023) :

Student population: 14 (12 MMSD, 1 Wisconsin Heights, 1 Middleton)

Staff: FT Director, 2 FT Teachers, 1 FT Counselor, 1 FT SEA, 1 PT SEA, 1 PT teacher

2022 Funding:

School Districts	\$117,950	(34%)
CCS	\$37,582	(11%)
Donations	\$176,133	(50%)
Grants	\$6,884	(2%)
In Kind Donations	\$10,663	(3%)
Total Income	\$349,212	

2022 Expenses: \$409,122

Just think what more recovery schools would mean for Wisconsin teens

2019 DPI Youth Risk Behavior Survey. For 260,001 public high school students:

- 42,900 had their first alcohol drink before age of 13
- 77,480 currently use alcohol
- 51,740 currently use marijuana
- 35,620 have been offered, sold or given illegal drug or alcohol on school property

WI DPI survey 12/6/22 showed ~34% of students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for more than 2 weeks in a row, and Wisconsin teens are showing suicidal ideation at highest rate in the survey's history.

→ One potential mechanism: UW System OEO Recovery charter schools, under Wisconsin 2017 Act 30, which set up a framework and a rigorous application process, and would provide the LEA status for recovery schools to apply for state and federal funding (e.g. SAMSHA block grants).

Recovery Schools—besides saving lives—are cost effective

- In Fall 2022, there were 78 juveniles locked up at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Schools. The cost per day for a <17 yr old juvenile is \$982 or \$358,291 per year. That totals to almost \$28 million a year.
- The cost of 5 recovery schools, working with 78 youths, would cost the state 1/10 of that cost and have a much greater probability of changing the young lives for the better.
- Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Oregon and Minnesota have shown state-level funding for recovery schools is possible. Oregon has found the funding from annual state block grant funding from SAMSHA for crucial SUD and mental health aspects of recovery schools.

If you are interested...

- Check out www.horizonhs.org and view the youtube videos made by some of our graduates.
- Sign up on our website to get our newsletters and annual reports.
- Make an appointment to come visit the school: contact Director Traci Goll at 608-335-0387 or email ttgoll@tds.net
- We are ready and willing to assist groups elsewhere in Wisconsin to start their own recovery schools. We have >18 years of experience. Just contact us!
- Contact John Fournelle 608-438-7480 or email at johnfournelle@horizonhs.org

Some data from Massachusetts, a leader

Massachusetts Recovery High Schools Statistics

Location	Year Started	Capacity	Served in recent year	# Students any one time	FT Staff	Budget
Boston	2006	30	48	22	11	\$1.3M
Northshore	2006	40	59	41	15	\$1.7M
Springfield	2006	40	43	22	11	
Brockton	2012	30	42	20	8	\$1.14M
Rockdale	2017	50	26	14	5	~\$1M
	totals	190	218	119	50	
	average	38	43.6	23.8	10	

Most data (2018-2019) from a survey commissioned by the Mass Dept of Elementary & Secondary Education, published June 2020; Budget costs from Fournelle's phone calls to the schools in late 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Madeline Brown and I am the Clinical Substance Abuse Counselor at Horizon High School in Madison Wisconsin. I have over 10 years of clinical experience in helping people suffering from substance abuse issues to lead healthier, balanced lifestyles. When the opportunity arose for me to work in Wisconsin's only recovery high school, I eagerly picked up my life and moved for the opportunity. I did this because I wholeheartedly believe in the mission of Horizon High School and other recovery schools across the country. It is a common opinion among addiction professionals that it is imperative to help those suffering from substance abuse issues sooner than later. Substance Use Disorders are chronic, progressive disorders and early intervention saves lives. Recovery Schools provide this type of early intervention to support young people who are working to maintain sobriety. Our school provides a low student to staff ratio so we are able to support students in ways that public schools simply are not able to provide. As a result, we are able to support our students therapeutically when they need it most. Many teenagers in our state unfortunately do not have supportive living environments that foster continued growth and sobriety. Luckily, our school is able to provide life saving support 8 hours a day to our students who do not otherwise have support in maintaining their sobriety.

The average cost of treatment in a residential rehabilitation facility is at least \$600 per day. Many young people who meet clinical criteria for this level of care do not have sufficient insurance or the funds to cover this type of treatment. The majority of our students who enter our school would meet clinical criteria for residential treatment. However, due to wait-lists, lack of availability, and financial difficulties inpatient treatment is not an option. As a result of the support, education, and therapeutic services this school provides, every single student is now clean and sober.

Two to three times per week I facilitate group therapy for all of our students. I utilize materials from the Matrix Model of Addiction Treatment and Stanford Medicine's Safety First Program. In addition to group therapy, I am available daily to meet with our students individually to offer additional support.

Horizon High School is not only providing a robust education, but also life saving therapeutic services to fifteen local students who struggle with substance abuse disorders. There are countless students across the state who are in need of an environment like Horizon High School. Please don't keep our teenagers suffering in silence. They deserve an opportunity to get sober and stay sober. They deserve happiness and a hopeful future.

Sincerely,

Madeline Brown, CSAC
Horizon High School, Madison WI
madelinebrown@horizonhs.org

October 31, 2023