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# ROBIN J. VOS

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SPEAKER OF THE WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

Testimony on AB 305  
Assembly Committee on Education  
June 13, 2023

Thank you Chair Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Education for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 305. This legislation ensures that every child in Wisconsin has access to the best education. Every parent should have the ability to send their child to the school that best meets their individual learning needs, whether that is a public school, charter school, choice school, home school, or open enrolling to another public school. Assembly Bill 305 guarantees that no matter where a student attends school, the state pays a similar average cost for all students to receive a great education.

As a state, we have led the nation on the issue of school choice. Generations of legislators have championed the school choice program since its creation in 1990, which created the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the longest running school choice program in the country. To date, nearly 50,000 students participate in the Milwaukee, Racine or Statewide Parental Choice Program; because of the increases in choice payments included in Assembly Bill 305, school choice leaders around the state anticipate that an additional 20,000 seats will be available for students to attend a choice school. That is an increase of nearly 40%.

When you consider school funding, the cost to educate a child is the cost to educate a child. The school choice program shouldn't be short changed when compared to public schools. Assembly Bill 305 increases payments to charter schools, private choice schools, and the special needs scholarship program so that all students regardless of where they go to school receive adequate state support for their education. This additional support will provide more options for parents to choose the school that best fits their child's educational needs.

In addition to increasing payments for choice and charter schools, this bill also raises the revenue ceiling for public schools from \$10,000 to \$11,000 and moving forward, provides an increase to choice and charter schools based on the change in the revenue ceiling.

Assembly Bill 305 addresses funding concerns for public, charter, and choice schools. Students are supported more equally because of this bill. Parents are empowered to choose the best school option for their child and children are able to attend the school that educates them most effectively based on how they learn.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



## ONE CITY SCHOOLS

Date: June 12, 2023

To: Chairman Jagler and Senate Education Committee Members

Re: One City Schools support for SB 330

As the founder and CEO of One City Schools, I would like to sincerely thank the legislature and Governor for their continued commitment to K-12 funding, and specifically for the recent agreement to increase per pupil spending for students attending independent public charter schools. I also respectfully request that you support SB 330. The proposed increase in per pupil funding will have a very positive, timely, and needed impact on our two independent charter schools and students we serve.

One City Schools, Incorporated is a Madison-based nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation that operates three schools in Dane County, Wisconsin: a tuition-based independent, 5-star rated preschool serving 2 and 3-year-olds, and two tuition-free independent 2x public charter schools authorized by the University of Wisconsin System's Office of Educational Opportunity. One City Elementary School opened in 2018 and enrolls students grades 4K through 5. One City Preparatory Academy opened in 2022 and will grow to enroll Wisconsin children in grades 6 through 12, with grades 6 and 7 operating this Fall.

The mission of our organization and schools is **to seed a new model of public education that ensures children and teens are on track to succeed in a college or career preparatory program from birth through high school graduation.** We also aim to make Wisconsin #1 in cultivating talented young people who will grow and sustain our state's economy, and lead healthy families and communities, into the future. The funding increase proposed in SB 330 is significant, necessary, and will go a long way towards helping us fulfill our mission and commitment to our students, families and the Badger state.

Our parents choose One City for their students because they believe it to be the best learning environment where their children will thrive. We also serve a very high needs population of students who require significant educational interventions that far exceed the \$9,264 per pupil the state currently provides to fund children attending independent public charter schools. The current funding formula unfairly penalizes parents by funding their students at a level significantly less than what is adequately needed for their education, and much less than what traditional public schools receive to educate students they serve. The new changes proposed in

SB 330 go a long way in addressing this funding deficit and will result in a more equitable position for all Wisconsin students regardless of where they attend school.

We believe all legislators are concerned with the current downward trends we are seeing in Wisconsin's reading scores. In 2022, only 35 percent of Wisconsin's third graders were proficient in reading. Proficiency rates ranged from just 8 percent of Black third graders to 43 percent of White third graders. Multiple strategies are needed to address and reverse this trend. Independent public charter schools are an important part of this equation.

As an operator of two independent public charter schools, One City acts as an incubator of educational strategies that can be tested and deployed at all schools. In fact, we operate the only public schools (and independent preschool) in Wisconsin that are undergoing a comprehensive, independent longitudinal evaluation that is assessing the value and impact of every innovation we are advancing in our schools. Through this evaluation, and our normal practice of widely disseminating information to community stakeholders, we share the results of successful approaches and strategies with public and private schools to improve the quality of the learning process for all children.

However, without adequate funding, the success of our strategies and continuation of our charter schools will be at risk. This school year alone, we have had to raise \$3.7 million of our operating budget from private philanthropy (individuals, foundations and corporations) in order to close the funding gap for our students. This is not sustainable. In addition to supporting our students at One City, the per pupil funding increase in SB 330 will help strengthen a network of ideas in education that benefits student learning throughout Wisconsin.

In closing, I ask for your support for SB 330 so that schools like One City can continue their mission to close the achievement gap, improve reading scores and support the development of strategies to enhance the learning environment for all Wisconsin kids. With your support, our children will be prepared to tackle today's challenges, solve tomorrow's greatest problems and lead successful, happy and enriching lives as adults and parents in a rapidly changing and globally competitive economy.

Thank you,

Kaleem Caire  
Founder and CEO, One City Schools



## MEMO

TO: Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: Chris Reader, IRG Action Fund Executive Vice President  
Quinton Klabon, Institute for Reforming Government Senior Research Director

DATE: June 13, 2023

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 305, increasing per pupil payments for voucher and charter schools

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Chairman Kitchens and members of the Committee, thank you for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill (AB) 305. We are extremely grateful to Speaker Vos, Majority Leader LeMahieu, and Governor Evers for finding a bipartisan solution that takes both district and choice school funding seriously. If passed, your hard work will improve children's lives and Wisconsin's economic future.

Today, IRG Action Fund submits testimony in support of AB 305. IRG Action is the advocacy and lobbying partner of the Institute for Reforming Government, a Delafield-based think tank that works to give all Wisconsinites an opportunity to prosper. We support high-quality schools in all sectors but will focus testimony on choice schools specifically.

You already know the success that choice schools have become, especially for poor students. Despite making up a fraction of the overall options, most of the predominantly low-income schools in Wisconsin with the highest reading proficiencies are voucher and charter schools. They're getting top-tier results across the state, from Immanuel Lutheran School in Wisconsin Rapids to Saint Mary's Springs Catholic Academy in Fond Du Lac to The Lincoln Academy in Beloit. They are stars in Milwaukee; schools like Saint Marcus Lutheran, United Community, Mount Lebanon Lutheran, Saint Rafael The Archangel Catholic, and Salam Islamic are helping students defy the odds.

But the days when underfunding sustained them have long since passed, and meager federal pandemic relief has them gasping for air. A substantial increase in choice funding must pass. This is about survival.

Let's start with a fact that may surprise you. A lower proportion of students are in private schools today than were in 2000. Yes, despite the voucher program's growth and the pandemic pushing kids private, private school enrollment lost ground to public and homeschooling this century. Take out Milwaukee and there are 32,000 fewer students and 215 fewer schools in the private sector since 2000. 43% of school districts now lack a single private option.

Largely, that is because the voucher amount is not enough to keep schools open statewide. Compare the voucher amount in Wisconsin to school spending nationally. It is behind every single state's per-student amount, \$1,000 behind last-place Idaho. Some schools survive on private philanthropy to stay afloat and

do stellar work. The rest see their pool of teachers shrink, watch quality drop, and eventually close for good.

Now, charter schools are unfortunately folding, too. Penfield Montessori, one of the true refuges for special needs children in Wisconsin, likely shut its doors forever last Thursday. 19% of this Milwaukee charter's special needs students read proficiently, easily beating the state special needs average and topping Milwaukee Public Schools' non-special needs proficiency. While AB 305's funding improvements come too late to save Penfield, it would be a lifeline to the standout schools that remain.

Regarding the special needs voucher, the rise doesn't approach the actual cost of serving special needs children, but the significant increase is a striking statement to other states. "In Wisconsin, all children can access the school option that's best for them." (If you hear someone say that voucher schools already get 90% reimbursement, know that they're referring to a specialty program that serves literally 9 students.)

For those reasons, IRG Action supports Assembly Bill 305's additional funding for charter and voucher schools. This historic increase would keep private schools open in Bonduel and Sparta and give charters in Racine and Hayward breathing room. You saying yes would allow parochial schools to serve more complex special needs and show those children purpose. Outside of Milwaukee, this would allow many choice schools to live up to their full potential, a transformational victory.

While we support the bill, it leaves unaddressed some troubling areas that we must bring to your attention. We strongly hope that state budgets soon will recognize the different needs of students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program compared to Racine's and Wisconsin's, especially at the elementary level. The funding amount simply does not sustain the high cost of doing business, fixing one of the worst education ecosystems in the country, potentially needing to spend thousands on new reading curriculum, and getting -\$3,300 less per student in pandemic aid than Milwaukee Public Schools. This biennium, their results will plateau and teachers will leave. Without further support going forward, the best voucher program in the country will begin to fall apart. Nevertheless, we appreciate and commend you for the *terrific work that you have produced in divided government*.

Century-old schools like Holy Cross Green Bay and Salem Milwaukee seem eternal until they're not. Their results and communities can fade with the others'. You've already created an incredible story through this bipartisan compromise. Pass AB 305, and you'll perpetuate that story in the lives of children across Wisconsin; they'll grow up, take on skills and good character, and live lives that fill their parents and communities with pride. Thank you for the hearing today. Please support AB 305 as it comes up for votes.



## **MTEA Testimony on AB305/SB330 – Assembly Committee on Education, June 13, 2023**

Hello, my name is Ingrid Walker-Henry, I am in my 23<sup>rd</sup> year as a teacher in Milwaukee Public Schools and am the Vice President of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association, the union for more than 5,300 workers in the Milwaukee Public Schools.

The bill we are discussing today would increase taxpayer payments to private voucher schools that are not accountable to those taxpayers by \$1,100 for K-8 voucher schools and \$3,000 for voucher high schools. These figures represent increases of 13% and 33% respectively. As of this morning, Fiscal Bureau has not even had time to provide a fiscal estimate for this massive giveaway of taxpayer funds to private school operators.

Meanwhile, a broader agreement would make a meager \$325 per pupil increase to Wisconsin's public school students.

You're hearing from supporters of this bill that want to talk about equitable funding of private and public schools in Wisconsin.

Private voucher schools' special education costs are reimbursed at 90%.

Wisconsin public schools? 30%. The terrible deal that AB305 is part of would increase that to 33%.

90% special ed reimbursement for unaccountable private voucher schools. 33% for public schools with school boards that answer to voters. That is not equity.

\$3,000 per pupil increases for unaccountable private voucher schools. \$325 per pupil increases for public schools with school boards that answer to voters. That is not equity.

The hearings on this bill have been a who's who of the private voucher industry lining up for a victory lap to celebrate the biggest taxpayer giveaway to unaccountable private voucher and charter schools in the history of this state.

These folks don't want equity. If they wanted equity, they would be out advocating for 90% special ed reimbursement for public schools. They would be advocating to return per pupil funding to the pre-Act 10 commitment of keeping our state's kids school funding indexed to inflation. Instead, Republicans in this state have our kids behind by \$4,000 per student since they began their scheme to defund public schools in Wisconsin.

Don't be fooled by the people you'll hear talking about equity today – these are folks that want our public schools defunded entirely. This bill is the biggest step toward that goal since statewide expansion. If you care about public schools and our communities, you must vote no on this betrayal of public education and longstanding Wisconsin values. And if it makes it to his desk, Governor Evers would be betraying the trust of Wisconsin's public school students, workers and communities if he did anything but veto it. Thank you.

My name is LaToya Woods and I am a lifelong resident of the city of Milwaukee. I currently reside in district 4 Senator Taylor and district 11 Representative Drake. I am a proud parent of 3 school age children. Education is very important to me because I was taught at an early age that the quality of the education you receive as a child determines the quality of your life as an adult, based on my education journey.

I have been a part of a movement of parents who have been standing up for our schools on the issue of equal funding for almost three years now, since the last budget. We are parents who are out here trying to make the best of our limited quality options for schools, given the achievement gaps we are up against in our city.

Hearing how far we have come in this budget cycle is a game-changer not only for kids in MKE but in the whole state of WI. The issues we see plaguing our communities are in many ways a result of our schools being drastically under-funded. And the schools that are trying to provide higher quality options for our kids, like mine, Rocketship, are battling a much higher funding shortage. Closing this funding gap is the right thing to do for kids.

I want to Thank you for listening. Thank you for listening to our stories and taking them seriously. Thank you for taking them into account in your decision-making process. This shows the true power of parent voices, when we come together. You took the time to really hear us and not just let our voices fall by the wayside.

Thank you for not putting politics first, and instead looking out for our children and ensuring the programs that are helping them to become productive members of our society are receiving the equal funding they deserve to change the future for our kids and make sure they are not just statistics.

Thank you for understanding me as a parent and that these are desires, wishes and dreams that I have for my children. Thank you for being a champion of us and believing that we know what's best for our children, as their first teachers. You are creating opportunities for my child to live out those dreams. To live out their own dreams.

I want to thank the Education Committee, and especially Speaker Voss and Sen. Stroebel for being champions for this issue and getting us true justice for the future leaders of our communities.



# DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

## Testimony on AB 305

*June 13, 2023*

Good morning Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Education. I am very proud to testify on Assembly Bill 305, a bill that will provide substantial new funding to low revenue limit school districts, independent charter schools, and those private schools participating in Wisconsin's various school choice programs.

There will undoubtedly be many other people testifying today about the real-world impacts of this funding. I will leave it to them to give you the stories of how this money will change lives for the better. I will instead focus on the big picture and how AB 305 fits into our record setting, bipartisan education funding compromise. It should be noted AB 305 deals exclusively with funding levels and does not propose any programmatic changes to choice and charter schools.

Majority Leader LeMahieu and my co-author Speaker Vos reached an agreement with Governor Evers for record K-12 funding. A key piece of this agreement is the provisions before you in AB 305. This bill moves our school funding system closer to the Legislative Republican policy goal of every child, in whatever educational environment, being worth a reasonable minimum level of support. Public support for educational alternatives has grown significantly since 2020 and we ought to respond accordingly. Independent charter schools and choice schools are doing amazing work educating a wide variety of students, including many from challenging backgrounds.

AB 305 will ensure a sufficient level of funding for these education alternatives to survive and potentially expand, if parents choose to entrust their children to these institutions. After AB 305, and the historic public K-12 investments that will be forthcoming as the Joint Finance Committee acts tomorrow, state taxpayers will still be getting a bargain on education alternatives. Average per pupil funding for choice and charter schools will be less than the total public per pupil funding for any K-12 school district.

I know there are some members who fundamentally oppose the parental choice and independent charter programs. I also know there are some members who would like broad programmatic changes to the choice and charter school programs to let them grow and adapt without the handcuffs of many current law provisions. The breadth of disagreement about education policy makes the bipartisan compromise all the more impressive. AB 305 is a giant leap forward for the sustainability and growth of education alternatives. It is a key pillar of education policy in Wisconsin. I encourage the committee to support it. Thank you.



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Largely, that is because the voucher amount is not enough to keep schools open statewide. Compare the voucher amount in Wisconsin to school spending nationally. It is behind every single state's [per-student amount](#), \$1,000 behind last-place [Idaho](#). Some schools [survive](#) on [private philanthropy](#) to stay afloat and



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June 12, 2023

Hello:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB305/SB330. My name is John Humphries and I am the Executive Director of the WI Association for Equity in Funding, a group of more than 60 school districts educating almost 100,000 students across the state. Since the revenue limit system was established 30 years ago, we have advocated for fairness in our system of school funding. We have made progress, and I am here to testify in favor of this bill. However, there is a lot left to accomplish.

When the revenue limit system was established in 1993, no one knew it was coming. Some districts were spending a lot, renovating, buying new curricula, or outfitting new facilities. Others were fiscally conservative, with school boards keeping their local taxes as low as possible. At the time, Governor Thompson said it was a temporary solution, that he would fix the revenue problem in the next budget. That never happened. Increases since then have not closed gaps. Since 2011, the low revenue amount has gone up 4 times, with a total change from \$9000 to \$10,000. Overall revenue limit increases were \$550. The gap was closing, but not quickly. In 2011, you might remember there was a decrease in revenue limits—I will refer to this in a few moments.

Here is where we stand today: we have 125 of 421 public school districts getting \$10,000 or less per student. One hundred sixteen districts get more than \$11,000 per student and 48 lucky districts get over \$12,000 per student. AEF has documented major disadvantages for students in low revenue limits including higher class sizes, lower staffing levels, and lower college entrance rates. It stands to reason—schools that get less money per student can't hire as many staff and can't provide the same opportunities for their students as the lucky districts that happened to be spending more in 1993. We believe the system as it stands is unconstitutional. It's clearly not fair, and it impedes the competition you say you want to foster. It's a problem you didn't create but is one the Joint Finance Committee has clearly been trying to solve.

In this budget, AEF was careful not to ask for funding to be taken from districts at the top, even though many have been grossly over-funded for 30 years. We requested a \$1500 increase in the low revenue amount paired with an increase in the per pupil *categorical* amount that would help all districts cope with rising costs. We hoped you would have avoided adding revenue limit authority to all other districts so all of the low revenue increase would go to closing gaps. This

approach would have made bigger improvements in overall equity, and would have had almost 350 districts funded at the same level.

Nevertheless, this bill helps a great deal. It adds \$1000 to the low revenue amount, increasing it from \$10,000 to \$11,000. This major change will mean that the number of districts at the minimum amount will increase from 125 to 261. That's great news—about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all districts in the state will be funded at the same level! The number of districts funded within 10% of the minimum, in other words equal to or less than \$12,100, will increase to 339, or more than 81% of all districts. Again, these are major steps toward fairness and equity. AEF is excited for this improvement.

As I mentioned above, there is still work to do. By raising the revenue amount for all other districts by \$650, the bill misses an opportunity to close funding gaps more quickly. About one-third of districts will still be funded substantially higher than the others. Their average revenue limit will be more than \$12,500! If, in two years, you once again raise the low revenue amount by \$1000, you will add another 71 districts to the bottom so almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of districts would then be funded at the same level. That's better, but still not fair to students in districts at the bottom level of funding for more than 30 years. We have to ask, when do you propose to get to a fair system that equally funds all students? At the current rate of progress, it's going to take too long before we have a fair system. The legislature has got to make a bold commitment to fairness, to creating a level playing field. It's not hard—raise revenue limits only at the bottom and provide other funding on a per pupil categorical basis.

Two other notes about the bill. First, it ties choice funding to low revenue changes. I mentioned earlier that in 2011 the revenue limit was decreased, but unless I am mistaken, this bill guarantees that choice schools would not face that same kind of potential decrease. That seems unfair. If there is a decrease in revenue limits, shouldn't all schools share that burden equally?

Next, the bill raises funding levels for choice schools, in some cases to levels well above public schools. For example, Waukesha Catholic Memorial will get \$12,000 per student while just a few miles away in Hartland, the Arrowhead Union High School district will get \$11,000 per student. How is Arrowhead supposed to compete for students when they will get \$1000 less per student than Catholic Memorial? They will also get \$1600 less per student than Elmbrook and \$800 less per student than Kettle Moraine (funding disparities that have gone on for 3 decades). With this bill, not only are some public schools STILL funded much more generously than others, but now some private schools are as well. This bill adds to the inequities. This should give you pause. My members find it more than disheartening. They are quite legitimately frustrated and angry.

There has been a lot of misinformation shared with regard to private schools. I won't repeat any of that. I want to share some facts about the challenges that public schools face. Public schools deal with barriers and inefficiencies created by DPI systems, administrative rules, state and federal laws that we must follow. Our special education programs not only educate students with

disabilities and work with their parents, but also contend with significant requirements for documentation and regular in-depth auditing. We provide no-cost transportation to students in private schools. Here is an example from my AEF Treasurer: They spent \$785 for each student transported, with 44 of the 907 total being private school students. That's substantial. Public schools can only hire staff who are certified by DPI to teach specific subjects. Our budgets can only be solidified in October, well after the fiscal year has begun. We are required to use a complex and antiquated accounting system. These inefficiencies are caused by a legal and regulatory system that the legislature and DPI have created. AEF seeks a fair funding system to support equal opportunities for all schools to compete for students. **This bill does not appear to reflect your interest in fair competition and does not reflect the regulatory realities.**

If you want to fund choice students at the same or higher levels than public students, then please reduce the legal, regulatory, and cost burdens placed on public school districts. This would allow for a standard, per-pupil amount with adjustments based on regional costs and student needs. It would also erase the inequalities in public school funding. Wouldn't that be a great advancement for all students? AEF is ready for that conversation to begin.

Thanks again for your work on creating a fair and equitable education funding system.



June 13, 2023  
Wisconsin State Assembly  
Education Committee Testimony

Senate Bill 305

Chairman Kitchens and Education Committee members,

Thank you for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 305, which presents historic investments for thousands of Wisconsin's students. At the Badger Institute, we have supported the goal of having the State of Wisconsin view all students with equal value, regardless of where they attend.

AB 305 targets funding at three distinct groups of students who are currently funded well below their peers. Independent Charter schools, Private Schools participating in the Parental Choice Programs, and students enrolled in districts at or near the low revenue ceiling will all receive significant gap closure investments in their per-pupil funding.

The existing funding gaps for students in Wisconsin, some totaling thousands of dollars, force their schools to compete in a very tight labor market. Combined with inflation, many of the highest-performing schools in the state are forced to operate with very tight budgets and with far lower revenue than neighboring schools.

For many philanthropic and corporate entities, their generosity has been focused on operational budgets at schools as the state has chosen to fund certain students with far less funding. Instead, these generous entities would like to invest in expansion of these high-quality schools. AB 305 goes a long way in adding the needed revenue for operational expenses.

Thank you.

  
Jim Bender, Badger Institute Lobbyist



WISCONSIN  
INDEPENDENT  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
ADVOCATES

[Info@wicsa.org](mailto:Info@wicsa.org)

June 13, 2023  
Wisconsin State Assembly  
Education Committee Testimony

Assembly Bill 305

Chairman Kitchens and Committee members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on increased funding for Independent Charter Schools in Wisconsin, commonly referred to as 2x and 2r for their statutory reference. The Wisconsin Independent Charter School Advocates had a very simple request at the start of this process: The state of Wisconsin should view all children with equal value.

By making historic investments in students that attend Independent Charter Schools, Private Schools participating in the Parental Choice Programs and traditional Public Schools that will have a higher low revenue ceiling, Assembly Bill 305 makes significant progress towards closing the funding gaps that exist in our publicly-funded educational options.

We want to thank the legislature and Governor Evers for publicly committing to these investments.

Currently, there are twenty-seven public 2r/2x charter schools in Wisconsin, some with multiple campuses. We enroll nearly 11,000 students grades K4 through 12. With the advent of the Office of Educational Opportunity within the UW System, we now have schools in most regions of the state.

We look forward to continuing to provide high-quality educational options for families across the state. This investment gives us the ability to better support quality staff and operations both now and in the future.

Respectfully,

Howard Fuller, WICSA Board Chair  
Jim Bender, WICSA Lobbyist



**Testimony to the Assembly Education Committee**

**Assembly Bill 305**

**Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President**

**Wisconsin Education Association Council**

I am Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, an English and art teacher serving as president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council. I am here in opposition to Assembly Bill 305.

The Wisconsin Constitution calls for state funding of public schools to protect our democracy and ensure a high-quality education for every pupil – no exceptions. The historic increase in taxpayer funding for private, unaccountable voucher schools proposed in Assembly Bill 305 paves the way for expansion of Wisconsin’s voucher programs – at the expense of most students who attend local public schools.

It is fiscally irresponsible and puts children at risk to continue pouring tax dollars into unaccountable private school voucher programs that aren’t governed by locally elected school boards. Increasing taxpayer funding for private, mostly religious schools directly reduces resources for public school children, and local property taxpayers are not informed that their tax dollars for education are reduced through the diversion to voucher schools.

Wisconsin Public School educators are disgusted that desperately needed fixes to the low revenue ceiling for public school districts are bundled with the harmful increases for unaccountable private vouchers. We call on the committee to oppose the current language of Assembly Bill 305 and to instead support legislation to either dismantle revenue limits on school districts or to introduce fixes to address low revenue ceiling problems plaguing public school districts.

Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President  
Bob Baxter, Executive Director



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Re: One City Schools support for AB 305

As the founder and CEO of One City Schools, I would like to sincerely thank the legislature and Governor for their continued commitment to K-12 funding, and specifically for the recent agreement to increase per pupil spending for students attending independent public charter schools. I also respectfully request that you support AB 305. The proposed increase in per pupil funding will have a very positive, timely, and needed impact on our two independent charter schools and students we serve.

One City Schools, Incorporated is a Madison-based nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation that operates three schools in Dane County, Wisconsin: a tuition-based independent, 5-star rated preschool serving 2 and 3-year-olds, and two tuition-free independent 2x public charter schools authorized by the University of Wisconsin System's Office of Educational Opportunity. One City Elementary School opened in 2018 and enrolls students grades 4K through 5. One City Preparatory Academy opened in 2022 and will grow to enroll Wisconsin children in grades 6 through 12, with grades 6 and 7 operating this Fall.

The mission of our organization and schools is **to seed a new model of public education that ensures children and teens are on track to succeed in a college or career preparatory program from birth through high school graduation.** We also aim to make Wisconsin #1 in cultivating talented young people who will grow and sustain our state's economy, and lead healthy families and communities, into the future. The funding increase proposed in AB 305 is significant, necessary, and will go a long way towards helping us fulfill our mission and commitment to our students, families and the Badger state.

Our parents choose One City for their students because they believe it to be the best learning environment where their children will thrive. We also serve a very high needs population of students who require significant educational interventions that far exceed the \$9,264 per pupil the state currently provides to fund children attending independent public charter schools. The current funding formula unfairly penalizes parents by funding their students at a level significantly less than what is adequately needed for their education, and much less than what traditional public schools receive to educate students they serve. The new changes proposed in



To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education

From: Jerry Ponio, Legislative Director, Americans for Prosperity – Wisconsin

Date: June 13, 2023

Subject: Support for Assembly Bill 305

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Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 305.

Americans for Prosperity firmly believes in empowering students and families to make educational decisions based on their unique needs and aspirations. Our goal is to provide every child with the opportunity to thrive in a learning environment that best suits them, whether it's a public, private, or homeschool setting. We reject the one-size-fits-all approach and advocate for a system that values individuality and choice.

Last year, we proudly joined the Wisconsin Coalition for Education Freedom, a diverse coalition united by the mission of granting parents more control over their children's education. Together, traditional education reform groups, and non-traditional partners from the business and grassroots communities developed a comprehensive education agenda that caters to the needs of all students.

Assembly Bill 305 addresses the coalition's top priority of closing the funding gap for choice and charter schools in Wisconsin. Currently, private high schools in parental choice programs receive nearly \$8,000 less per pupil in funding compared to public high schools. Closing this gap and providing equitable funding is vital to ensure access to these high-quality opportunities for all students.

In recent years, studies by the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) have highlighted the performance of Wisconsin's charter and private schools in the state's choice program. Their findings reveal that many of the top-performing schools in the state are choice and charter schools. The report also showcases higher student proficiency rates in math and English language arts found in choice and charter schools in Milwaukee compared to traditional Milwaukee public schools. Statewide parental choice programs have also demonstrated greater academic achievements than traditional public schools.

These findings further emphasize the urgent need to address the funding gap for choice and charter schools. For too many students in Wisconsin, success is often based on their family's income level and zip code. Many find themselves stuck in underperforming schools or

## **Testimony of Edward DeShazer, Executive Director, Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy**

Prepared for the Assembly Education Committee, 6/13/23

Hello and good morning. My name is Edward DeShazer and I am the Executive Director of Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy. I am pleased to be here today to advocate on behalf of Milwaukee and Wisconsin's private choice schools and the students they serve, and to encourage your support of Assembly Bill 305.

I want to thank Chairman Kitchens for holding the hearing today, and to Speaker Vos, Governor Evers and Majority Leader LeMahieu for working together to come up with a bill that makes historic investments in the education of students across the state.

Greater Holy Temple has proudly served 4K through eighth grade students on the north side of Milwaukee for 20 years. In our first year we had 57 students. In the years since, we have continued to grow. Today, I am proud to say we have a student body of roughly 500 young people and 99 percent of our students are enrolled in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

This is not just a job for me, it is a calling — one that I have shared with my late father and uncle, two people instrumental in the development and growth of Greater Holy Temple. We have a mission to inspire our students to strive for excellence in pursuing a strong academic and Christian foundation to succeed in and contribute to the community. We don't take that mission lightly.

With such a significant percentage of our student body participating in the choice program, the increase in the voucher amount will have a major impact on our ability to increase teacher pay to hire and retain the best educators possible. The increased funding will also allow us to put additional resources toward educational programs to help our students grow.

I also would like to note for a moment the importance of the increase in high school funding. While we only serve students up to grade eight, our students graduate and then go on to high school. Without a strong network of choice high schools in place, our students can find themselves in the difficult position of adjusting to a different environment and suffering learning loss and other difficulties.

To summarize, Assembly Bill 305 is an important piece of legislation that will go a long way to ensuring our families have the educational options and opportunities they deserve. I encourage all members of the legislature to do what their leaders have done and put politics aside to pass AB 305. Thank you.



Good Morning, esteemed members of the Assembly Education Committee.

My name is Nataly Andrade and I am the Director of Hispanics for School Choice. I am delighted to be here today to testify in support of Assembly Bill 305.

Today I speak for over 52 thousand students and families that participate in one of four parent choice programs in Wisconsin and the 373 schools that provide a quality education to those who choose to participate.

School Choice Wisconsin has provided committee members graphics demonstrating growth in participation in the Milwaukee, Racine, and Wisconsin parent choice programs as well as the special needs scholarship program.

I personally was a product of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. I attended Notre Dame School of Milwaukee and was recently honored as their Distinguished Alumna. Financially this educational opportunity would not have been possible if it were not for the choice program.

I want to express my gratitude to all individuals who have advocated for the right to educational options. School choice allows families to choose a school that meets their needs and shares their values. Private choice schools are experiencing tremendous growth, not just in Milwaukee where people from both sides of the political aisle came together to authorize the first school choice program in the country, but all across Wisconsin with the recent expansions.

Our schools get results, and our students go on to do great things in life, but schools participating in the program are also facing challenges that limit their ability to survive and thrive.

There is a difference of several thousand dollars between what public schools receive per pupil and what private choice and charter schools receive in our state. With additional funding to narrow this funding gap, our schools could provide:

- educational support to address student learning loss
- better salaries for teacher retention and hiring new educators,
- more quality seats for income eligible students

On behalf of our students, families and schools, we ask that you increase the value of payments to private choice and charter schools. I travel all over the state helping connect schools and families from big cities like Milwaukee, Madison and Green Bay, to small communities like Mayville, Baraboo, and Oconto Falls among others. All students should have educational value regardless of the type of school choice they desire.

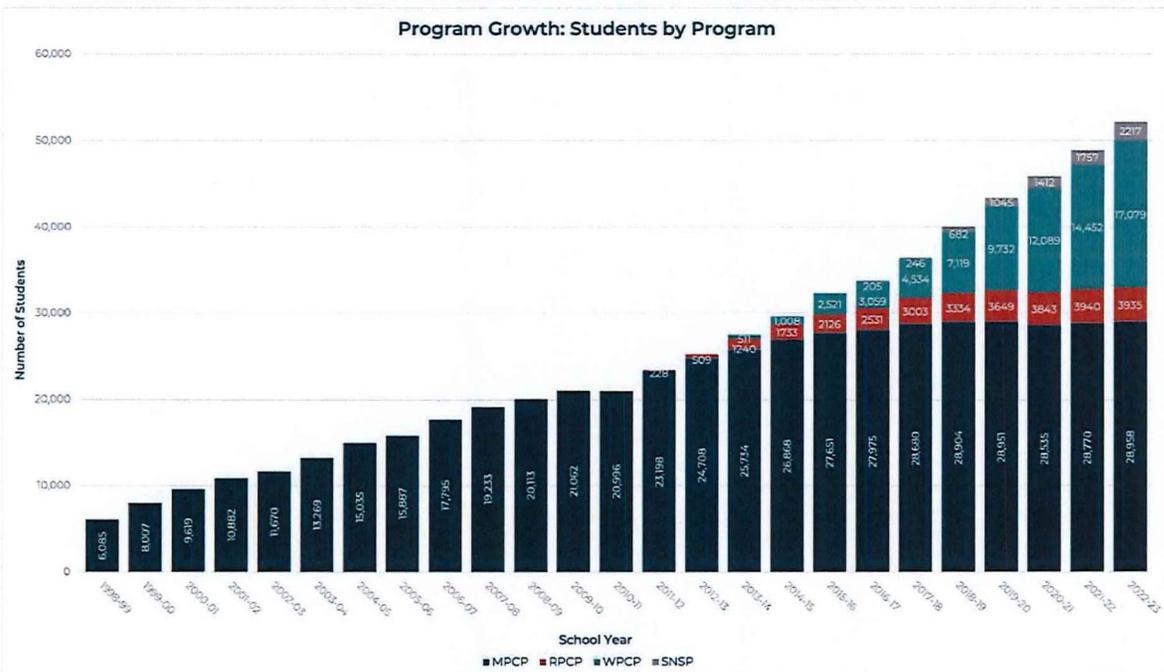
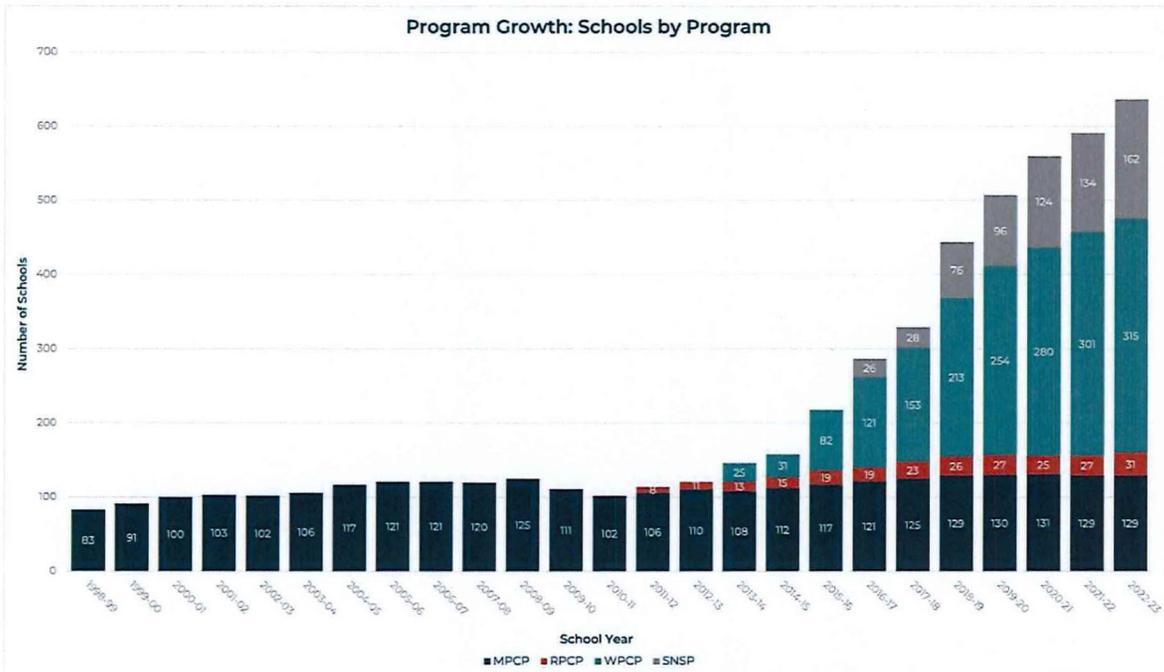
Please support Assembly Bill 305.

## History of the Wisconsin Parental Choice Programs

School Year	MPCP		RPCP		WPCP		SNSP		Total School Entities	% School Growth	Total Students Participating	% Student Growth
	Schools	Headcount	Schools	Headcount	Schools	Headcount	Schools	Headcount				
2022-23	129	28,958	31	3,935	315	17,079	162	2,217	373	4.5%	52,189	6.7%
2021-22	129	28,770	27	3,940	301	14,452	134	1,757	357	4.1%	48,919	6.6%
2020-21	131	28,535	25	3,843	280	12,089	124	1,412	343	8.2%	45,879	5.8%
2019-20	130	28,951	27	3,649	254	9,732	96	1,045	317	11.6%	43,377	7.5%
2018-19	129	28,904	26	3,334	213	7,119	76	682	284	19.3%	40,339	10.6%
2017-18	125	28,680	23	3,003	153	4,534	28	246	238	12.3%	36,463	8.0%
2016-17	121	27,975	19	2,531	121	3,059	26	205	212	9.8%	33,770	4.6%
2015-16	117	27,651	19	2,126	82	2,521			193	22.2%	32,298	9.1%
2014-15	112	26,868	15	1,733	31	108			158	8.2%	29,609	7.7%
2013-14	108	25,734	13	1,240	25	511			146	20.7%	27,485	9.0%
2012-13	110	24,708	11	509					121	6.1%	25,217	7.6%
2011-12	106	23,198	8	228					114	11.8%	23,426	11.6%
2010-11	102	20,996							102	-8.1%	20,996	-0.3%
2009-10	111	21,062							111	-11.2%	21,062	4.7%
2008-09	125	20,113							125	4.2%	20,113	4.6%
2007-08	120	19,233							120	-0.8%	19,233	8.1%
2006-07	121	17,795							121	0.0%	17,795	12.0%
2005-06	121	15,887							121	3.4%	15,887	5.7%
2004-05	117	15,035							117	10.4%	15,035	13.3%
2003-04	106	13,268							106	3.9%	13,268	13.7%
2002-03	102	11,670							102	-1.0%	11,670	7.2%
2001-02	103	10,882							103	3.0%	10,882	13.1%
2000-01	100	9,619							100	9.9%	9,619	20.1%
1999-00	91	8,007							91	9.6%	8,007	31.6%
1998-99	83	6,085							83	260.9%	6,085	293.9%
1997-98	23	1,545							23	15.0%	1,545	-6.8%
1996-97	20	1,657							20	17.6%	1,657	14.0%
1995-96	17	1,454							17	41.7%	1,454	81.3%
1994-95	12	802							12	0.0%	802	9.4%
1993-94	12	733							12	9.1%	733	20.6%
1992-93	11	608							11	83.3%	608	16.7%
1991-92	6	521							6	-14.3%	521	52.8%
1990-91	7	341							7	0.0%	341	0.0%

All enrollment data can be found at:

- <https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/choice-programs/data/mpcp-historical>
- <https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/choice-programs/data/rpcp-historical>
- <https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/choice-programs/data/wpcp-historical>
- <https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/special-needs-scholarship/data>



<sup>1</sup> <https://schoolchoicewi.org/programs/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://schoolchoicewi.org/programs/>

# CITY FORWARD COLLECTIVE

Please note our new address:  
700 West Virginia Street, Suite 604  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
[www.cityforwardcollective.org](http://www.cityforwardcollective.org)

June 12, 2023

## **Representative Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Education Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'm Brittany Kinser, and I'm here as the President & CEO of City Forward Collective, a nonprofit that works to secure Milwaukee's future by ensuring there's a great Milwaukee school for every Milwaukee child.

I'm here together with our Executive Director, Colleston Morgan, to express City Forward Collective's strong support for Assembly Bill 305, which enacts the bipartisan agreement on K12 school funding reached between legislative leadership and the Governor. I'm also here to express our gratitude for the tireless work of leadership in both chambers, including the bill's author, Speaker Vos, Senate Majority Leader LeMahieu, legislators in both chambers and their respective staffs, who together spent untold hours working to find common ground on this critically important issue.

As a founding principal and former Executive Director of a charter school network in Milwaukee, I know what a fiscally- and educationally-responsible school budget should look like. To be sure, charter and private schools have long been successfully educating our state's students – doing more with less – and will continue their tireless work to provide a high-quality education to every student.

But, I know first-hand that for far too many of our state's charter and private schools, their budgets are no longer sustainable – the funding gap has become an existential threat to their continued operation, and to the opportunities these school options provide.

This bill, and this agreement, will provide a significant funding increase for all Milwaukee students – and a historic closing of the funding gap for the nearly half of Milwaukee students who are enrolled in our city's more than 100 charter schools and private schools through parental choice programs.

It provides vital additional resources to all schools to better serve our state's most vulnerable students with special needs, to improve literacy outcomes through proven instructional methods, and to address the mental health challenges faced by all students.

Testimony as Prepared For Delivery to Assembly Education Committee  
Assembly Bill 305

<COLLESTON>

Each of the more than 110,000 children accessing publicly-funded education in Milwaukee, and every one of their peers across the state, are limitless in their brilliance, and boundless in their potential. I know this as an educator, as a former district administrator, and as an advocate – but perhaps most importantly, I know this first-hand, because I was once a Milwaukee student myself.

As a child, my mother made the choice to send me both to Milwaukee Public Schools and then private schools. Her first concern in selecting a school wasn't whether it was a charter, district, or private school – it was whether or not I was in a school that was safe, welcoming, affirming, and one that was providing me with a rigorous, high-quality education to prepare me for life.

Now, as a father to two school-aged daughters, I'm making those same choices for my own girls. And like every parent, my wife and I have one priority: to do what's best for our children. We want – as all parents want – to be able to choose the best school to unlock the brilliance and potential we see in each of our children daily. And, we want to know that when we do that, they're going to be in a place that has the resources they deserve, to deliver the education they need to thrive.

But for too long, that hasn't been true: for the growing number of Milwaukee families who are selecting charter and private school options, that potential is being limited by a persistent and growing funding gap, which creates opportunity gaps that sap their educational potential.

AB 305, and the broader bipartisan agreement on K12 funding, represents a generational opportunity: it will immediately narrow these funding gaps and opportunity gaps. And it will, quite literally, open new doors of educational opportunity to tens of thousands of students and families in Milwaukee, and across Wisconsin.

Education is an investment in our state's most important asset – our people – and a promise to our state's future – our students. Right now, we're not equally fulfilling that promise to too many families, in Milwaukee and across the state. AB 305 represents a wise investment of state dollars in a proven approach – one that will return results to our state for generations to come.

We urge you to support AB 305, and to deliver on our collective promise to our state's students and families by fairly funding the schools that educate them. Our city's kids – our state's kids – can't wait.

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Education is an investment in our state's most important asset – our people – and a promise to our state's future – our students. Right now, we're not equally fulfilling that promise to too many families, in Milwaukee and across the state. AB 305 represents a wise investment of state dollars in a proven approach – one that will return results to our state for generations to come.

We urge you to support AB 305, and to deliver on our collective promise to our state's students and families by fairly funding the schools that educate them. Our city's kids – our state's kids – can't wait.

June 13, 2023

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Education Committee:

On behalf of School Choice Wisconsin and our affiliate, School Choice Wisconsin Action, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 305.

Our organizations believe that all children have value no matter what type of school they attend. They deserve similar taxpayer support whether they attend private, public, or charter schools.

This bill makes substantial progress towards that goal. We applaud legislative leaders and the Governor for working together on behalf of Wisconsin children and families.

The financial support this bill provides will allow schools across the state to expand seats and improve educational programming. A survey that we conducted with the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty last year produced an estimate of 20,000 additional seats. That is a conservative estimate based on a response rate of about 50 percent and not taking into account the schools that are joining the program for the first time.

The support will be particularly welcome at the high school level. Current funding literally threatens the viability of several highly respected high schools and others said they would limit or reduce seats. This is a game changer that will provide a path to success for many students.

We have attached to this testimony a letter signed by leaders of 25 schools and school systems who also urge that you support Assembly Bill 305. They represent 11,519 students who participate in Wisconsin's school choice programs and they, like us, are extraordinarily grateful for this bipartisan accomplishment.

It is an historic achievement.



Susan Mitchell, Founding Director

Nicholas Kelly, President



June 13, 2023

Dear Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Education Committee:

We, the undersigned, represent **25** successful, and respected private educational institutions in Wisconsin. Our schools have **11,519** students taking part in one of four parental choice programs in Wisconsin and our total student population was **18,701**.

This letter is to express appreciation and strong support for the provisions in Assembly Bill 305 that strengthen the financing of schools participating in the choice programs.

The provisions narrow the substantial gap between taxpayer support of public schools and schools in the choice program. If enacted public schools would continue to receive thousands of dollars more per pupil in taxpayer support than do schools in the choice program.

The importance of narrowing the gap is particularly crucial when it comes to the viability of high schools. Free-standing public Union High Schools now receive nearly \$8,000/pupil more in taxpayer support than do high schools in the choice program. Without the meaningful increase provided in Assembly Bill 305, the availability of high schools' seats is at risk. Some schools would need to cap enrollment. Others would need to reduce enrollment. Not all would survive.

Enactment of Assembly Bill 305 would prevent a serious disruption in the educational pathway for thousands of students seeking a high-quality high school education. This will not only affect their academic aspirations, but will have broad, long-lasting consequences for the communities these schools serve. Upon graduation, our students are college and career ready. Private high school choice students outperform their peers on standardized testing year after year. They are less likely to commit crimes or interact with law enforcement as adults. They are the workforce and citizenry of the next generation in Wisconsin. Our state cannot afford to lose this high-value pipeline.

Wisconsin legislators have been national leaders since the 1990s in expanding education options for parents. In addition to private school choice the state has enabled charter schools to form and has provided parents with open enrollment options to select schools in a neighboring district. Assembly Bill 305 continues in that tradition of leadership.

Respectfully,

**Catholic Memorial High School  
- Waukesha**



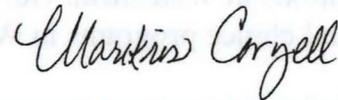
Donna Bembenek, President

**Lutheran High School  
Association of Greater  
Milwaukee – Milwaukee,  
Greenfield, and Hartland**



Cole Braun, CEO

**St. Joan Antida High School -  
Milwaukee**



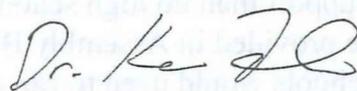
Marikris Coryell, President

**Eastbrook Academy -  
Milwaukee**



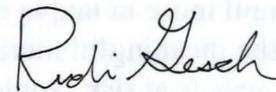
William Druliner, Executive  
Director of Administration

**Wisconsin Lutheran High  
School - Milwaukee**



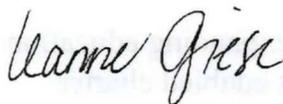
Ken Fischer, President

**Sheboygan Christian School**



Rudi Gesch, Director of  
Marketing & Enrollment

**Dominican High School –  
Whitefish Bay**



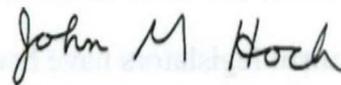
Leanne Giese, President

**Pius XI High School -  
Milwaukee**



Jack Herbert, President

**St. Thomas More High School  
- Milwaukee**



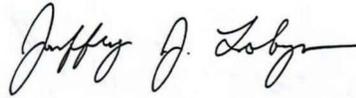
John M. Hoch, President

**Notre Dame de la Baie  
Academy – Green Bay**



Thomas Kiely, President

**Fox Valley Lutheran High  
School - Appleton**



Jeffrey J. Loberger, President

**Kettle Moraine Lutheran  
High School – Jackson**



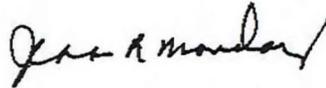
Jamie Luehring, President

**Marquette University High  
School - Milwaukee**



Randall Melchert, Administrator

**Marquette University High  
School - Milwaukee**



Jeff Monday, Principal

**Messmer Catholic Schools -  
Milwaukee**



Jim Piatt, President

**Divine Savior Holy Angels High  
School - Milwaukee**



Daniel Quesnell, Principal

**Shoreland Lutheran High  
School - Kenosha**



Paul Scriver, President

**Catholic Central High School  
- Burlington**



Brian Shimon, Principal

**Roncalli Catholic Schools -  
Manitowoc**



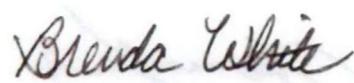
Barbara Strawn, Director of  
Finance

**Archdiocese of Milwaukee**



Bruce Varick, Associate  
Superintendent

**Siena Catholic Schools of  
Racine**



Brenda White, President

## **Testimony of Donna Bembenek, President of Catholic Memorial High School**

Prepared for the Assembly Education Committee, 6/13/23

Good morning. My name is Donna Bembenek, and I am the President of Catholic Memorial High School in Waukesha, Wisconsin. It is an honor and a privilege to be with you today to encourage you to support Assembly Bill 305, which is a critical and historic commitment to Wisconsin's private choice programs and the students they serve.

I want to start off by personally thanking the committee chairman, Representative Kitchens, for scheduling this hearing.

Catholic Memorial is a school of more than **576** students. About 15 percent of our students are enrolled through Wisconsin's choice program. The school draws students from over 40 different cities/villages and six different counties.

By and large, private schools in Wisconsin's choice programs provide our young people with the great educational alternative parents are seeking for a variety of reasons. The Choice program is a lifeline for many families. It may be smaller class sizes, specialized resources, our STEM programs – and more. Students from lower incomes should be able to access these options.

As a school administrator, one of my primary responsibilities is to work with our board of directors to develop our annual budgets and long-term plans to offer the best education possible. I can tell you with certainty that educating a child, particularly a high school student, costs far more than the \$9,045 voucher amount. Our current cost of education as audited is \$17,107.

The gap that exists between the voucher amount and the true cost of running the school needs to be filled through fundraising. But as demand increases, the gap has grown, so have the challenges. The gap also limits our ability to invest in key services. Added pressures include the reality of the teacher shortage and the increased costs due to the current labor market and rising costs due to inflation.

Quite simply, it costs a lot of money to operate a high school. Our school offers:

- International Baccalaureate Diploma and Career Path Programs
- Advanced Placement courses
- A robust STEM program and immersive course offerings in science, technology, and engineering as part of the Project Lead the Way curriculum; and
- Concurrent enrollment courses
- Career planning, internships, and project-based learning opportunities.

Students benefiting from the Choice Programs earn college credit and college scholarships, creating a long-term benefit for the state.



TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: Rachel Ver Velde, Senior Director of Workforce, Education and Employment Policy

DATE: June 13, 2023

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 305, increasing the per pupil payment in parental choice programs and independent charter schools

---

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 305. I want to thank the authors of the legislation, Speaker Vos, Senators Stroebel, Hutton and Jagler, and Majority Leader LeMahieu for crafting this important piece of legislation. This bill will increase educational choice throughout Wisconsin.

WMC is the largest general business association in Wisconsin, representing approximately 3,800 member companies of all sizes, and from every sector of the economy. Since 1911, our mission has been to make Wisconsin the most competitive state in the nation to do business. That mission includes making sure Wisconsin's youth are prepared and ready to participate in the workforce.

In 1990, Wisconsin led the nation by creating the parental school choice program in Milwaukee to bring education options to low-income students stuck in failing public schools. Since then, the school choice program has been expanded to Racine and statewide so that students throughout the state can receive a great education. Unfortunately, there currently is a substantial funding gap between public school students and choice and charter school students, with choice and charter school students receiving only about 60% of the funding of public-school students.

Assembly Bill 305 addresses that funding gap by providing additional per pupil funding to choice and independent charter schools. Not only will these resources allow these schools to continue serving their current students, but it also will allow them to expand the number of seats available to new students. This bill invests necessary resources into our K-12 choice and independent charter schools.

Employers are concerned about declining test scores in Wisconsin and students that leave the public school system unprepared for the workforce. Only one-third of Wisconsin students read at grade level. Additionally, one-third of Wisconsin 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and 43% of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students are proficient in math.<sup>1</sup> These poor outcomes are a huge concern for Wisconsin employers. It is vitally important for employers to have students graduating from the K-12 system that are

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<sup>1</sup> The Nation's Report Card (NAEP):

[https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/WI?cti=PgTab\\_OT&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=WI&fs=Grade&st=MN&year=2022R3&sg=Gender%3A%20Male%20vs.%20Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single%20Year&tss=2022R3&sfj=NP](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/WI?cti=PgTab_OT&chort=1&sub=MAT&sj=WI&fs=Grade&st=MN&year=2022R3&sg=Gender%3A%20Male%20vs.%20Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single%20Year&tss=2022R3&sfj=NP)

proficient in reading, writing and math. In WMC's most recent *Wisconsin Employer Survey*, conducted in January 2023, 85% of employers indicated that they are struggling to hire workers. As employers throughout Wisconsin have severe worker shortages it becomes even more important that their future employees have basic competencies and skills for the workplace.

Choice schools have proven that they succeed at preparing their students for the future. Choice students have consistently performed at least one point better on the ACT college-readiness exam than their public-school counterparts. There are also numerous studies on Milwaukee's choice program, since it is the longest running program, that show better life outcomes for students. Additionally, in the Milwaukee choice program, 82% of students attend high schools that meet or exceed expectations. Compare that with 20% of Milwaukee Public School high school students in schools that meet or exceed expectations. Similarly, in the Racine choice program, all high schools meet or exceed expectations. But, in the Racine Unified School District, only 25% of high school students attend schools that meet or exceed expectations.

That is why employers are supportive of expanded access to choice and charter schools, which this bill will help accomplish. They want to be sure that students have access to the best schools and the ability to partake in educational options that are the best fit for the student. Employers need students to graduate from high school with the skills to be a productive member of the workforce. Employers view choice and charter schools as valuable partners to accomplish this goal.

Wisconsinites have also been definitive in their support of choice and charter schools. In polling conducted on behalf of the WMC Foundation last month, 69% of Wisconsinites say that they support using tax dollars to send a child to the public or private school that best serves the child's needs. Wisconsinites also believe that it is important to narrow the gap in funding to ensure more equitable funding for all students, no matter what school they attend. According to the WMC Foundation poll, 59% of Wisconsinites support legislation that would narrow the funding gap between public school students and choice school students.

WMC is pleased to see legislators supporting educational opportunity for all Wisconsin students and we urge members of the Assembly Committee on Education to support Assembly Bill 305. Investing these resources in choice and charter students will ensure that all students have access to a great education and preparation for the workforce.

# EDUCATION REFORM<sup>POLL</sup> RESULTS

MAY 2023

**WMC**  
FOUNDATION

The WMC Foundation recently commissioned a poll to assess voter attitudes with respect to education funding and education reform issues.

The poll was conducted by OnMessage Inc. from May 9, 2023 through May 11, 2023 among 700 likely voters statewide.

Sixty-percent of respondents were called on a cell phone, and forty-percent on a landline.

The partisan voting behavior of respondents was 40.8% Democratic, 12.1% ticket splitters, and 38.8% Republican. The poll respondents were 51.6% female, and 48.4% male. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 3.8%.

# EDUCATION REFORM

## POLL RESULTS

**WMC**  
FOUNDATION

# 70%



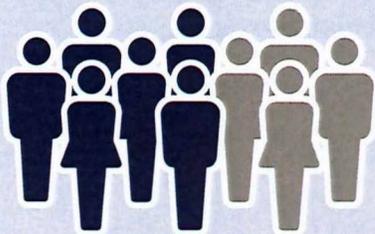
of Wisconsin voters support school choice.

School Choice has bipartisan support in Wisconsin – earning a majority of support from Democrats, Republicans and Independents.

89% Republicans

67% Independents

53% Democrats



6 in 10 Wisconsinites support narrowing the funding gap between public schools and choice schools.

# 63%



of voters support expanding school choice in Wisconsin.

# 74%

of Wisconsinites oppose plans for the state Supreme Court to make School Choice illegal.



# POLL: Education Reform Policies Popular with Wisconsinites

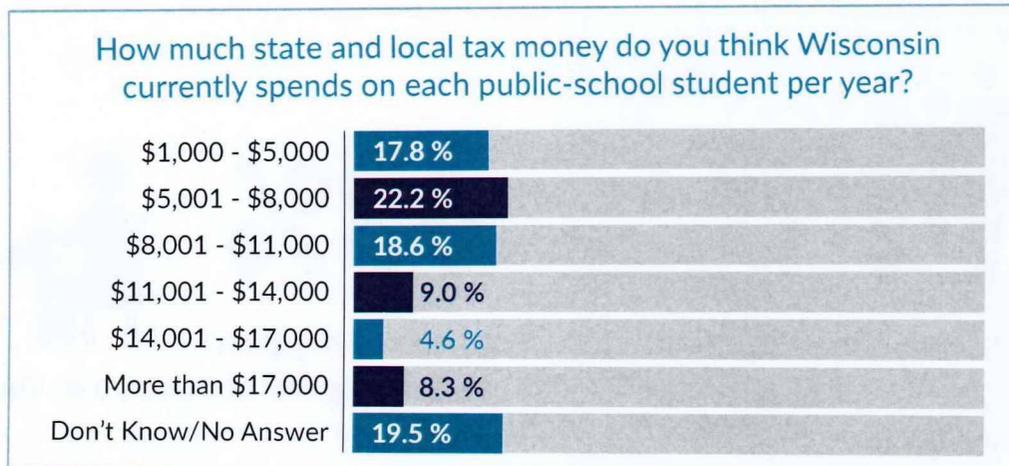
*70% Support School Choice & 59% Back Equitable Funding for All Schools*

A new poll found education reform has significant support amongst Wisconsinites, including narrowing the funding gap between public schools and choice schools, and expanding the state's school choice opportunities for students. WMC Foundation – an affiliate of Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) – conducted the scientific poll to gauge public sentiment on a variety of educational issues.

## THE POLL'S FINDINGS

According to the poll results, Wisconsinites overestimate the academic performance of students at public schools while simultaneously underestimating the amount of funding public schools receive from taxpayers.

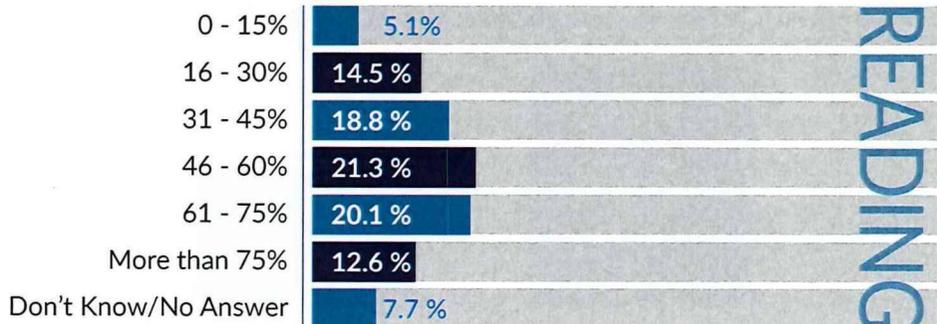
On average, Wisconsin taxpayers spend about \$15,000 per year on each public school student. However, 68 percent of poll respondents estimated funding to be less than that – including 40 percent of Wisconsinites who believe funding is below \$8,000 per student each year.



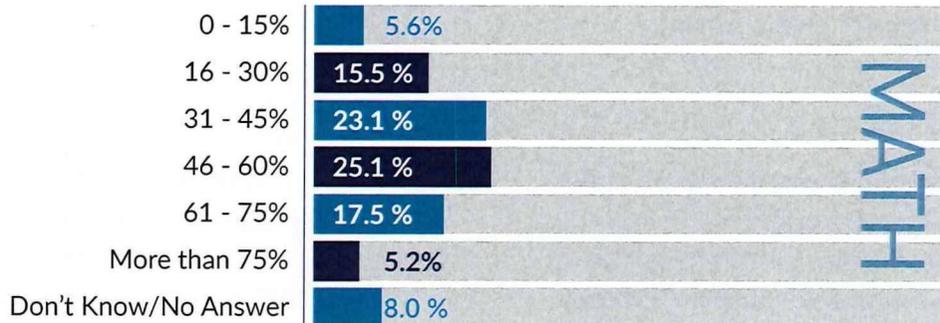
In contrast, roughly half of those surveyed overestimated students' ability to read and do math at grade level. In the 2021-22 school year, 37 percent of students were proficient in English Language Arts on the state's Forward Exam. On the same exam, 39 percent of students were proficient in Math.

When asked about proficiency, 54 percent of Wisconsinites thought students were performing better than actual in reading, while 48 percent had an inflated view of students' academic achievement in math.

What percentage of Wisconsin public school students do you believe are proficient in reading?



What percentage of Wisconsin public school students do you believe are proficient in math?



## SCHOOL FUNDING

Though Wisconsin public schools receive approximately \$15,000 per student on average from Wisconsin taxpayers, funding for choice and charter schools is far less. In fact, choice and charter schools receive about 40 percent less than their public school counterparts in per-pupil funding.

One policy being considered on this topic is to narrow the gap to ensure more equitable funding for all students, no matter what school they attend. That plan has widespread support amongst Wisconsinites. According to the WMC Foundation poll, 59 percent of likely voters would be in favor of making the gap smaller.

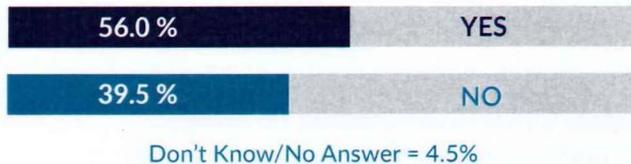
In Wisconsin, the school choice program pays about \$10,000 per student per year, while the average public school receives over \$15,000 per student per year. One proposal before the state Legislature is to narrow the gap between the school choice funding per student and the public-school funding per student.

**Do you support or oppose this bill?**

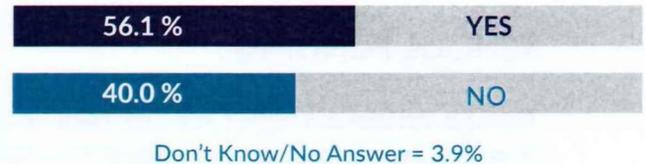


A similar number of respondents believe that not only should the funding gap be narrowed, but it should in fact be equal for public, choice and charter schools alike. Fifty-six percent of Wisconsinites said the per-student investment in both choice and charter schools should be equal to funding for public schools.

Wisconsin currently invests over \$15,000 per public school student each year. Knowing this, do you think Wisconsin should make the school choice voucher equal to the investment the state makes in children who attend public schools?



Do you think that Wisconsin should provide the same level of funding to students who attend independent charter schools as we do to students who attend public schools?



## EDUCATION FREEDOM

The WMC Foundation poll found strong support for parents directing their children's education. Asked if they agreed that parents, and not the state, are responsible for determining the type of education their children need, 74 percent of respondents said they agreed.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: *Parents, not the state, are responsible for determining the type of education that their children need.*



This sentiment drove similarly strong support for giving parents the freedom to choose the best education for their children. Seventy percent of Wisconsinites said they generally support school choice. When broken down by political party, there was bipartisan majority support for education freedom. Eighty-nine percent of Republicans, 67 percent of Independents and 53 percent of Democrats all support school choice.

Do you generally support or oppose school choice?



Don't Know/No Answer = 6.5%

**REPUBLICANS**



**INDEPENDENTS**



**DEMOCRATS**



When given more information about school choice, support remained. After being told that "school choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs," 69 percent of Wisconsinites said they were supportive. This includes 44 percent who said they strongly support school choice.

School choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs. Knowing this, do you generally support or oppose school choice?



Don't Know/No Answer = 2.7%

Wisconsinites also overwhelmingly agree that the state's school choice program should be expanded because it gives parents more control over choosing the best school for their family's specific situation. In total, 63 percent of those polled believe the program should be expanded. This included strong majorities for both men (66 percent) and women (60 percent). Importantly, support for expanding school choice was above 60 percent for every single age group in Wisconsin.

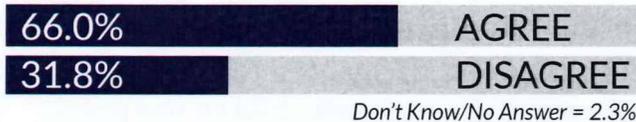
Notably, Wisconsinites are opposed to judicial action that would alter the state's education options. Seventy-four percent oppose the Wisconsin Supreme Court striking down the state's parental school choice program – including 57 percent who are strongly opposed.

If challenged in the courts, there would be bipartisan opposition according to the poll. A majority of people across party affiliations oppose such action. Ninety percent of Republicans, 77 percent of Independents and 59 percent of Democrats oppose the state Supreme Court making school choice illegal.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: *Wisconsin should expand its school choice program because it gives parents control in choosing a school and curriculum that meets their standards for their child.*



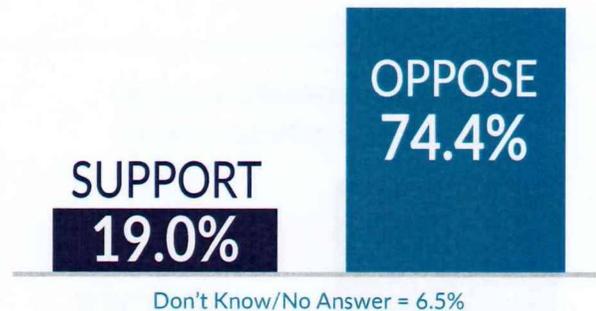
**MALE**



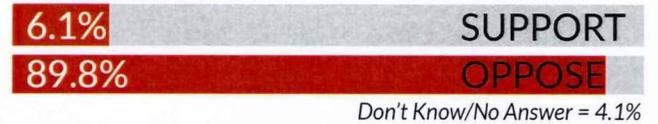
**FEMALE**



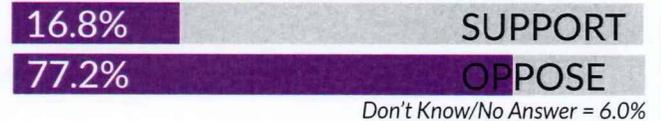
Would you support or oppose the Wisconsin Supreme Court striking down Wisconsin's parental school choice program and making school choice illegal in Wisconsin?



**REPUBLICANS**



**INDEPENDENTS**



**DEMOCRATS**

