



June 8th, 2023

Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 267

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 battling addiction 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.

Senate Bill 267 would provide some security for recovery schools in our state by creating a state grant program to help support their operational costs. The bill allocates \$500,000 each year of the biennium to the program, and the total is prorated evenly amongst the number of approved applicants to support existing and new institutions. The bill also requires the schools to submit a report on August 1st of each year outlining how the funds were spent, student substance use recovery progress, and other important academic information.

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 and the state senate creating its first ever committee on mental health, substance abuse prevention, and children and families. 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
Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov



June 8, 2023

**Senate Committee on Mental Health,
Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families**

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2023 Senate Bill 267**

I want to thank Chairman James and members of the committee for the opportunity to give testimony on Senate Bill 267 (SB 267). My name is Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and with me today is Monica Caldwell, DPI School Mental Health Consultant.

DPI is offering testimony for information only on SB 267.

We have continuing concerns that this bill appears to be an earmark authorizing up to \$1 million over the biennium to benefit a single school, Horizon High School, the only recovery high school currently operating in the state. While the bill is neutral on its face, it aligns with Horizon High School's structure and budget, giving the impression that this bill was designed specifically to benefit Horizon High School with no evidence that their program is effective at educating students or in addressing their recovery needs. Additionally, we believe this bill lacks adequate financial, academic, and programmatic transparency and accountability measures.

Continuing to critique the bill distracts us from the real problem. Our children are suffering. We can point to data like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey that tells us 18% of students seriously considered suicide, 15% made a plan, and nearly 9% attempted suicide. In 2021, fewer than one in four students who felt sad, empty, hopeless, angry, or anxious agreed that they received the help they needed. We can also look to our family and friends to see that our children need help. Evidence clearly shows a relationship between mental health needs and alcohol and drug abuse.

The financial and programmatic appropriateness of recovery high schools cannot be considered in a vacuum, but rather should be assessed within the context of a continuum of services. DPI is open to further conversations about the feasibility of recovery high schools in Wisconsin, but it must be part of a larger conversation about comprehensive mental health services.

DPI recommends increasing funding for substance abuse prevention and mental health services as provided for in the governor's budget or using Wisconsin's opioid settlement money to expand the provision of a continuum of mental health supports, including mental health promotion, early intervention, and treatment services in charter and public schools. Recovery high schools could be a part of that discussion as a component of the continuum of care.

DPI further recommends referring the matter to legislative counsel to review recovery high schools in other states to advise recovery high school program development in Wisconsin. We

would be inclined to support a fully funded and administratively supported pilot study to assess the academic performance as well as treatment measures in recovery high schools. Currently, there are around 42 recovery high schools operating in 21 states. Our research into recovery high schools showed that there is no definitive evidence either supporting or refuting the efficacy of recovery high schools to provide both academic achievement and effective treatment.

To talk about comprehensive mental health services and how a recovery high school might fit in to a continuum of care, I will turn things over to Ms. Caldwell.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about SB 267. My name is Monica Caldwell and I am a School Mental Health Consultant on the Student Services Prevention and Wellness Team at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and some of you may remember me from the testimony I provided on comprehensive school mental health in March before the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse. We appreciate the chance to share information about students who are struggling with mental health and substance use and need additional support to realize their full potential. We've talked about the data in the past and you've heard stories from many about how this affects local communities. Our state is making strong advances in addressing mental health and substance use in schools through a comprehensive approach that makes sense and gets kids back on track. I want to explain and connect how recovery schools are a piece of a larger systems' design that can help all kids who are showing signs of distress.

While investing in one specific school and a small number of students is important, we currently have a significant impact when we address a root cause of substance abuse - the mental health needs of students. Schools are uniquely positioned to provide programs and services that promote student health and wellness while removing barriers to learning. Many students will face some level of difficulty or be at risk for alcohol and substance use, violence, or mental health problems at least one time during their school career. And the evidence reveals that there is a close relationship between stress, mental health, and substance use, not only for young people, but for all of us. You may know a student right now who is struggling. A primary goal of comprehensive school mental health systems is to identify kids early and provide the support they need and deserve. Schools do this through offering screening for mental health or substance use concerns, similar to what a pediatrician might do for physical illness. Schools have core multi-disciplinary teams who look at screening results, referrals from worried parents or teachers, review data on attendance, grades and behavior, and encourage help seeking from the students themselves. Schools teach all students about the life skills that will promote healthy decisions and focus specifically on mental health and substance use literacy. And schools work with families and community providers to bring needed therapy services into schools for those kids who need it. This begins to describe the comprehensive approach that will benefit the kids you care about in your communities.

I'd like to tell you a common story that happens in Wisconsin high schools. An athlete gets caught drinking at a party and faces an athletic code violation. The family finds out and discovers that this, unfortunately, isn't the first time - there is a pattern of excessive drinking. The parent calls the school social worker asking for help and advice. The social worker offers the student some counseling sessions and uses a screener to determine the root cause of the drinking. The student is included at every step and explores their own motivation to stop drinking. Through this process,

the student and counselor may realize there is a history of depression and anxiety that is also having an impact on their life. Drinking gives the student a break and they don't have to think about the sad feelings and worries. This counseling approach is called SBIRT - Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment and has been funded annually with state funds directed to Opiate Overdose Prevention and it works. If this young person continues to struggle with substance use, the parents can find help for their child with outpatient services. This is the connection I want to offer...recovery schools are not the first stop in addressing substance use and mental health challenges for Wisconsin students. It may be a necessary and effective approach for a small group of kids in the context of the development of a comprehensive and continuous array of services in our schools.

While this bill is great for the kids that will directly benefit, recovery schools are only one part of what our kids with substance abuse disorders need and it will only reach a very few. Access to recovery services should be for all who are willing, not just a select few who are lucky to be near a place that can serve them and have access. I ask you to please consider the larger picture and provide funding to help schools to develop the comprehensive mental health systems our students need.

Wisconsin schools are currently attempting to fund mental health programs and address substance abuse issues through a patchwork of funding sources, such as competitive grants, limited term ESSER funds, and one-time sources of funding like the AODA grant and Get Kids Ahead. We know this from the data we've collected on ESSER III expenditures: As of March 2023, Wisconsin schools budgeted over \$30 million of these funds for evidence-based social and emotional learning and mental health strategies with most of the funds going to pay for additional staff to support student mental health needs. And as you know, those ESSER funds have a clock ticking - an expiration date that will come in September 2024.

The bipartisan support for school mental health grants over the last three legislative sessions has been critical to laying the foundation for school mental health with over half of districts gaining momentum in innovative ways to support students in Wisconsin. Thank you for your support to make this happen. Unfortunately, some districts still experience barriers in applying for grants and we now have a situation where some schools are growing in their capacity and others not, creating inequities especially in rural areas. Schools need reliable funding for comprehensive school mental health systems to address mental health issues and to be proactive in preventing and addressing substance abuse. We simply cannot have a support system that is dependent on a student's zip code.

DPI's requested funding to support comprehensive school mental health staffing and training *across our state will make a big impact.* We need caring staff and the opportunities for collaboration with community partners and families to make real change now when we most need it and to build sustainable systems for future students. The best funding models are braided with federal, state, and local dollars and we have many outstanding examples of this approach statewide. If you would like to hear more about what school mental health, including substance use, looks like at the local level, please invite us back and we will bring a local district partner so you can hear the stories about how students are supported in real time. COVID, lack of consistent funding, teacher workforce concerns and the lack of a systemic framework for holistic comprehensive support for

children and their families has created the perfect storm. And Wisconsin has an opportunity to move through this with an "all hands-on deck" approach.

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.

Horizon High School of Madison, Inc

Wisconsin's only Recovery High School

Presentation to Mental Health Hearing on SB 267
Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse
Prevention, Children and Families

June 8, 2023

Why recovery schools?

- Sending kids to rehab, then they come back and return to their old school—and to the old crowd and habits— they inevitably relapse. Increasingly, they tune out of being educated at their home schools, so they lose out there.
- Recovery schools are alternative schools. They are separate, distinct schools that provide education, and critically are explicitly sober, and provide both individual and group therapy to support sobriety and address co-occurring mental health issues.
- Many of our students have learning disabilities, which can be contributing factors to drug and mental health issues
- The smaller, intimate nature of recovery schools provides a real way that young people can start to change their behaviors. And connect with their teachers there, and actually start to get back into education.

Horizon High School: Wisconsin's only Recovery School

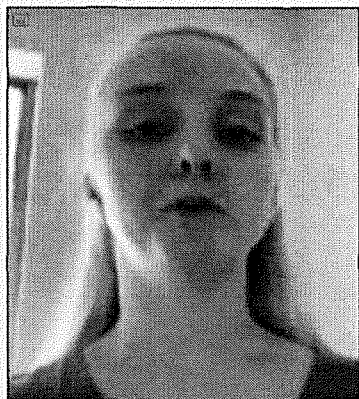
- Horizon started in January 2005 with 5 concerned parents & counselor, with 6 students and a \$10,000 donation. Incorporated as a non-profit private school. Barely survived financially, almost closing twice.
- Since 2011, have had collaboration (MOU) with MMSD, agreeing to take up to 15 MMSD students. Also students from other area schools.
- 205 students have attended Horizon over the past 18 ½ years
- 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 provides wrap-around services to the students
- Students come back to Horizon after graduation—for some, it is a new family

Students return to education at Horizon

- Many if not most students coming to Horizon have tuned out of their education long ago.
- Horizon's teachers are able to re-connect with students, and find ways to engage students, expanding their educational horizons
- Some academics at Horizon in past year:
 - Social Studies: A World Religions topic was suggested by students; guest speakers, discussions, research papers written and oral presentations made. "it proved to be one of the most fruitful courses we have taught, challenging both staff and students alike."
 - English: students are pushed in reading, writing, speaking, and language. They read a Shakespeare play as well as viewed it in person. There is constantly reinforcing of the importance of problem solving and good communication skills.
 - Aleks math software with individual assistance helps student pick up where they last left off. One-on-one assistance from teachers and special ed assistants.
 - Science class focused on human anatomy with *The Body: An Occupant's Guide*, and students were engaged, intrigued and shocked, in awe of the human body.

One measure of success: graduation

- Horizon succeeds in graduating students who otherwise would not have graduated
- May 2021: 9 students graduated
- May 2022: 3 students graduated
- May 2023: 4 students graduated



What one 2013 Horizon graduate says about Horizon's educational experience

“From the academic side of things the teacher, Ket really did an amazing job. He met me where I was at, since I have multiple learning disabilities. He helped me understand the material in a way that I could do it. The classroom was a really small size which gave me the opportunity to focus and have one-on-one help. It was also a fun and enjoyable place to learn. They also helped me far beyond academics. They provided me with a structured schedule that included individual and group therapy, life skills to be an adult, ways to have fun being sober, help with college application, touring the college, signing up for classes—so many ways they helped me.”

In 2016, Amy received her Associates degree in Human Services from MATC, and followed with Bachelors and Masters degrees at Arizona State University. She is now a licensed social worker working with adolescents.

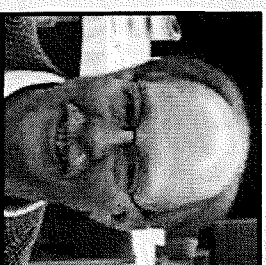
Results of Recent Study:

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%

Nationwide Research on Recovery Schools*



Paul Moberg
(1949-2022)
UW-Madison

Research on students who have had SUD treatment (in or out patient), and who either return to their old school, or who go to a recovery school, **finds that students who continue in recovery high schools:**

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

*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.

- Currently 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 survive 9.5 years (many after 5 years).
- A decade ago, there were 2 other charter recovery schools in Wisconsin (Janesville, Waukesha), but they closed due to budget crunches
- Alternative model: Massachusetts uses Public Health \$ 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.

Biggest challenges to recovery schools

- Enrollment variability and smaller school size make the schools challenging and more expensive than traditional schools--\$30-35K/student
- 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.

SB 267

- Can be an important step forward in providing initial funding to create more recovery schools in Wisconsin

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

Horizon High School's history:

- Horizon started operation in January 2005 as a private, non-profit, incorporated recovery high school
 - 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:
 - 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

Horizon High School Numbers (May 2023) :

Student population: 15 (12 MMSD, 1 Wisconsin Heights, 2 Middleton)

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

2022 Funding:

School Districts	\$125,318	(30%)
CCS	\$37,582	(9%)
Donations	\$175,007	(42%)
Grants	\$71,274	(17%)
In Kind Donations	\$10,663	(3%)
Total Income	\$419,844	

2023 Budget: \$508K

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. They have found the funding, some from annual state block grant funding from SAMSHA for crucial SUD and mental health aspects of recovery schools.

- Senator James has introduced SB267 to create a modest GPR grant program for state support recovery schools in Wisconsin (\$1M total over biennium).