



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE SENATOR • 19TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education

Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara

April 25, 2023

Hello, Chairman Jagler and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 74, an important piece of legislation that will help families and students attend the school of their choice.

Thousands of students across the state have opted to attend schools outside of public school systems. Enrollment in these choice schools has grown dramatically over the last decade. This has created an increasing demand for education options and with it the need for a smooth application process.

Currently, public schools have an automatic enrollment process which permits students within the district to attend their schools if they so choose. With there being no application necessary, many parents have found it extremely helpful not to worry about dates or deadlines with the public school systems. Choice schools do require such an application, and that has led to many families missing out on the education they sought for their kids.

This amended bill intends to change that story. For too many parents, missing application deadlines for choice school enrollment has meant that—in some cases—their kids were forced to attend struggling schools where their educational growth may be stunted. By allowing these parents two chances at enrollment in the spring and summer, they no longer need to worry about risking their child's education all because of one missed date. This would help reduce the risk of their kids having to switch schools for a year, losing out on time with friends, mentors, and teachers. Additionally, this amended bill will help address concerns related to residency paperwork.

These kids should not be forced back and forth between schools and differing education standards due to one missed date. I am hopeful you are able to support this piece of legislation which will provide some peace of mind for parents and their children alike by providing another opportunity to submit an application. Thank you again for your time.



SHAE SORTWELL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony
Senate Committee on Education
April 25, 2023
Senate Bill 74

Chairman Jagler and members of the Senate Committee on Education – Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on SB 74. My testimony today will focus on Substitute Amendment 1, which my co-author and I drafted following the Assembly hearing on this legislation last week.

Annual enrollment is often a pre-requisite that many parents opting to send their child to a private school do not always think about. Unfortunately, for my constituent, from whom you have received written testimony, and many other Wisconsin parents over the years, a missed deadline for re-enrolling their kids in the school choice program has meant their opportunity for a better education is limited or eliminated. And the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) does not allow any exceptions.

As a way to maintain a child's enrollment in Wisconsin's school choice system, Substitute Amendment 1 offers parents a summer enrollment period in July in case they miss the spring deadline. In general, a summer enrollment period will give more families an additional opportunity to enroll in a private school participating in a choice program.

Additionally, Substitute Amendment 1 eliminates the extremely cumbersome administrative task for schools and returning families to provide proof of their residency. Simply put, if a family has not changed its residence, it does not need to fill out the paperwork when re-enrolling.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this legislation and would gladly answer any questions the committee may have.

Senate Education Committee Hearing - 4/25/2023

Senator John Jagler and Senate Education Committee Members,

I am testifying today in support of SB74.

I would like you to imagine a situation in which the state of Wisconsin required a select number of businesses to make every employee go through a complete reapplication process for their position every single year just to keep their job. That situation would justifiably raise immediate questions. Why do some businesses have to comply with this requirement while others do not? For the businesses required to comply, how many work hours and business resources would be lost to this requirement? Why did this requirement even come into existence in the first place? As public officials, I am guessing that you can already hear the cry of the collective business community who would be affected by this.

While that seems like a ludicrous image to even contemplate, the state of Wisconsin currently places an identical requirement upon a select number of its schools while allowing others to avoid the requirement altogether. Private schools that participate in the Parental Choice Program are required by state law to have every currently enrolled student complete a reapplication into the Parental Choice Program every single year. This requirement must be followed in every last detail by every family or they lose their child's seat in the school. At the same time, public school districts are allowed to assume the continued enrollment of all students year to year with no additional requirements, applications, or documentation on the part of the school or the families.

This "private school only" requirement puts schools like Saint Lucas Lutheran School at a significant disadvantage. We are required to expend unnecessary amounts of time, energy, and resources into supporting our families each year with the application process. All of these school staff resources are spent on getting an application submitted for families who are already in the Parental Choice Program, are currently enrolled in our school, and desire to continue in their enrollment. This just flat out makes no logical sense. If this requirement were removed, we could relocate those resources within our school to better serve our students and families.

In addition to the school resources expended, the annual Parental Choice Program application process for our current students creates fear. Fear for our families that they will miss a deadline, a checkbox, a signature, a document. Fear from the school staff that we will not be able to help every family complete all the application elements in the right way and in the right time frame. Why does this fear exist? The fear exists because both families and our school staff have seen the damage that this requirement causes. Saint Lucas has lost families over the years who have wanted their children in our school for years to come but did not complete the Parental Choice Program application correctly or in time and have lost their child's seat. This is the most heartbreaking of realities when a child cannot get the education they need at the location of their choice due to an unnecessary requirement.

I would call on you today to eliminate a requirement that should never have originally been put into place. Allow private schools and families the same freedom of time and resources enjoyed by the public schools. Remove the requirement for current private school families to "opt in" to their own school. Create a pathway for us to eliminate the annual fear of a child losing their seat due to a missing element of a yearly application. I ask for your support for SB74 and close with this: Can you hear the cry of the collective private school community who is affected by this?

Mr. Andrew Baxter

Principal - Saint Lucas Lutheran School

**Senate Committee on Education
Hearing on Senate Bill 74
April 25, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Jagler and Senators:

My name is Amy Loudenbeck, and I am the Director of Policy and Government Affairs for School Choice Wisconsin.

First, I want to thank Representative Shae Sortwell and Senator Rachel Cabral-Guevara for authoring Senate Bill 74 and shining a bright light on a problem that is very real for the more than 52,000 students and 373 schools we support at School Choice Wisconsin.

School Choice Wisconsin isn't a think tank, and we do a lot more than lobbying. We have a full team of people in West Allis who support schools in the choice program. We help with compliance, onboarding, professional development, and *enrollment*.

The enrollment application period is a very, very busy time for SCW and for schools. Perhaps you didn't know, but the final deadline for enrollment in the statewide Wisconsin Parental Choice Program was last Thursday - April 20. And ***all students must reapply every single year***. If a currently enrolled student misses the deadline, that student loses their seat and their scholarship. Period. No exceptions.

It happens more often than you might think, and the stories are heartbreaking.

Committee members should have received written testimony submitted by several private choice schools. We also have one school here to testify in person. They know this process well, and on their behalf, I am pleased to testify in support of Senate Bill 74 with a substitute amendment to address the most pressing challenges posed by the re-enrollment process in a timely manner.

School choice is about allowing parents to choose a school that is best for their child regardless of their income or zip code. Requiring a tedious reapplication process every year puts bureaucracy ahead of families and puts red tape ahead of quality academic instruction and student achievement.

SCW, the schools we support, and our many allies applaud the authors' willingness to offer solutions to improve the enrollment system, particularly for continuing students who have not moved.

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Michigan Committee on Education



Our schools and families *and* the Department of Public Instruction spend an inordinate amount of time and resources to comply with multiple aspects of the reapplication process. The online portal has *thirty-seven* different screens to navigate. Current rules require *paper documentation that is not less than three months old to be submitted to the school for ALL applications, including continuing students. The guidelines document for schools to follow for processing applications is nearly 300 pages.*

We accept that an automatic re-enrollment provision would be challenging to design, program and implement. The DPI provided testimony at the Assembly hearing stating it would take two years. SCW and our schools would like to see something implemented more quickly.

In response to the timeline and other challenges brought forth by DPI, the substitute amendment was drafted to simply allow a parent to attest during online reapplication that they have not moved and allow DPI to run an electronic address verification on a state-supported data exchange. *No more paperwork for non-movers.* The current rules are archaic and unnecessary. A lot of state programs allow electronic verification to determine eligibility. In fact, some programs are federally required to utilize this type of technology to reduce the administrative burden on the agency.

There is also a second provision of the substitute amendment to prevent kids from inadvertently losing their scholarship, their school, their friends, their teachers and all the stability those relationships provide. The substitute amendment would add a July enrollment period for the statewide Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP).

I hope the committee will strongly consider supporting Senate Bill 74 and the substitute amendment. If SCW or I can be a resource to you or your constituents, we stand ready to assist.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer questions.



Senate Committee on Education
April 25, 2023

Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2023 Senate Bill 74

I want to thank Chairman Jagler and members of the committee for the opportunity to present testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 74 (SB 74). My name is Chanell Crawford, and I am the Director of the Parental Education Options Team at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). DPI opposes SB 74 because it could cause confusion for families resulting in different reasons why students would be ineligible for the program. It will also create new and time-consuming work for both schools and DPI.

Under this bill, a private school participating in the Wisconsin, Milwaukee, or Racine choice program may allow parents to use an automatic reapplication process until: (1) the student's parent submits a notice to the private school indicating that the student will not attend the private school under the choice program in the following school year; or (2) until the student is enrolled in the highest grade offered by the private school. Under the bill, if a school allows for automatic reapplication, the parent can opt to use the process or not.

Currently, parents are required to annually apply for the Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and Racine choice programs. Parents use the Online Parent Application system to apply for the choice programs. Schools use the choice program Online Application System (OAS) to process student applications. The DPI maintains resources that include information about how schools can determine whether applications have been submitted for returning students. Based on that information, schools may reach out to remind parents to apply who have not submitted an application. In addition, the DPI sends schools a reminder at the beginning of all application periods for the choice programs and prior to the end of the Wisconsin application period that parents must apply each year, that schools can determine if returning students have applied, and that schools may follow up with parents who have not yet applied.

The DPI recommends a systematic review of the three choice programs' application processes and any potential changes to those, along with input from stakeholder groups and schools, to more holistically address both the concern spurring this bill (families missing application periods) along with other areas identified where improvements may be made to benefit schools and families. As noted below, this bill could create more confusion for parents resulting in an increased number of applicants missing the application periods or forgetting to submit required residency documentation, which would impact eligibility. In addition, this bill will create significant additional work for schools and the DPI. Current processes exist to help schools reach out to families that have not reapplied.

- **Opting in or out of Reapplication Process:** Under this bill, both schools and families can opt in or out of using the automatic reapplication process by student, which may result in added confusion. For example, there could be confusion among parents regarding which

schools a parent may need to apply for their students each year and which schools the student has an automatic application. Parents with students continuing in the choice program that have automated applications will need to apply for their new students. Parents of current 8th grade students will need to remember to apply for the student for 9th grade, after not applying for years, because students may attend a different school for high school. Many families have students at different schools (elementary versus high), and these families will need to remember which students they need to apply for each year depending if the schools their students attend allow for automatic applications. This could result in more students missing the application windows.

- **Annual Residency Requirements:** Residency is an annual eligibility requirement for the Choice programs and needed for funding purposes for each Choice program. All students will have to continue to provide a residency document annually, regardless if they have an automatic application. Even with automatic reapplication, schools will need to work with parents to collect new addresses or confirm the student resides at the same address because the school will no longer receive the student's current address due to the automatic reapplication. Schools will also need to verify that parents are applying to the correct program based on their current address. These new steps for schools and parents could lead to confusion and result in many students not having eligible applications for the choice program.
- **New Administrative Requirements for Schools:** This bill creates new significant administrative functions for schools participating in the choice program(s). Schools will need to reach out to applicants to determine which students have moved and then update new address information for students into OAS. Currently, this is completed as part of the online annual application process. In addition, when supporting families, schools will also have new challenges, as they will no longer be able to provide the consistent guidance that all students must apply every year because not all applicants will necessarily opt-in to the process.
- **Administration Costs:** To implement this bill, the Department will have to redesign both choice program systems (the Online Parent Application and OAS). To support the increased initial and ongoing workload associated with an automated application process, the DPI estimates the need for at least two additional DPI staff positions (a consultant and programmer).
- **Effective Date:** This bill does not have a delayed effective date or initial applicability date, which means that if the bill were signed into law, it would go into effect the day after it is published (typically, one day after enactment). Given the time needed to redesign the choice program systems and create update resources for schools and families, the earliest the automatic reapplication process could begin is the 2025-26 school year. Applicants would indicate, when they apply to the Private School Choice Programs for the 2024-25 school year if they would like to opt in or out of the process beginning in the 2025-26 school year.

For the reasons stated above, DPI opposes SB 74. We welcome the opportunity to discuss changes to the bill. 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.



**SHEBOYGAN
CHRISTIAN**
S C H O O L

Scholarship | Discipleship | Citizenship

April 21, 2023

Senator John Jagler and Senate Education Committee Members,

Firstly, thank you for your hard work to make education in Wisconsin better for all involved. You typically hold “thankless” positions, and I’d like to rectify that: Thank you!

I represent Sheboygan Christian School in Sheboygan, WI. We are a P-12 Christian school that participates in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP).

We project that next year’s enrollment will include at least 211 students participating in the WPCP. This is in addition to 281 traditional/tuition-paying students. The WPCP has been transformational in the lives of many of our students, granting them access to an education that aligns with their family’s values, and a partnership that allows parental involvement- both key indicators of student academic success!

There’s at least one current sticking point with the WPCP- the fact that families need to verify themselves every year to their school. Education represents a partnership between the parent and the school. For schools like Sheboygan Christian School, this partnership means that we are committing to educating their child until he or she graduates from high school (or until the family determines that we are no longer their choice for education). And unfortunately, even though the vast majority of WPCP students return to SCS year in and year out, there’s this annoying chore of annually verifying your home address with your school. While this may seem like a small ask, today’s families are incredibly busy and are increasingly looking for “set it and forget it” lives.

Simply put, our WPCP families call Sheboygan Christian School “my school.” They have no intention of disenrolling from our school... and in the rare cases that they do, they tell us. Parents with children enrolled in public schools don’t have to go through a laborious annual re-enrollment process, and in the spirit of fairness, neither should our WPCP families.

Thank you for your support of bill SB74, the “Auto re-enrollment Bill.” When passed, this bill would better represent the spirit of school choice, make school choice students and parents lives’ easier, and help participant schools more effectively work and prepare to educate our great state’s next generation.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you to answer any questions that you might have about what the “front lines” of working in the WPCP is like. My enrollment team spends countless hours annually trying to track down required information for our WPCP students every year!

Sincerely,

Rudi Gesch
Director of Marketing & Enrollment

Director of Marketing & Enrollment
Elliott Green

Dear Family,

Thank you for the information provided to our MSCB regarding your child's education. We are pleased to hear that you are considering the MSCB as a potential option for your child's education. We will be in touch with you again in the near future regarding the enrollment process.

We are currently accepting applications for the 2023-2024 school year. We will be in touch with you again in the near future regarding the enrollment process. We will be in touch with you again in the near future regarding the enrollment process.

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Thank you for your interest in the MSCB.

We are currently accepting applications for the 2023-2024 school year. We will be in touch with you again in the near future regarding the enrollment process.

Sincerely,

Elliott Green
Director of Marketing & Enrollment



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April 21, 2023

Dear Senator John Jagler and Senate Education Committee Members,

As the Choice Administrator for Seton Catholic Schools, which is comprised of twelve schools, I fully support Bill SB74 that would allow for automatic re-enrollment of continuing Private School Choice Program students. Each year, we have examples of returning students who are eligible to continue in the program and yet lose their voucher due to missing an application deadline.

Our schools, are a family of 12 K-8 parish Catholic schools in Greater Milwaukee, educating 3,000 students, with 80% of students economically disadvantaged and 85% students of color. We invest significantly in academic development of our students and have Six 5-star schools as rated by DPI's report cards, and our average student academic growth was 132% in Math and 128% in English Language Arts last year.

There are multiple examples of Private School Choice Applications that were determined ineligible due to the re-enrollment process and thus have caused multiple students to have their education disrupted by losing their seats in their current school.

For Example:

- Changing of the street name example; "Old World Third Street" now "Dr. Martin Luther King Drive."
 - DPI requires the proof of residency document to show the new street name. The first year after the change, DPI accepted a letter from the City of Milwaukee stating the change in street name. Now that it has been over a year since the change, families are required to have their proof of residency document list "Dr. Martin Luther King Drive" as the street name. Getting the street named changed on utility bills or other documentation can be a difficult and time-consuming endeavor for parents who are not native English speakers and are not comfortable using technology. The time it takes for them to accomplish this causes them to miss application deadlines.

Application and correction windows examples;

- Application periods for applications submitted after the 15th of each month. (only a 5-day window) difficult to obtain the residency documentation before the end of the open application period.
- Parents not submitting acceptable documents within the allowed correction window thus missing the deadline.



- The dates on the document provided by the parent fall outside the DPI designated 3-month window.
- Returning students were waitlisted because they did not complete the application during the first open application period and the class filled up with the addition of new students.

Residency documentation examples;

Some parents do not submit the residency documentation immediately after completing the online application. Oftentimes parents provide different documents for residency proof each year and the new documents may not meet DPI requirements. This causes the deadline to be missed in many cases because the first item submitted is not acceptable and needs to be corrected. Causes of this include:

- Parent name that did not match the proof of residency.
- Misspelled or multiple last names.
- Abbreviations or hyphens in names - some official documents have the students name hyphenated while others do not. Ex. a birth certificate may not have the last name hyphenated, while the baptismal certificate may have it that way.
- Street directions (North, South, etc.) do not match or are missing.
- City (the document has county and not the city) does not match.
- Partial or illegible documentation provided (parent takes a picture and sends a portion of or a blurry picture of the document).
- Unacceptable forms of proof of residency documentation submitted.

Municipal address example;

- A family participating in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program must go to City Hall each year to get a letter stating that their address appears on documentation to be in Milwaukee; however, the residence is in Franklin. The mailing address city is not the city in which the family resides. They have a Milwaukee mailing address, because of the post office parameters for handling mail, but the home is in Franklin and the family pays property taxes to the City of Franklin.

This is a time-consuming task that is the cause of unnecessary time spent for a family. And it often takes multiple attempts to get the correction documents required by DPI. For many of our families English is their second language and they are not comfortable with technology. This causes a major delay in the process of getting students accepted into the Choice Program and results in a disruption to the student's education.



In addition to the burden this places on families, on average, our twelve schools estimate that their staff would save 400-500 hours during every school year if continuing Private School Choice Program students are automatically re-enrolled.

Bill SB74 would provide a major reduction in work for school staff as well as that of parents. The passing of the bill allows schools to focus their resources on the important work that more directly benefits our students.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Leung".

Julie Leung

Seton Director of Regulatory Affairs, Compliance, and Systems



April 23, 2023

To: Senator John Jagler and Senate Education Committee Members
RE: SB74

Dear Senators:

Please accept this letter in support of SB74 coming before the Senate Education Committee. A bill that allows parents and guardians of pupils participating in any of the parental choice programs to use an automatic application process to attend their private school in subsequent school years will provide significant value to the families and the participating schools.

Many of the families benefiting from the program risk losing their voucher if they miss the WPCP deadline, then the grade level entry point preventing future participation. This is not because families are careless. The households benefiting from WPCP are often run by individuals managing multi-generational homes, working hard to make ends meet and struggling with language barriers.

The detailed nature of the residency documentation that parents must prove annually, even when they have not moved is onerous. For instance, DPI's reminder to schools about the end of the WPCP period cites their resources to help with application verification – 296 pages, if my count is correct! Our staff tries to compensate for this by investing numerous hours of time which could be invested in much more productive ways for the benefit of the families we serve.

We have seen lives changed due to the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program. The impact for families is inspirational and protecting the voucher for the enrolled families will make the program stronger and the impact deeper.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. I urge passing of SB74.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donna'.

Donna M. Bembenek
President



SHORELAND
LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Senator Jagler and Senate Education Committee Members,

On behalf of the Shoreland team, I write to encourage you to support SB74. The time spent working with families to complete the re-enrollment process takes away from valuable time needed in providing quality customer service and support for the education process. 63% of our students enroll through the School Choice program. Based on our current enrollment that means 263 students will need to re-enroll in the School Choice program under current law. We have two people dedicated to making sure each family gets a chance to return to the school the following school year. It is a process that takes a great deal of time and effort. Since you may not have had the opportunity to experience this, I have asked our team to describe the process we have to go through for 263 students.

- Process the proof of residency which consists of comparing the name and address on the document to what is in the OAS, making sure the date of the document is correct, proving the school district through one of 3 online programs, and marking them complete in the OAS.
- Contact the parent whose proof of residency isn't acceptable through the DPI guidelines via email or phone calls (multiple times)
- Create a file for each student with the documents mentioned above
- Compare the returning students with the OAS to make sure that all have re-applied
- Contact parents of those students who have not applied via email and phone calls (multiple times)
- Contact parents of those who applied but did not submit their proof of residency via email or phone calls (multiple times)
- The DPI training to be a designee takes approximately 8-12 hours through the online training

As you can see, the process and the time involved is extensive. While hours are being spent making sure all students are re-enrolled, other key aspects of supporting quality education are pushed aside.

While this is an issue, the biggest tragedy that results from the process is families who disqualify themselves from the program by missing deadlines in returning proof of residency documents. In Spite of all the time and effort put in by our team in encouraging families to meet the requirements of state law, we have had to make some very difficult phone calls to families who have lost their seats in the program.

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SHORELAND

LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL

Please support SB74. It is important that families who choose a school through the School Choice program are not required to do more than those who choose the local public school to re-enroll their child each year for school.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Paul Scriver, President

Susan Scriver, School Choice Designee, Registrar, Student Services Support, Test Coordinator

Lisa Fink, School Choice Designee, Administrative Assistant to the Principal and Dean of Students, Main Office Manager

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