



## **School Administrators Alliance**

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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**TO:** Assembly Committee on Education  
**FROM:** John Forester, Executive Director  
**DATE:** August 3, 2017  
**RE:** AB 427 – Comprehensive Firearm Education for High School Pupils

The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) is testifying for information only on Assembly Bill 427, relating to comprehensive firearm education for high school pupils.

AB 427 requires the state superintendent to develop curriculum for a comprehensive firearm education course to be offered as an elective to high school pupils. The curriculum must be jointly developed with the Department of Natural Resources, a law enforcement agency, or an organization that specializes in firearms safety or that certifies firearms instructors. The bill also requires that, if a school district does offer such a course, the course must be taught or supervised by an individual who demonstrates proof of training in firearms safety.

The bill does not require a school district to offer the course, and that is why we are testifying for information only today. If the bill did include any type of instructional mandate, we would be opposed.

In anticipation of this hearing, I sought input on AB 427 from a broad cross-section of SAA members. I'd like to share with you some of their thoughts on the bill.

First of all, we are unsure of the problem the bill seeks to solve. In their co-sponsorship memo, the authors indicate that some students participating in trap and target shooting clubs have not taken a hunter safety course or may not be well versed in Wisconsin's sporting heritage. But it does not appear the authors are suggesting that there is a shortage of hunter safety courses in Wisconsin. What's more, we believe that school districts already have the authority to offer a firearms safety course, in response to the needs of their students and their community. In fact, quite a number of superintendents have shared with me that their districts provide space for the hunter safety course during summer school or outside of the normal instructional day.

Several SAA members have also suggested that, given how tightly most high schools schedule their course offerings, the reality is that if you add this course as an elective you will likely have to remove another elective academic course offering.

Finally, in the past couple of weeks, a few people, including a couple inside this building, have asked me "Why do you care about this bill at all? It doesn't require schools to do anything." But,

I guess I'm still idealistic enough to believe that that reason, in and of itself, is not a good enough reason for this bill to become the law of the land here in Wisconsin.

Our educators in Wisconsin face some enormous challenges in meeting the objectives we have for K-12 education. In a nutshell, I would characterize these primary objectives as follows:

- To improve student achievement for all students.
- To close those stubborn achievement gaps.
- To make sure all Wisconsin students graduate college and career ready.

We currently have lots of statutory requirements directed at schools, some that help schools to achieve these objectives and some that don't. Every legislative session we see several bills that would create new instructional mandates. And we all know that there are scores of interest groups that believe that schools should be providing children with instruction in many new subject areas in order to meet laudable public policy goals. In short, these proposals, if adopted, would lead school districts to take time, money and focus away from their primary objectives.

Mr. Chairman, you know that I have great respect for the work of this committee and the challenges you face. I see this committee as the gatekeeper in the Assembly for education policy. As such, I would just pose a couple of questions for the committee as you consider this legislation.

- First, how will this bill help school districts to meet our education policy objectives?
- Finally, given the very big challenges that we face and the important objectives we are working hard to achieve, "How would you like us to use the precious minutes we have in the limited number of instructional days in each school year?"

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you should have any questions on our thoughts on AB 427, please call me at 608-242-1370.