

THE FOLLOWING SNIPPETS OFFER A SUMMARY OF VARIOUS EDUCATION POLICY AND FUNDING ISSUES UNDER CONSIDERATION BY THE JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE SOON TO BE FORWARDED TO THE STATE ASSEMBLY AND SENATE.

1. Public School Funding: Public schools will see an estimated \$48 million reduction in state equalization funding and a freeze in the categorical “per pupil” funding created in the last budget. The decrease in “state aid” will impact West Salem by increasing the local tax levy and by reducing our programming. In an ironic note of “charging more and offering less,” we continue to reduce staff and trim programming while at the same time begin discussing the possibility of a future referendum to exceed the revenue limit. From a statewide perspective, these changes will lower Wisconsin below the national average in public education funding for the first time in 100 years and conclude a remarkable 6-year period in which funding for public education in Wisconsin has been reduced by 15%.

2. Voucher Expansion: The state of Wisconsin now spends approximately \$212 million on private school vouchers with anticipated growth to \$800 million over the next 10 years. The proposed legislation calls for public schools to be the fiscal agent and “pay” the voucher to a private or charter school much as they now do for open enrollment students attending other public schools. Of note, the tuition charge for open enrollment to a neighboring public school is \$6,600 while the proposed voucher payment to a private school averages 18% more at \$7,210 for elementary students and \$7,850 for high school students. The proposed law caps voucher applications at 1% of district enrollment in the first year. For example, let’s assume West Salem receives 18 applications for high school vouchers. This will raise West Salem School District property taxes by approximately \$57,000 or \$.07 on the mil rate and will impact the West Salem School District budget with a \$141,300 (18 X \$7850) expenditure. In turn, the district will have to cut the remaining \$84,300 (\$141,300 - \$57,000) in order to balance our budget.

The proposed law allows for an expansion of vouchers by 1% per year over a 10 year period meaning by year 10 the district will be funding 180 students, property taxes will have increased to \$570,000 or \$.70 on the mil rate just for voucher students, district expenses will be at \$1,413,000 for voucher payments, and district budget reductions will total \$843,000 to accommodate the payment. The goal of this legislation is to create a funding mechanism to fund private and charter school education. In order to achieve this goal without adding new dollars to the budget, public schools like ours will continue to face funding reductions, program cuts and tax levy increases.

3. Charter Expansion: The proposed legislation allows entities other than public schools to certify charter, or “experimental” schools at public expense. Currently this is limited to the Milwaukee metro area. For example, the proposal allows various public entities to establish a charter school, recruit students from the surrounding area and bill the resident school districts through the use of vouchers. This proposed legislation sets the stage for continued expansion of public entities using private firms to create “charter schools” at tax payer expense.

4. Teacher Licensing Standards: After years of “raising the bar” and making it increasingly difficult to graduate from college and earn a teaching degree in 4 years, the proposed legislation now reduces qualifications for licensure to “life experiences” for vocational-related areas and to any form of a college degree in the core subject areas. If the legislation is adopted as written, Wisconsin will have one of the lowest standards for teacher licensure in the nation. In West Salem we have worked tirelessly to recruit, select, train and retain the very best professional educators for our children. The proposed bill will make it much more difficult to staff our schools with highly-qualified instructors.

5. Home School and Virtual School Students Can Participate in Public School Co-Curricular Activities:

The proposed legislation allows children who are home-schooled or virtual-schooled to participate in the co-curricular programming offered at the local public school. This will create a whole host of eligibility and “participation” issues. The WIAA stands in strong opposition as eligibility regulations are a foundational piece of their charter. This has the potential to create a high school basketball team with 5 starters who only come to school for practice and games.

6. High School Learning Portfolios: The proposed legislation will allow up to 50% of the credits required for high school graduation to come in the form of learning portfolios. From the Senior Exit Project to a host of other locally required curricula, we have worked hard to maintain a high standard for our local diploma. The proposed legislation has the potential to dramatically alter the requirements for graduation by significantly lowering expectations. This creates the real risk of markedly devaluing a high school diploma from any high school in Wisconsin including West Salem.

7. Statewide Assessments: The state assessments scheduled for next year will represent the third different version in three years. All public school districts, private schools and charters will be required to take a test - just not the same test. Each school or district will be allowed to choose from a menu of tests. This will make comparisons between schools impossible. It will make charting curricular progress and compliance with federal testing requirements difficult.

8. Civics Test: The proposed legislation requires that any student earning a high school diploma in Wisconsin must pass a civics exam. At this time the particular civics test has not yet been identified and/or developed. In West Salem we have a model curriculum in the area of civics. Our graduates are well-prepared for their responsibilities as citizens. Interjecting a required, high-stakes civics exam will deter from our programming. More emphasis on civics is a good thing; an additional round of testing is not.

Public education in Wisconsin has long been a model for other states, viewed as an asset, and a source of pride. Wisconsin produces some of the highest ACT scores and graduation rates in the nation. The statewide quality of our educators, programming, facilities, and local commitment is literally second to no other state. Whether you are a supporter or an opponent of the proposed education policy initiatives, please be aware the changes will re-define the very nature of public education in our state. I urge you to pass your very own “civics test” by calling your legislators to offer your opinion on these and other issues.

Steve Doyle
Wisconsin State Assembly
(608) 266-0631
Rep.Doyle@legis.wisconsin.gov

Jennifer Schilling
Wisconsin State Senate
(608) 266-5490
Sen.Schilling@legis.wisconsin.gov