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STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill (SB) 293 Fact Sheet

Problem 1: *SB 293 failed to include important accountability measures needed in the voucher program*

As a strong supporter of public education and someone who has never wavered from demanding voucher school transparency and accountability, I was **dismayed when the anemic SB 293** failed to include crucial voucher school accountability measures, while doing things like reducing basic reporting requirements and making vouchers easier to do. For instance:

SB 293 Failed: At banning corporal punishment

SB 293 Failed: At ensuring educators at voucher schools obtain a license or certificate through the Department of Public Instruction

SB 293 Failed: At implementing the same 4K-2nd grade reading readiness assessments as public schools

SB 293 Failed: At having the same or better high school graduation requirements as public schools

SB 293 Failed: At ensuring a transparent system for suspensions and expulsions

SB 293 Failed: At making sure voucher school buildings are safe

SB 293 Failed: At ensuring no more than 49% of students at a school receiving vouchers may be voucher students (preventing profit runs on public dollars)

Also: taxpayers wouldn't be reimbursed for 100% of money lost when a voucher school fails.

In past sessions as in this session, I have fought for real voucher school accountability that includes the items above and more ([see last session's bill, here](#)). I will again be introducing a true voucher accountability proposal and will also push for an up-or-down vote on it in this state budget.

Problem 2: *A public hearing and committee vote on the bill were scheduled with barely a day's notice, leaving little time for thorough review or public input*

Like many of the bad Republican bills we see at the state and federal level, this bill was hurriedly introduced and rushed through the committee process. In fact, it came before the Senate Committee on Education with just one day's notice before the hearing, followed by a party-line vote immediately afterward. To add to the difficulty of public involvement, this was also on the last Friday of classes for many public schools across the state. I have been a leader in the fight for stronger accountability for the voucher system for years. I made the case during the committee meeting on SB 293 that if we were going to call this an accountability bill (which the Republicans are doing), it should actually have the measures that have been needed for years. After all, Walker's proposed budget gives away \$500+ million in new money to the voucher scheme with no additional accountability.

Given the rushed hearing, I introduced two simple, commonsense amendments:

1. The first would have [capped the total percentage of students that voucher schools could siphon away from public schools at 5% of the local school district](#). This was in line with the original promise 27 years ago that capped voucher population at 1% of each school. [This amendment failed along party lines](#).

2. The second amendment would have [strengthened voucher transparency by requiring a disclosure to go out with tax bills](#) that showed how much tax money was being pulled out of local public schools and given to vouchers. A version of this is already done in Milwaukee, so this amendment would have allowed the rest of the state this same basic fiscal transparency. [This amendment also failed along party lines](#).

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Problem 3: *The bill was rushed to the full Senate days after the Committee hearing and vote*

Less than a week after the committee hearing, the bill was rushed to the Senate floor where I again advocated for a more thorough public process and made a similar case for real accountability and introduced the same two amendments. During session, I spoke about:

- **The 41% of voucher schools that have failed since the program started.** I also pressed the bill's authors on the long delay to even acknowledge the basic need for things we have been calling for, like requiring voucher teachers to pass background checks and doing things to ensure taxpayers don't lose all their money when a voucher school shuts down in the middle of the night.
- **The need for reinvesting in our kids, after our public schools saw the largest cuts to education in state history.** These crippling cuts have yet to be restored, and our state will continue to see pre-2011 funding levels under any of the proposals introduced by Republicans during the budget process so far.
- **The fact that if we continue on the same downward spiral we've been on for the last eight years, we will never get back up to the levels of public education funding we were at before 2011.** To put it another way, a child who was a kindergartener when Scott Walker took office will be finishing 8th grade by the end of this budget cycle and the funding will still be short of what it was when they first started. **At the same time, voucher schools have seen their funding more than double and the per-voucher pupil funding rise higher than public schools, year after year.**

[You can view a video from session, here.](#)

In the Senate, four pro-public education [senators joined me in opposing the bill](#) as a strong demand for more immediate and substantive voucher school transparency and accountability. The shortcomings of this bill were also called out in the Assembly where [30 Democratic representatives also voted to reject this half-measure.](#)

Moving Forward: *Continuing to Fight for our Kids and Neighborhood Public Schools*

I am a proud public school parent and I am committed to all our community's children getting the education and opportunities they deserve. As such, I have introduced several pieces of pro-public education legislation, like:

- [Bipartisan Character Education Bill \(SB 329\)](#) – Republican Senator Alberta Darling and I introduced a bill that provides funding to the Department of Public Instruction to award grants to allow for teachers and school leaders to participate in professional development training in character education. This bill would also allow teachers and school district administrators to use their character education training toward any professional development requirements needed for their license.
- [Special Education Reimbursement Rates \(SB 211\)](#) – I introduced Senate Bill 211 to increase state aid to school districts for special education programs. Funding for special education categorical aid has been frozen since the 2008-09 school year. This bill would bring Wisconsin back to reimbursing special education rates to schools districts to 33%.
- [Community School Start Up Grants \(SB 282\)](#) – I introduced Senate Bill 282 to create a community school start-up grant program, which would allocate funds to public schools that focus on improving student learning, strengthening families, and working with community partners to provide additional services to families in the district.
- [Public Education Reinvestment Act \(PERA\) \(LRB 0996\)](#) – This legislation, proposed by Rep. Brostoff and I, would expand a smaller class size model statewide across all K4-12 grades. The benefits of having smaller class sizes are far-reaching and include students scoring higher in reading, language arts, and mathematics as well as evidence of higher graduation rates.