



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wisconsin DPI Refuses to Help Students Battling Addiction

Legislators Call on Dr. Jill Underly to support recovery schools in State of Education address

Madison - [Senator Jesse James](#) (R-Altoona) and [Representative Barbara Dittrich](#) (R-Oconomowoc) blasted Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Tuesday for its refusal to help students battling addiction and called on Superintendent of Public Schools Jill Underly to support [pending legislation](#) on recovery high schools in her State of Education address later this week.

"Recovery high schools have proven to be a successful tool in helping students battling addiction," Senator James said. "It is a shame the department won't even meet with me or my staff to have a discussion on this topic -- especially in the 'Year of Mental Health' -- unless we give them more money for other initiatives. Funding has already been approved for recovery schools in this year's state budget."

Rep. Barbara Dittrich added, "As the Vice-Chair of both the Assembly Committee on Education as well as the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Prevention, I find it extremely disturbing that DPI has repeatedly refused to meet with either myself or Senator James. At a time where our students are struggling more than ever with the hopelessness of substance abuse, this behavior is completely shocking. It is incongruent with the Governor's declaration of 2023 as 'The Year of Mental Health.' How can Wisconsin's families trust that DPI has our kids' best interests as their top priority?"

DPI originally had several suggestions to help improve the bill. Now, the department says the concept is "not salvageable" despite [extensive data](#) showing the effectiveness of recovery schools, especially in other states like [Minnesota](#). DPI is holding the bill hostage until they receive more funding, even though Sen. James and Rep. Dittrich already secured \$1 million for the recovery school program in the state budget.

"Games like this are exactly why people are fed up with Madison," Senator James concluded. "I am calling on Dr. Jill Underly to come out in support of recovery schools in her State of the Education address this Thursday. The data is there, the money is there -- it is time DPI stops playing politics with students' drug addictions."

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The 23rd Senate District encompasses parts of Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Marathon, and Wood counties. The 38th Assembly District includes portions of Dane, Jefferson, and Waukesha Counties including the communities of Oconomowoc, Cambridge, Deerfield, Marshall, Ixonia, Johnson Creek, Lake Mills, and Waterloo.