



Mary Lazich

President
Wisconsin State Senate

Sen. Mary Lazich: Legislature Should Give Schools the Tools to Keep Them Safe

Do you believe Wisconsin public school teachers are threatened or physically attacked more than their peers across the nation? Do you believe Wisconsin does not have a system for reporting and tracking incidences?

A report by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Systems, during 2011-2012, explains 11.3 percent of Wisconsin teachers reported they were physically attacked by their students, and 13.7 percent of teachers reported they were threatened with injury by their students. The national average for reported physical attacks among teachers was 5.8 percent during 2011-12.

Unfortunately, the reports are largely anecdotal because Wisconsin lacks data to fully track and confront this problem. Local school districts collect data about suspensions, graduation rates, test scores and other variables. Current state statutes do not require the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to collect information about school crime and safety incidents, resulting in local school districts having little to no impetus to report incidents in a comprehensive manner.

It is imperative we are aware and address the issue of violence within schools. School violence has serious effects upon learning environment. The education process is affected by physical and emotional components. According to Laura Erlauer, the author of the Brain-Compatible Classroom, stressful, threatening, or fearful experiences within classrooms build memories of negative issues rather than important academic concepts.

Schools should be safe havens for teaching and for student learning. Passively allowing violence to occur within schools, without actively addressing and finding innovative solutions to mitigate the problem, fails students and teachers.

After being confronted with these startling statistics, I, along with Representative Ken Skowronski, introduced a bill to create a pilot program to ensure comprehensive, methodical reporting of violence within our schools.

The pilot program is similar to federal reporting requirements for colleges and universities participating in federally subsidized student loan programs, required under the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, originally enacted during 1990. DPI will develop and operate the program during the 2016-17 school year in one urban school district, one suburban school district, and one rural school district. School districts will submit two reports to DPI that include anonymous, aggregate data about student safety incidents that occur on school district property, on transportation provided by the school district, and at a school district sanctioned event.

Parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers are entitled to public safety information to facilitate informed decision making. The pilot program provides DPI and local school districts information to study methods for reporting and analyzing the data. Understanding trends in location, timing, and the actors involved assists school districts to develop safety plans to mitigate issues.