



Jeremy Thiesfeldt

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 52nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Wisconsin Students Deserve Wisconsin Standards

A Column by Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt

Imagine a scenario where an employer crafts and institutes a set of policies. Within a short time, all parties involved agree the policies are ineffective and increasingly in need of revision. Next, imagine that these policies were created in 1998 and only recently were they partially revised. This setting is the story of Wisconsin's K-12 academic standards.

No organization can successfully operate being so slow to react to the needs of its constituency. In this light, Senate Bill 619 (SB619) would provide a framework and timetable for revising academic standards. Even though such a process represents solid public policy and is generally supported by superintendents across the state, Wisconsin has never instituted such a system. SB619 would provide transparency, professional participation, public involvement and legislative oversight to the revision process. As Chairman of the Assembly Select Committee on Common Core Standards I support this approach.

The most recent set of standards adopted by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) were for mathematics and language arts in 2010 as part of a national movement called Common Core Standards (CCS). Being the first in the nation to do so, State Superintendent Evers unilaterally adopted CCS. He did this after having jettisoned the solid work done by Wisconsin educators in creating our own highly-acclaimed standards in 2009. Those standards sit unused in a filing cabinet at the DPI.

There has been growing controversy over CCS nationwide. Many doubt the ability of the standards to improve K-12 education. As a result, in October 2013, the leadership of the state legislature established select committees to examine CCS. This effort received the backing of the governor. These committees have since completed their duties and given recommendations. Legislation is now pending.

SB619 would create a standards board of 15 specific, education-minded appointees, chosen by the governor, the DPI, and legislative leadership. No legislators may serve on the board. This board would appoint experts to a subject-specific subcommittee tasked with revising standards. Once completed, the standards would be sent to the board for their endorsement, and then to the DPI which may choose to make further revisions. When the DPI has completed its work, the standards would then be submitted to a joint committee of the legislature for approval. If approved by the joint committee, the

Serving the communities of Fond du Lac, Oakfield, Byron, Empire, Taycheedah, and the western half of Calumet township

standards would be adopted by the state. If rejected, it is only at this point that the legislature could amend the standards.

SB619, like most critical legislation, is the result of an agreement crafted among key lawmakers--some of whom have had second thoughts. I welcome the opportunity to improve it. It is important to note that school boards still maintain authority to adopt any standards despite any recommendations of the DPI.

The DPI is fighting a turf war to avoid its power being curtailed by SB619. DPI has particularly targeted the end of the proposed revision process in which legislators could potentially debate and amend the standards. While conceivable, I believe such an event would be unlikely, and I don't know a legislator who aspires to reach that point.

Had SB619 been in place years ago, education in Wisconsin would be in a better place. The state constitution clearly allows legislative oversight of academic standards, but no official process is in place. Without a process establishing at least minimal legislative oversight, the slow revision of the 1998 standards and the bungled adoption and implementation of CCS will be repeated.

The federal government is no doubt delighted, if not scheming, to control our schools through national standards and Superintendent Evers has complied. Our children deserve standards created by those who know them best. Wisconsin students need Wisconsin standards.