

To: All Legislators

From: Rep. Thiesfeldt

Date: January 7, 2014

Subject: Creating an Academic Review Plan for school improvement

In recent years much time and energy has been devoted to the discussion of what can be done to improve all of our schools in Wisconsin, particularly those that have historically struggled to impact student achievement at an adequate level. What seems to be a popular and logical concept—that all schools receiving some level of subsidy from the taxpayers should be required to meet certain performance standards—is often lost in the midst of several struggles. This bill creates a system that is, 1) fairly and adequately applied across all categories of schools respective of their inherent differences, 2) not merely focused on punitive measures, but rather offers significant assistance for improvement (financial, administrative and pedagogical) on a realistic timeline, 3) offers potential for significant alteration when reform plans are not realized, and 4) not cost prohibitive.

This bill requires the creation of an Academic Review Board (ARB) made up of 13 voting members. The Superintendent of Public Instruction will chair the meetings of the board and also have 6 appointments. The Governor will have 2 appointments, the Speaker of the State Assembly will have 1, the Assembly Minority Leader will have 1, the Senate Majority Leader will have 1 and the Senate Minority Leader will have 1 appointment. ARB members will serve for 4-year staggered terms. The ARB will meet a minimum of 2 times per year and, in general, provide guidance to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on the implementation of the provisions created by this bill. All activities of the DPI resulting from the provisions of this bill would be reported to the ARB, and the ARB activities reported to the legislature and the governor.

The legislature passed a law that required beginning in 2011-12 all public schools receive an annual report card demonstrating overall student achievement and growth. However, subject to this bill, the details used in compiling the report cards have been altered, and will now use letter grades (A, B, C, D, F) to aid in the public recognition of the status of each school. A private school using the Parental Choice Program (PCP) will be assigned a grade for students on scholarship, and, if the school chooses, a second grade for all its students.

Pupil achievement on a standardized test will be a major component of the process used to develop each school's report card grade. All schools will have the option of selecting the test of their choice from a short list compiled by the ARB. Each approved test must meet certain specifications to be considered for approval. In order to statistically equate the results of a variety of tests, the DPI will contract for the services of the UW Value-Added Research Center (VARC).

After the third consecutive report card under requirements created by this bill, schools (not districts) that receive a D or F on their report card will be potentially subject to two improvement measures:

1. The school (public school or private school using the PCP) will be required to develop goals and implement a four-year improvement plan. If the school has been previously labeled by the DPI as a “Focus” or a “Priority” school under the federal Title 1 program to improve their instruction and professional development, the school will use these resources. If the school has not previously been labeled by the DPI as a “Focus” or a “Priority” school, the school may implement the appropriate program or an alternative program from a list approved by the ARB to achieve the goals of its reform plan.
2. If the school has not been approved for exit from the step 1 improvement program by the Superintendent of Public Instruction:
 - a. For a public school or an instrumentality charter school, the DPI will publish a request for proposals (RFP) that directs interested applicants to convert the school to an independent charter school under the authority of the ARB.
 - b. For an independent charter school, the DPI will work with the governing board of the school to cease all public payments as soon as practicable.
 - c. For a private school using the PCP the governing board of the school will be required to withdraw from the program entirely with the possibility of reapplying in four years.

Once a private school using the PCP has qualified for the PCP, this bill repeals the current statutory requirements to maintain participation in the PCP and replaces it with these sanctions.