

Point counterpoint: Private schools spur competition, increase achievement

By Jake Lubenow · Apr 20, 2015

Every year, each school in Wisconsin must submit a report to the Department of Public Instruction regarding their students' performance on standardized tests, graduation rates, attendance rates and gap closure. This past year, the Milwaukee school district [scored](#) in the lowest bracket of state standards, utterly failing to educate our state's youth.

Inner-city public schools have struggled for years across the nation, and both parties have drastically different ideas of how to solve the problem. Democrats want to continue to pour money into failing public schools and hate seeing money follow the students to private voucher, charter and virtual schools. Republicans, on the other hand, want to put the power to determine a student's education into the hands of parents in order for students to obtain the best education possible.

The Assembly's, Senate's and governor's budgets all reflect the newest plan to help solve public education for those in low performing districts. Our state government is attempting to put the power over students' education back into the hands of parents. The new school accountability legislation and the removal of the cap on school vouchers will help us achieve this goal.

Assembly Bill 1 and Senate Bill 1 have been the subject of controversy recently. [AB1](#) has strict sanctions for public schools that do not meet expectations and do not have a viable plan for improvement, as determined by the governing board. However, [SB1](#) and the governor's budget plan do not place such sanctions, nor do they have a governing board. Whether these controversial policies will be taken up by the Senate and eventually signed by the governor is yet to be seen.

All three plans keep an accountability system similar to what is currently used, ditch Common Core standards in favor of a standardized testing system not tied to highly controversial standards and find new ways to tell parents about their school's performance and alternatives if the school is underperforming.

This is a giant step for parents around the state, as the DPI will no longer hide low performing schools from parents, but rather let those parents in the district know that there are other options for their student such as private voucher, virtual and charter schools.

Another controversial part of Gov. Scott Walker's proposed primary education appropriations was the lack of an increase in funding to schools around the state. The problem with this criticism is simple: Per-pupil education spending has [increased](#) significantly over the last several decades without substantial increases in scholastic performance.

Look to Washington, D.C., where funding per pupil is higher than in any state. However, D.C. is also notorious for their atrocious public schools. In a [metastudy](#) conducted by education experts, D.C. ranked lower than all the states, as well as having the highest dropout rate, lowest math and reading scores and some of the least safe schools in the country. Beyond that, the [Heritage Foundation](#), [CATO Institute](#) and the [Center for American Progress](#) all agree there is little to no correlation between funding and achievement.

Walker has also proposed in his latest budget to remove the cap on vouchers. A school voucher is essentially a way for a student at or below 300 percent of the poverty line to attend a private school. School vouchers have been a way for students in failing public schools to find haven in a better educational environment. In Milwaukee, parents with school age children [favor](#) school vouchers by almost a two-to-one margin because they value a better education for their child.

Democrats will consistently make the argument that this takes money away from public schools, which makes struggling public schools worse. Aside from the fact that there is no correlation between funding and achievement, this argument is still misguided.

Funding for public schools is not assigned to the school in districts with vouchers, but rather to the students. If a student attends a public school, the funding is allotted there. But if that student would rather have a voucher and go to a better institution, the money should follow him there. Even at that, the public school will still receive partial funding for that student for three years after the student has left. A [case study](#) in Milwaukee also found achievement actually went up when school vouchers were more heavily embraced in the district.

The current proposed versions of school accountability legislation and the removal of the school voucher cap will help students achieve all that they can, and take the power to choose what school a student attends away from the government and back to the parents.

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