



For Immediate Release

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The Davis Report

The Davis Report is a column written by Wisconsin State Representative Brett Davis (R-Oregon) to keep residents of the 80th Assembly District informed with what is happening in our State Legislature. The 80th District includes all of Green County and portions of Rock, Dane and Lafayette Counties.

Assembly Misses Key Opportunity to Pass Education Reforms

Last night the State Assembly acted on legislation designed to make changes to Wisconsin's education system. The bills were intended to make our state eligible for federal "Race to the Top" funding. However, the measures that passed are a far cry from the meaningful reform that is needed.

One key provision that is required to make Wisconsin eligible for the Race to the Top grants is removing the prohibition on evaluating teachers based on student test scores. There was a bill, Senate Bill (SB) 372, which was approved last night that addresses this issue by removing the firewall between student test scores and teacher evaluations. However, the problem is that SB 372 built 425 more firewalls in its place.

The legislation fell short of the reforms needed because it simply retains the status quo due to two provisions in the bill. First, the language that was approved forced teacher evaluation plans to be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining in all 425 school districts in Wisconsin. This will result in either very watered-down evaluation plans or no plan being implemented at all. Therefore, I authored an amendment that would remove the collective bargaining provision and simply leave it to school boards to implement an evaluation plan. Unfortunately, this amendment failed.

The other harmful provision in the bill prevents the teacher evaluations from being used to hold poor teachers accountable through possible discharge or disciplinary measures. In fact, this provision is seen by the Wisconsin Association of School Boards as weakening Wisconsin's application for the federal grant program. It makes little sense to allow for the evaluation of teachers, but not give school boards the opportunity to remove the bad teachers in our schools.



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Some argue that teachers should not be fired due to a few of their students testing poorly on the standardized WKCE exam. I agree, and the legislation specifically states that school boards must come up with multiple criteria in addition the standardized exams. In fact, I led an amendment that would have changed the language of the bill to state that a teacher could not be fired solely based on the test results.

Overall, I believe we missed a perfect opportunity to pass meaningful education reform, especially with the President visiting our state and talking about the need for changes to our education system. The legislation that passed last night had bipartisan opposition because they did very little to reform our current system. Wisconsin needs to enact multiple measures to ensure our schools remain strong and competitive.

Earlier this week I announced my vision for both reforming our education system and creating a sustainable school finance system. This is done by modernizing our student assessment system and giving school districts the tools they need to budget responsibly and lower property taxes. I will outline this package of reforms in more detail in future updates.

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