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Free-Market Paths to Better Lives



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## Following WPRI story, Gov. Walker asks DPI to resubmit Wisconsin federal funding plan

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Less than 24 hours after the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute **highlighted the failure** of state policy-makers and Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Tony Evers to take advantage of an opportunity to provide local school officials with greater flexibility when spending federal education funds, Gov. Scott Walker sent a **letter** to Evers asking him to "resubmit a new proposal that allows our schools to innovate and students to succeed."



The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal education policy law signed by President Barack Obama in 2015, requires states to maintain a statewide report-card system for public schools, measure teacher effectiveness and explain how they will improve low-performing schools. Plans must be approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have submitted their ESSA plans and six have been approved. The deadline for the remaining states is Sept. 18.

"The Every Student Succeeds Act allows greater flexibility for states in education policy," Walker said in the letter to Evers. "Congress replaced the restrictive No Child Left Behind Act with this law so states could craft innovative policies to improve education outcomes. Your bureaucratic proposal does little to challenge the status quo for the benefit of Wisconsin's students. Other states are using their plans to drive improvement through bold reforms."

In a two-part series based on a statewide survey of school superintendents, business managers and school board members, WPRI reported yesterday that the vast **majority of local educators** in Wisconsin desire more discretion over how federal education dollars are spent in their schools.

A majority of respondents said they would prioritize spending differently, steer more money to classrooms and be more innovative were it not for the bureaucratic requirements and perverse incentives associated with federal education funding.

"In addition to complex regulations, bureaucratic hurdles and hidden costs, federal funds also compel local school officials to make decisions they wouldn't make otherwise," said Dan Benson, editor of WPRI's Project for 21st Century Federalism. "ESSA could provide the flexibility that school officials throughout the state tell us they need."

"Allowing states more flexibility in how they deliver education to students is at the core of ESSA," said a statement from the office of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. Delaware was the first state to have its plan approved by DeVos. It allows low-performing Title I schools — those with large populations of disadvantaged students — to develop improvement programs and apply to the state for competitive grants to implement them.

In Tennessee, officials proposed that districts be allowed to use funds to create innovation models to address low-performing schools. Florida offers incentives to successful charter school operators to open schools in areas with low-performing public schools, giving parents more educational choices. New Mexico wants to close failing schools and reopen them as charters.

It's not immediately clear what effect Walker's refusal to sign Evers' ESSA plan will have on meeting the ESSA submission deadline. A spokesman from Evers' office said they would respond to Walker's letter on Sept. 18.

*More survey results, responses and analysis are available [here](#) and [here](#). Permission to reprint is granted as long as the authors and WPRI are properly cited.*