



Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator · District 8

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Education
Assembly Bill 966

Thank you Chair Thiesfeldt and committee members for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 966.

This bill is part of the Empowering Parents K-12 Education Reform Package to address the growing demand from parents to tailor their children's individual education, establish accountability, and encourage collaboration with educators.

Since being released, this bill has received negative attention. It is unfortunate that the attention is focused on naysayers of reform, instead on why a bill of this magnitude is necessary to start a conversation on the poor performance of the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system that currently enrolls over sixty-six thousand students. Without this bill, I fear the level of interest from the media and key stakeholders would continue to be non-existent.

According to the most recent data, only 4.2% MPS students are proficient in math. 7.3% of students are proficient in English language arts. That is unacceptable and disheartening. While some may argue that this is due to the pandemic, this problem has existed for many years and has gone unaddressed for too long. As leaders in this state, we must demand more from our largest public school system.

Opponents of reform have often opined that MPS's struggles are due to the lack of funding. Last year, the state budget included over \$770 million dollars in total state aid just for the MPS system. On top of that, the system is expected to receive another \$770 million in federal COVID relief aid. And in 2020, a referendum was passed to generate another \$87 million dollars. I welcome a conversation on addressing the funding formula so more money follows a child into the classroom, but this is more than just a money problem.

Assembly Bill 966 has three main components to address the poor performance and promote local control. First, effective July, 2024, Milwaukee Public Schools would be dissolved into four to eight City of Milwaukee public school districts. Second, it creates a seven member commission made up of the Governor and two appointees, the Mayor of Milwaukee and two appointees, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Lastly, it establishes by no later than October 1, 2022, the commission must determine the number of new school districts and submit to the legislature recommended changes to the statutes necessary to organize and operate the new districts.

Opponents of this legislation have levied many questions and hypotheticals on why this proposal could not work. I welcome those questions to be asked to the commission formed under this bill. The commission is ultimately tasked with proposing solutions to those questions. Next, they will submit their proposal to the legislature to begin the legislative process. Between now and 2024, there will be many discussions on what is best for the students in Milwaukee. I cannot be clearer. This bill is only the first step to a long and desperately needed discussion on how to help MPS's students.

The commission created under AB 966 has a very important role. That is why I chose the Governor who is accountable to all citizens of Wisconsin, the Mayor of Milwaukee who is accountable to their city, and the State Superintendent who is elected to be Wisconsin's education leader. These individuals were chosen because they have a vested interest in making sure our largest city is preparing students to become contributing members of our state.

Previous administrations, both Republican and Democrat have looked for ways to improve the quality of education in Milwaukee, Unfortunately, this problem continues to exist today. If we cannot work together to acknowledge the problem and fight for change, then we will lose yet another generation of kids. And that is a much more dire consequence than anything that can happen to legislators politically for making this bold leap forward.

I want to thank my colleague, Representative Wittke, for co-authoring this bill in the Assembly, and thank you committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 966 today. I ask that you accept this challenge to create a better educational landscape for the students trapped in a failing system.

MMAC

**METROPOLITAN MILWAUKEE
ASSOCIATION OF COMMERCE**

**Written Testimony: Assembly Committee on Education
Andrew Davis, Director for Government Affairs
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
February 16, 2022**

Chairman Thiesfeldt and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on these important education issues. It is important that we share with you the value that our membership, the business community, places on K-12 education and the role it plays in our mission.

The MMAC is a regional chamber serving nearly 2,000 member companies that employ 300,000 people in the metro-Milwaukee area. It is our mission to invest capital, grow business and create jobs. K-12 education has always been a top priority for our organization. We have always been an active participant with an aggressive agenda to increase educational attainment and improve career development to help feed the talent pipeline for our members and employers in the region.

MMAC has a long history of engaging in education reform, including the formation of a K-12 system fueled by parent options with the goal to develop citizens as skilled, innovative and productive lifelong learners. Historically we have worked with education stakeholders and partners to help provide our citizens with a pathway to great educational outcomes through our K-12 system, two-year, technical and four-year plus degree granting institutions. Educational attainment and a discipline of lifelong learning are the best anchors for prosperity. Unfortunately, this reality is eluding too many of our citizens-- leaving them without opportunity and hope. Leaving Milwaukee short on the talent it needs to thrive.

It is for the reasons stated above that we care very strongly about the following MMAC agenda items:

- A fair and balanced school report card that rewards schools educating some of our most troubled students below grade level.
- Automatic charter reauthorization and replication of high performing charter schools, that includes non-instrumentality charter schools.
- Expansion of charter school authorizing entities and options
- Addressing the issue of under-used and vacant school facilities in Milwaukee. Both taxpayers and parents will benefit from any use of these empty facilities owned by the City of Milwaukee.
- Closing the charter and choice per pupil funding equity gap. The disparity threatens to financially strangle quality schools and reduce educational options. This inequity must be addressed as we are already seeing some schools in Milwaukee close because of it.

Too much of the debate in Milwaukee is over the type of school students attend and too little on results. Whether attending a traditional public school, a public charter school or a school in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, ensuring that Milwaukee's children and future workforce have access to a world class education is not only a moral imperative, it is also an economic necessity.

There is no greater determinant of a region's prosperity than the educational attainment and workforce skills of its citizens. We need an unapologetic and unwavering commitment to students and families that attend schools that deliver uncharacteristic results, regardless of what type of school they are in. Getting children ready to learn is the first step, and getting them ready to work is a necessary step.

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ELEMENTS OF A WORLD CLASS EDUCATION SYSTEM

As stated in the *No Time to Lose* report by the
National Conference of State Legislatures

CHILDREN ARE READY TO LEARN, STRUGGLING STUDENTS SHOULD BE GIVEN EXTRA SUPPORT. ALL CAN ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS



Necessary resources ensure that all children enter the first grade with the cognitive and non-cognitive skills needed to master a first-grade curriculum set to high standards.



Resources are distributed so that students who may struggle to meet high standards are given the extra resources—especially highly effective teachers—they need to succeed.

EVERY STUDENT HAS ACCESS TO HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS. EVERY STUDENT IS EXPECTED TO SUCCEED.



The highly professional teaching force is well-prepared, well-compensated and well-supported throughout their careers.



Teachers support a well-designed instruction system that includes high standards for learning, a core curriculum created by world-class teachers, and high-quality assessments designed to measure complex skills demanded by the standards and curriculum.



All students are expected to be ready for college and career, and all educators are expected to get them there.

A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE, INTELLECTUALLY RIGOROUS SYSTEM OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IS AVAILABLE TO THOSE PREFERRING AN APPLIED EDUCATION.



A powerful, hands-on applied curriculum is built, requiring strong academic skills.



The system has no “dead ends,” and pathways to university are clear and always available.



Schools partner with employers to ensure that high standards are set for the students and provide on-the-job training and learning opportunities to enable them to reach those standards.

INDIVIDUAL REFORMS ARE CONNECTED AND ALIGNED AS PARTS OF A CLEARLY PLANNED AND CAREFULLY DESIGNED COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM.



All policies and practices are developed to support the larger education system.



The coherent system of education is designed to ensure that every student meets the same goal of college and career readiness.

http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/EDU_InternationalEdu_Revised_30523.pdf, from page 10

WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK 



MEMO

TO: Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: Chris Reader, Executive Vice President of IRG Action Fund

DATE: February 16, 2022

RE: Support for AB 966, Reorganizing Milwaukee Public Schools

Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing today on these important education reform proposals. My name is Chris Reader, and I'm the Executive Vice President for IRG Action Fund. IRG Action Fund is the advocacy and lobbying partner to the Institute for Reforming Government, a Wisconsin based think tank. We support AB 966.

For too long, Milwaukee children and families have been failed by the public-school establishment. Taxpayers have sent billions of dollars into a system in Milwaukee that structurally does not work. Wisconsin needs a strong K-12 school system in Milwaukee in order to succeed, and Senator Darling and the bill authors deserve credit for forcing a conversation about improving Milwaukee Public Schools.

Many years of indifference, politically motivated opposition to change, poor fiscal planning, and interest-group politics have added up to some sobering facts.

Why Reform is Needed

1. Wisconsin's racial achievement gaps are routinely found to be either the worst in the nation or very near it¹. The Badger State is last for reading achievement for black students (among the 42 states reporting data).
2. Running a large urban school district isn't easy, but MPS does it worse than almost any other major urban district. Among dozens of the largest cities tested in the Nation's

1

https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/WI?cti=PgTab_GapComparisons&chort=2&sub=MAT&sj=Wl&fs=Grade&st=MN&year=2019R3&sg=Race%2FEthnicity%3A+White+vs.+Black&sgv=Black&ts=Single+Year&tss=2019R3&sfj=NP

Report Card², Milwaukee scored second worst in 4th grade math, in 8th grade math, and in 4th grade reading, and in 8th grade math. **Each time, they performed better than only Detroit and performed far worse than other challenging cities such as New York City, Chicago, DC, Los Angeles, Cleveland, and Baltimore.** Milwaukee's performance is bad and trending downward, and this was all before COVID.

3. According to the MacIver Institute, **"Only 4.2% of MPS students scored proficient or better in Math on the Forward exams last year (grades 3-8)."**³ Only 7.3% of MPS students scored proficient or better in English on the Forward exams last year (grades 3-8)."
4. COVID-19 has made this dire situation a statewide crisis. Children are struggling to pass classes that often have indefensibly low expectations to begin with, and we are now only beginning to learn the extent to which the many children reading and doing math below grade level suddenly find themselves in an even deeper hole.⁴
5. And the problem will get worse. MPS closed its schools for nearly one and a half years. A recent WILL study by Dr. Will Flanders showed that districts that remained closed for in-person learning saw significant declines in math and English.⁵ Around one out of every three students at Milwaukee Public Schools, according to MPS, failed the fall semester.
6. MPS spends only 54% of its funding on instruction (13% on operations, 10% on staff, 7% on administration, and 7% on facilities), according to the MacIver Institute.⁶

Milwaukee Public School District is simply "too big to succeed" and too broken to be healed through half-measures. Something must be done, and we applaud the authors of AB 966 for starting this bold conversation.

In contrast, city leaders like former Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett subjected these children – who are more likely to live in poverty than their peers around the state – to nearly two decades of indifference and neglect. When he spoke up as mayor, it was more often than not to decry options like school choice that might actually give children stuck in failing schools a way out. Meanwhile **Wisconsin taxpayers have continued to pay billions into this failed system without any discernible improvement on outcomes.**

²

<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/districtprofile?chort=2&sub=MAT&sj=XQ&sfj=NL&st=MN&year=2019R3>

³ <https://www.maciverinstitute.com/2022/02/lawmakers-propose-mps-breakup/>

⁴ <https://www.tmj4.com/news/coronavirus/mps-says-30-of-high-school-students-failed-fall-semester-11-5-increase-from-last-year>

⁵ <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CountingTheCost-Final.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.maciverinstitute.com/2021/11/deeper-dive-wisconsin-schools-receive-passing-grade-from-dpi-while-students-fail-miserably/>

AB 966 is the Bold Reform Milwaukee Children Need

The bill would require a Commission, composed of the governor and two appointments, mayor of Milwaukee and two appointments, and the state superintendent of public instruction, to create between four to eight new school districts by October 1, 2022.

Overall, this would benefit parents and students in two main ways:

1. **More consumer choice.** Smaller school districts give parents more options on where to send their children to school, which increases accountability on the districts to perform better. This would also require school boards to be more innovative.
2. **Weakening the grip that special interest groups have on MPS.** An AEI study has shown that big, urban districts have proportionately strong teachers unions. This often leads to policies that are detrimental to students. For example, in Wisconsin, a WILL study showed that union strength was the number one predictor of a school closure - not presence of COVID.⁷ Smaller districts tip the balance of power from teachers' unions and towards students.

The MTEA and others have stated that this would bring about chaos. That is simply not true. Smaller government can - and should be - a more efficient government. School districts can still consolidate and share services like transportation, food, and administration. As we see in other parts of Wisconsin, smaller districts feature a closer relationship between administration and teachers, principals, and parents.

The new school boards would have to offer a better product in order to attract - and keep - students; this is especially true with a robust, vibrant network of educational options through private schools and public charters in Milwaukee.

By replacing MPS with smaller districts, each district will be more accountable to its neighborhoods and constituencies. While this plan requires further detail and measurable progress to ensure it results in meaningful change rather than a mere rearrangement of broken pieces, it is a serious attempt to address a crisis that cannot continue to be ignored.

Members of the committee, you have an opportunity with this bill to say that the children of Milwaukee matter. That the children and their families come before the teacher's union. That the neighborhoods of Milwaukee and the ability of teachers to make a difference in kids' lives comes before the education establishment. IRG Action encourages you to support this bill and move it forward to the full Assembly.

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https://captimes.com/news/local/education/local_schools/will-study-unions-political-affiliation-more-predictive-of-virtual-learning-decision-than-covid-cases/article_f1adb15b-2e8d-5e06-9484-ee0e767597a0.html#tracking-source=home-top-story-1



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Survival Coalition Statement in opposition to (or regarding) AB970 & AB966

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations, a cross-disability coalition of more than 20 state and local organizations and groups, has significant concerns about two of the bills that are before the Assembly Committee on Education on Wednesday February 16. AB970 would remove existing income limits and participation limits on Wisconsin's voucher programs; AB966 would partition the Milwaukee Public School District into four to eight smaller districts. Both of these bills would be disproportionately harmful for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities have federal rights to a free, appropriate public education, but those rights only apply in public schools. AB970, which proposes an immense expansion of the voucher programs, would funnel scarce funding resources away from the public schools where those rights apply, and into private schools that are not bound by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We know from past decades of experience in Milwaukee that the unbridled expansion of vouchers tends to concentrate the students with the greatest disability-related challenges into public schools, while simultaneously cutting into the funding that supports them. Public schools remain the only schools in Wisconsin that are required to enroll and educate students of all abilities. To support students with disabilities to get the necessary education to lead a full and participatory life in communities across our state, Wisconsin should be supporting public schools rather than expanding voucher programs. AB970 does the opposite.

AB966, with its proposal to split the Milwaukee public schools into multiple districts, would add an additional layer of disproportional impact for students with disabilities, given that 19.6% of MPS students have disabilities while the statewide percentage is only 14.2%. The bill leaves undefined what would happen to a student who attends an MPS school outside their new home-district lines after the districts are drawn, but none of the possibilities are good: either undergoing the disruption of being forced to change schools, or the uncertainty and bureaucracy of being suddenly open-enrolled across district lines. In addition, the forcible split would reduce the placement opportunities that are currently available for students with disabilities across the entire city. The new subdivided districts would either incur additional expense in recreating those opportunities or succumb to financial pressure and fail to offer them at all. A proposal this sweeping should involve a robust stakeholder process, and the lack of that input leaves this bill replete with unintended consequences, particularly for students with disabilities.

The Survival Coalition opposes both AB970 & AB966.

Sincerely,

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Real Lives, Real Work, Real Smart, Wisconsin
Investing in People with Disabilities

CITY FORWARD COLLECTIVE

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February 13, 2022

City Forward Collective, a Milwaukee-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to eliminate educational inequity by ensuring every Milwaukee child has access to a high-quality school, is testifying to provide the committee with information regarding AB 966/SB 963, which would dissolve the Milwaukee Public Schools and require the creation of 4-8 smaller districts serving the current MPS footprint:

- a. We believe the bill raises an issue of critical and citywide concern: The challenges regarding governance of MPS are real, and we agree there's an urgent need for bold action to disrupt a status quo that's not working for far too many MPS students.
- b. However, we also believe that in addressing this issue, we should follow the medical axiom to "do no harm". We are concerned that the nationally unprecedented act of breaking up MPS won't fix the problem, and that elements of this bill might actually do more harm than good for MPS students & families:
 - i. More bureaucratic bloat, less clarity for families: the bill proposes that Milwaukee would expand from 9 to as many as 56 elected school board members, from 1 to as many as 8 superintendents, and with the creation of redundant central office functions for everything from transportation to special education that families will have to navigate.
 - ii. Restrictions on right-sizing staff: the bill provides every current MPS staff member with a new statutory guarantee of continued employment, despite declining district enrollment and at a time when stakeholders across the ideological spectrum have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of district bureaucracy.
 - iii. Even more citywide fragmentation: there's already too much confusion and too little coordination across Milwaukee's three-sector education ecosystem; splintering the district in the manner proposed by this bill only makes this worse, and harder for our city to align on a shared vision and strategy for improving student outcomes.
 - iv. Worsens economic and racial segregation: wealth and opportunity aren't evenly distributed within Milwaukee, and smaller regional districts are likely to compound the city's deep and long-standing issues with residential and school segregation, as well as to result in less total funding for our city's highest-need students (especially through the federal Title 1 formula).



Statement before the State of Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Education concerning
A.B. 966

Breaking Up Urban School Districts in Wisconsin

Howard Husock

Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

February 16, 2022

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author.

Good afternoon. My name is Howard Husock, and I am a senior fellow in domestic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a leading public policy think tank in Washington, DC, dedicated to defending human dignity, expanding human potential, and building a freer and safer world. In my scholarship, I focus on municipal government, urban housing policy, civil society, and philanthropy.

Before joining AEI, I was vice president for research and publications at the Manhattan Institute and director of case studies in public policy and management at the Harvard Kennedy School. I am the author of the AEI research paper “The Case for Breaking Up Big Urban School Systems.”¹ I am honored to testify on legislation A.B. 966, which would “[dissolve] the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and [create] in its place four to eight city of Milwaukee public school districts.”²

I will offer several reasons why I concluded that such a course of action might improve education in our large cities.

On the surface, of course, it may seem that larger school districts may be more efficient than smaller ones. They can, to be sure, procure supplies in bulk and realize similar economies of scale. The fact that spending per student tends to be higher in urban districts might reflect the special needs of students rather than some inherent inefficiency.

On closer inspection, however, there are good reasons to conclude that the smaller districts contemplated by the legislation this committee is considering could be advantageous for learning and system accountability.

It is worth noting that the highest-performing school districts in the state of Wisconsin are far smaller than that of the Milwaukee Public Schools. The Elmbrook public schools serve only about 7,400 students,³ for instance, while the Muskego-Norway public schools serve only about 4,800.⁴

Many factors affect student achievement, of course, but a body of social science research has shown that metropolitan areas characterized by competing smaller districts tend to show positive achievement results.

In a widely cited paper entitled “Does Competition Among Public Schools Benefit Students and Taxpayers?,” Stanford University economist Caroline Minter Hoxby examined the effect of greater public school choice due to a larger number of independent school districts in a metropolitan area. Minter Hoxby reported a range of positive and nonnegative effects. These included

Evidence that easier choice leads to greater productivity. Areas with greater opportunities for choice among public schools have lower per-pupil spending, lower teacher salaries, and larger classes. The same areas have better average student performance, as measured by students’ educational attainment, wages, and test scores.⁵

Minter Hoxby noted further:

Improvements in student performance are concentrated among white non-Hispanics, males, and

students who have a parent with at least a high school degree. However, student performance is not worse among Hispanics, African-Americans, females, or students who do not have a parent with a high school degree. Also, student performance improves at both ends of the educational attainment distribution and test score distribution.⁶

The existence and, indeed, persistence of a relatively large number of districts and positive resulting effects are in keeping with economist Charles M. Tiebout's long-respected analysis of metropolitan area political economies. In his 1956 paper "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures," he posited the idea of the "consumer voter," who faces choices among competing political jurisdictions that each potentially provide a distinct market basket of public goods, allowing for choice by virtue of residential self-selection. "The consumer-voter may be viewed as picking that community which best satisfies his preference pattern for public goods," writes Tiebout. "The greater the number of communities and the greater the variance among them, the closer the consumer will come to fully realizing his preference position."⁷ In the school district context, more choice improves the position of consumer voters, per Tiebout.

Were Milwaukee divided into four to eight school districts, it would be in a position to provide greater consumer choice and competition among districts to provide the best services.

That pressure to perform would be reinforced by a closer relationship between voters and a district school board. Voters in smaller suburban and small-town districts are not only more likely to know their school board members thanks to sheer proximity, but their own votes, as a percentage of an election total, are less diluted and thus more consequential. It's worth noting that only two of four open seats on the Milwaukee school board were even contested in the most recent election.⁸ In contrast, in Muskego-Norway, each of three seats was contested, despite their being incumbents holding those seats.⁹ This is the sort of robust local democracy we should encourage.

Finally, it is important to note that smaller districts would continue to provide teachers access to labor unions and negotiation rights. At the same time, labor disputes that might lead to a work stoppage, as we've seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, would affect smaller numbers of students. Indeed, the availability of alternative nearby examples of compromise could encourage similar approaches in neighboring districts. My own paper showed that smaller districts lay the groundwork for labor peace.

Heading into the fall of 2020, the Center for Reinventing Public Education found that "one in four school districts plan to reopen entirely remotely, but four in five urban school districts are set to, making them twice as likely as suburban districts and six times as likely as rural districts to do so."¹⁰ The Return 2 Learn Tracker developed by AEI indicated that the problem continued, even with the acceleration of vaccine distribution last spring (and to the devastating effect for largely low-income, minority students). As of April 2021, 56 percent of rural school districts were fully in person, compared to 36 percent of urban school districts.¹¹ During the recent omicron wave, resistance from teachers unions in Chicago resurfaced, with Democratic mayor Lori Lightfoot referring to the action as "an illegal walkout. They abandoned their posts and they abandoned kids and their families."¹²

The New Chicago Way: Lessons from Other Big Cities, a book by Ed Bachrach and Austin Berg,

examines the dysfunction of the public school system in Chicago and carefully makes the case for the benefits of hypothetical urban disaggregation to solve some of the fundamental issues within the Chicago Public Schools. As the book points out, the desire for school decentralization in Chicago is certainly a driving force for parents: It was neighborhood parents who opposed the recent closing and consolidation of fifty schools.¹³

Moreover, data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics official work stoppages records of K–12 teachers strikes since 1993 show that the strikes have been concentrated in larger jurisdictions. Of the 66 strikes during that period, 36 have occurred either through statewide action or in one of the 100 largest school districts, including Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Oakland. Strikes have also occurred in an additional four districts that, though not in the top 100, are the largest in their metropolitan area (Buffalo, Dayton, Providence, and Youngstown).¹⁴

Giving Milwaukee the chance to consider dividing its school district into smaller ones may seem to be a dramatic change. In reality, it would align Wisconsin’s largest city with the scale of school district size in the Milwaukee suburbs and those of districts across the nation.

I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

Notes

¹ Howard Husock, “The Case for Breaking Up Big Urban School Systems,” American Enterprise Institute, April 29, 2021, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-case-for-breaking-up-big-urban-school-systems/>.

² A.B. 966, Wisconsin Legislature (2021), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/related/proposals/ab966.pdf>.

³ “Elmbrook School District,” *US News & World Report*, <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/wisconsin/districts/elmbrook-school-district-110492>.

⁴ “Muskego-Norway School District,” *US News & World Report*, <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/wisconsin/districts/muskego-norway-school-district-101820#:~:text=Overview%20of%20Muskego%2DNorway%20School,district's%20minority%20enrollment%20is%2010%25>.

⁵ Caroline Minter Hoxby, “Does Competition Among Public Schools Benefit Students and Taxpayers?” (working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, December 1994), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w4979/w4979.pdf.

⁶ Minter Hoxby, “Does Competition Among Public Schools Benefit Students and Taxpayers?”

⁷ Charles M. Tiebout, “A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures,” *Journal of Political Economy* 64 no. 5 (October 1956): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1826343>.

⁸ “Milwaukee Public Schools, Wisconsin, Elections (2021),” Ballotpedia, [https://ballotpedia.org/Milwaukee_Public_Schools,_Wisconsin,_elections_\(2021\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Milwaukee_Public_Schools,_Wisconsin,_elections_(2021)).

⁹ Caitlin Sievers, “Three Incumbents Face Three Newcomers for Three Seats on the Muskego-Norway School Board,” *The Journal Times*, April 3, 2021, https://journaltimes.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/elections/three-incumbents-face-three-newcomers-for-three-seats-on-the-muskego-norway-school-board/article_ca92e3f6-150e-53de-878c-5430ce70c489.html.

¹⁰ Lauren Camera, “Big City Schools Are Less Likely to Reopen for In-Person Instruction,” *US News & World Report*, August 27, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2020-08-27/big-city-schools-are-less-likely-to-reopen-for-in-person-instruction>.

¹¹ Return to Learn Tracker, website, <https://www.returntolearntracker.net/>.

¹² Jordan Wolman, “Lightfoot Says Teachers ‘Abandoned Their Posts,’ Remains ‘Hopeful’ Deal Can Be Reached,” *Politico*, January 9, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/01/09/lightfoot-chicago-teachers-deal-abandoned-526807>.

¹³ Edgard H. Bachrach and Austin Ray Berg, *The New Chicago Way: Lessons from Other Big Cities*, (Carbondale,

IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2019).

¹⁴ These data were compiled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. I use official work stoppages involving 1,000 or more K–12 education workers from 1993 to 2019. These data do not include informal strikes such as walkouts, sick-outs, and other mechanisms that teachers have used. See US Bureau of Labor Statistics, website, <https://www.bls.gov/wsp/>.

Good morning, I hesitated to come today because I didn't want to breathe any air into this bill. But instead of going to work and seething all day over this proposition I decided it best that I take a personal day, drive on over and sit before you and speak up for my community, for the children of Milwaukee. I am a proud parent of a Milwaukee Public Schools graduate and one current MPS student. When I am in our schools and out in the community I hear a lot about our public schools and the choices our families have regarding the matriculation of their children from those who have chosen Milwaukee Public Schools.

With the current landscape of authorized charter schools within MPS, under the city of Milwaukee, under UW Milwaukee, the OEO, and Milwaukee's extensive system of private and parochial schools funded with vouchers - Milwaukee is undoubtedly among the 'choicest' places in the United States. The Wisconsin legislature has gone above and beyond it's diligence to ensure that the landscape of schools, funding streams and accountability measures are difficult to navigate and understand for the typical family. In my opinion, informed by being an MPS parent for 18 years and a citizen of the city of Milwaukee for 20 years, further fracturing the educational landscape of the city will do nothing to improve student outcomes and only create 4 to 8 more institutions of bureaucracy. If "choices" were all it took to improve student outcomes, we would already be the panacea of urban school districts. You see it take more than choices to improve student and community outcomes; it takes belief, investment and the will.

You have not asked Milwaukee parents or educators what would be good for our schools and our community so I have come here this morning to tell you a few things that this body could do to infinitely improved education outcomes in my city and communities throughout the state:

1. Legislate the reimburse of special education services for our traditional public schools (currently about 30%) be at the same rate you have for voucher/parochial/private schools 90%
2. Legislate the creation of an equitable and predictable funding system for revenue limits and aid increases and untangle the school funding formula
3. Legislate to increase aid for Student Mental Health, Bilingual/English Language Learning students, Sparsity aid, Transportation aid and Low Income aid
4. Legislate aid to help attract and retain educators, school support staff and school leaders. Help address the statewide staffing shortages
5. Legislate to fully fund public, full-day K4 programs

I realize the bills you are taking up currently, including this one which is aimed at dissolving Milwaukee public schools and establishing 4 to 8 fiefdoms, may feel politically appropriate and in alignment with other tactics inflicted on urban communities across the country... but really there are actual, useful tactics you could take which would have a near immediate effect on student learning outcomes and one is easy and takes no legislation at all... just stop talking about our schools and our children in Milwaukee as if they are less than or "sad charity" cases and start talking to and with our community about how you can help. Stop inciting headlines on

Friday afternoons about dissolving our schools and start asking what we need to further succeed. Stop acting like everyone in Milwaukee is ignoring the needs of our children and help drive down class sizes and increase student opportunities for all of our children.

Another legislation free way to support our schools is to stop trying to use the state report cards as a weapon to cast penalties and dispersions on our schools and communities and start using the information they do provide as a mechanism for identifying schools and communities which require nurturing and not dissolution.

We have some wonderful schools, amazing educators and brilliant children and families in MPS. Our children deserve all of the opportunities afforded to their suburban neighbors... and that starts with the economics of the community and not with overthrowing local control. This proposal would never be directed at Whitefish Bay or Oak Creek or Howard Suamico or Eau Claire.

I am no apologist for the areas that MPS needs improvement, but dissolving and reorganizing is NOT the solution.

We have no time to lose on another half baked take over or destroy of Milwaukee Public Schools. Our children are learning and growing every day and need your support and encouragement. They need you to believe in them and for you all to stop brainstorming fly by night proposals and start supporting common sense approaches to supporting the schools and communities our children deserve.

“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy.” - John Dewey



**Testimony to the Assembly Education Committee
Opposition to Assembly Bills 966, 967, 968, 970, 971, 975**
submitted by the
Wisconsin Education Association Council
February 10, 2022

The Wisconsin Education Association Council, representing teachers and education support professionals in Wisconsin Public Schools, are opposed to Assembly Bills 966, 967, 968, 970, 971 and 975. These bills are circulating at a time when lawmakers should be working with parents and educators to help our students and develop sustainable solutions to the exodus of educators leaving the classroom. The following is a quote from WEAC President and teacher Peggy Wirtz-Olsen:

“Legislators need to stop politicizing our schools and pitting families against each other with divisive proposals. The supporters of these bills are making an already difficult job that much more complicated for educators. These bills are reckless and could cause the destruction of our public school system.

“The people who know best how these proposed laws would impact public schools – educators – can’t even attend the public hearing to give input because they are at work – keeping schools open and teaching students. We have not been consulted nor given time to educate the bills’ sponsors on the consequences of these bills on our students and classrooms. The bills’ sponsors are urged to take time to discuss these proposals with the front-line professionals who teach the children.”

Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President
Bob Baxter, Executive Director

Dear Representative Thiesfeldt,

I am writing to you today to ask for your support of education bills AB 966, 967, 968, 970, 971 and 975. As a parent of a child enrolled in a Wisconsin public school, I believe legislation is the only way to restore parental rights in our schools. As things stand now, I have little faith in our public schools, and I see no evidence that DPI wants to operate with parental input into our schools. I want parents and taxpayers to have a say in our children's education – not a faceless bureaucracy. I believe these bills are a step in the right direction. Thank you for giving parents a much needed voice.

Doug Dyer
Elmbrook Parent and Resident

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to you today to ask for your support of education bills AB 966, 967, 968, 970, 971 and 975. All of these bills are vital to maintaining the integrity of our educational system. Wisconsin parents have lost all faith and trust in our government schools and DPI. These bills help to give authority back to the parents, taxpayers and stakeholders, to determine what is best for our children's education. Thank you for your service and commitment to improving our K-12 education system, and for helping to get Wisconsin schools back to success.

Most Sincerely,

Heidi Anderson
Brookfield, WI

Dear Representative Thiesfeldt,

I am writing to you today to ask for your support of education bills AB 966, 967, 968, 970, 971 and 975. All of these bills are vital to maintaining the integrity of our educational system. Wisconsin parents have lost all faith and trust in our government schools and DPI. These bills help to give authority back to the parents, taxpayers and stakeholders, to determine what is best for our children's education. Thank you for your service and commitment to improving our K-12 education system, and for helping to get Wisconsin schools back to success.

Emily Donohue
Elmbrook Parent and Resident

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to you today to ask for your support of education bills AB 966, 967, 968, 970, 971 and 975. All of these bills are vital to maintaining the integrity of our educational system. Wisconsin parents have lost all faith and trust in our government schools and DPI. These bills help to give authority back to the parents, taxpayers and stakeholders, to determine what is best for our children's education. Thank you for your service and commitment to improving our K-12 education system, and for helping to get Wisconsin schools back to success.

Thank you.
Eric Valk
950 Chester St.
Brookfield, WI

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2021 ASSEMBLY BILL 966

February 8, 2022 - Introduced by Representatives WITTKE, THIESFELDT, BRANDTJEN, GUNDRUM, KNODL, KUGLITSCH, MACCO, MAGNAFICI, MURPHY and VORPAGEL, cosponsored by Senators DARLING and ROTH. Referred to Committee on Education.

AUTHORS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

- 1 AN ACT to renumber 119.9000 (1); to amend chapter 119 (title), subchapter I
- 2 (title) of chapter 119 [precedes 119.01], 119.01, 119.02 (intro.), 119.02 (1), 119.02
- 3 (2), 119.04 (1), 119.04 (2) and 119.50 (3); and to create 119.9000 (1e) and
- 4 119.9000 (1m) of the statutes; relating to: reorganizing the Milwaukee Public
- 5 School System into four to eight school districts and creating a Milwaukee
- 6 Public Schools Redistricting and Implementation Commission.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

Effective July 1, 2024, this bill dissolves the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and creates in its place four to eight city of Milwaukee public school districts. Each new school district must operate grades kindergarten to 12. Each new school board must consist of seven members elected at large for three-year terms. The initial election of school board members occurs at the 2024 spring election.

The bill creates a Milwaukee Public Schools Redistricting and Implementation Commission consisting of the governor, two members appointed by the governor, the state superintendent of public instruction, the mayor of the city of Milwaukee, and two members appointed by the mayor. No later than October 1, 2022, the commission must determine the number of new school districts and the boundaries of those new school districts and submit to the legislature recommended changes to the statutes necessary to organize and operate the new school districts. The commission must recommend legislation to do all of the following:

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1. Transfer school buildings from the city of Milwaukee to one of the new school districts.
2. Address the taxing and borrowing authority of each new school district.
3. Ensure that employees of MPS prior to its dissolution are employed by one of the new school districts after the dissolution of MPS.
4. Provide for the continuation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, under which an eligible pupil who resides in the city of Milwaukee may attend a private school at state expense under certain conditions.
5. Provide for the continuation of any charter school authorized by MPS.

The bill directs the Department of Public Instruction to provide staff support and funding to the commission and to assist each new school district created under the bill.

For further information see the state and local fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 119 (title) of the statutes is amended to read:

2 CHAPTER 119

3 FIRST CLASS CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

4 SYSTEMS IN FIRST CLASS CITIES

5 OTHER THAN MILWAUKEE

6 SECTION 2. Subchapter I (title) of chapter 119 [precedes 119.01] of the statutes
7 is amended to read:

8 CHAPTER 119

9 SUBCHAPTER I

10 FIRST CLASS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

11 DISTRICTS IN FIRST CLASS CITIES

12 OTHER THAN MILWAUKEE

13 SECTION 3. 119.01 of the statutes is amended to read:

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SECTION 3

1 119.01 Applicability. This chapter subchapter applies only to cities of the 1st
2 class.

3 SECTION 4. 119.02 (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 119.02 Definitions. (intro.) In this chapter subchapter, unless the context
5 clearly requires otherwise:

6 SECTION 5. 119.02 (1) of the statutes is amended to read:

7 119.02 (1) "Board" means the board of school directors in charge of the public
8 schools of a city of the 1st class other than those public schools transferred to the
9 opportunity schools and partnership programs under s. 119.33 or subch. II.

10 SECTION 6. 119.02 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

11 119.02 (2) "City" means a 1st class city of the 1st class other than the city of
12 Milwaukee.

13 SECTION 7. 119.04 (1) of the statutes is amended to read:

14 119.04 (1) Subchapters IV, V, and VII of ch. 115, ch. 121, and ss. 66.0235 (3) (c),
15 66.0603 (1m) to (3), 115.01 (1) and (2), 115.28, 115.31, 115.33, 115.34, 115.343,
16 115.345, 115.363, 115.364, 115.365 (3), 115.366, 115.367, 115.38 (2), 115.415, 115.445,
17 118.001 to 118.04, 118.045, 118.06, 118.07, 118.075, 118.076, 118.10, 118.12, 118.125
18 to 118.14, 118.145 (4), 118.15, 118.153, 118.16, 118.162, 118.163, 118.164, 118.18,
19 118.19, 118.196, 118.20, 118.223, 118.225, 118.24 (1), (2) (c) to (f), (6), (8), and (10),

20 118.245, 118.25, 118.255, 118.258, 118.291, 118.292, 118.293, 118.30 to 118.43,
21 118.46, 118.50, 118.51, 118.52, 118.53, 118.55, 118.56, 120.12 (2m), (4m), (5), and (15)
22 to (27), 120.125, 120.13 (1), (2) (b) to (g), (3), (14), (17) to (19), (26), (34), (35), (37),
23 (37m), and (38), 120.137, 120.14, 120.20, 120.21 (3), and 120.25 are applicable to a
24 1st class city school district operating under this subchapter and board but not,
25 unless explicitly provided in this chapter subchapter or in the terms of a contract, to
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SECTION 7

1 the commissioner or to any school transferred to an opportunity schools and
2 partnership program.

3 SECTION 8. 119.04 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 119.04 (2) The board shall exercise the powers, perform the functions, and be
5 entitled to all school aid under sub. (1) insofar as the same are relevant to cities of
6 the 1st class. The board and the schools in cities of the 1st class a school district
7 operating under this subchapter shall be governed in all matters by the general laws
8 of the state, except as altered or modified by express amendments.

9 SECTION 9. 119.50 (3) of the statutes is amended to read:

10 119.50 (3) The superintendent of schools shall keep separate accounts of all
11 money raised and apportioned for 1st class city purposes of a school district purposes
12 operating under this subchapter. The money shall be disbursed in accordance with
13 this section and s. 66.0607 (5) and shall be paid from the proper funds.

14 SECTION 10. 119.9000 (1) of the statutes is renumbered 119.9000 (1s).

15 SECTION 11. 119.9000 (1e) of the statutes is created to read:

16 119.9000 (1e) "Board" has the meaning given in s. 119.02 (1).

17 SECTION 12. 119.9000 (1m) of the statutes is created to read:

18 119.9000 (1m) "City" means a 1st class city.

19 SECTION 13.0Nonstatutory provisions.

20 (1) DEFINITION. In this section, "commission" means the Milwaukee Public
21 Schools redistricting and implementation commission created under sub. (3) (a).

22 (2) DISSOLUTION OF MPS; CREATION OF NEW SCHOOL DISTRICTS. The Milwaukee
23 Public School System is dissolved. The territory comprising the dissolved school
24 district is divided into new school districts as determined by the commission under
25 sub. (4) (a).

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SECTION 13

1 (3) MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS REDISTRICTING AND IMPLEMENTATION
COMMISSION.

2 (a) There is created a Milwaukee Public Schools redistricting and
3 implementation commission that consists of the governor, 2 members appointed by
4 the governor, the state superintendent of public instruction, the mayor of the city of

5 Milwaukee, and two members appointed by the mayor of the city of Milwaukee.

6 (b) The members of the commission shall receive no compensation or
7 reimbursement for their services or expenses.

8 (c) The department of public instruction shall staff and provide funding for the
9 commission.

10 (d) The commission terminates upon the earlier of the following:

11 1. The date the commission makes the determinations under sub. (4) (a) or the
12 date the commission submits the recommendations under sub. (4) (b), whichever is
13 later.

14 2. October 1, 2022.

15 (4) COMMISSION; POWERS AND DUTIES. No later than October 1, 2022, the
16 commission shall do all of the following:

17 (a) Determine the number of public school districts, which shall not be less than
18 4 nor more than 8, created in the city of Milwaukee under sub. (2) and the boundaries
19 of the school districts. To the extent practicable, the commission shall make the
20 population in each school district roughly equal. The commission shall consider the
21 location and capacity of school buildings when drawing the boundaries under this
22 paragraph.

23 (b) Submit to the legislature recommendations on legislation needed as a result
24 of the creation of the city of Milwaukee public school districts under this act, on any
25 other legislation required to implement this act, and on related matters deemed by

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SECTION 13

1 the commission to be desirable or necessary to organize and operate the school
2 districts created under this act, including the appropriate allocation of assets and
3 liabilities under s. 66.0235 (2c) to each of the school districts created under this act.
4 The commission shall recommend legislation under this paragraph to do at least all
5 of the following:

6 1. Transfer each school building and grounds and each school site from the city
7 of Milwaukee to the public school district created under this act within which that
8 school building and grounds or school site is located.

9 2. Address the taxing and borrowing authority of each public school district
10 created under this act.

11 3. Ensure that persons employed by the Milwaukee Public School System on
12 June 30, 2024, are employed by one of the public school districts created under this
13 act on and after July 1, 2024.

14 4. Provide for the continuation of the program under s. 119.23.

15 5. Provide for the continuation of any charter school authorized under s. 118.40
16 by the board of school directors in charge of the Milwaukee Public Schools.

17 (5) RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION. The
18 department of public instruction shall provide assistance to the city of Milwaukee

19 public school districts created under this act, including planning for the operation of
20 the school districts.

21 (6) MEMBERS OF NEW PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS.

22 (a) Each of the city of Milwaukee public school districts created under this act
23 shall be governed by a school board consisting of 7 members elected at large as
24 provided in s. 120.42. The initial members of each school board shall be elected at
25 the 2024 spring election and shall take office on July 1, 2024.

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SECTION 13

1 (b) The initial terms of 4 of the initial members of the school board for each city
2 of Milwaukee public school district created under this act shall be 2 years. The initial
3 terms of 3 of the initial members of each school board shall be 3 years. For the initial
4 election, in filing nomination papers and a declaration of candidacy, each candidate
5 shall specify whether the candidate seeks office for a 2-year or a 3-year term.

6 Successors to the initial board members shall serve for 3-year terms.

7 (7) UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT LAWS APPLY. Each city of Milwaukee public school
8 district created under this act shall be a unified school district under subch. II of ch.
9 120 and shall operate grades kindergarten to 12.

10 SECTION 14.0Effective dates. This act takes effect on the day after publication,
11 except as follows:

12 (1) The treatment of ss. 119.01, 119.02 (intro.), (1), and (2), 119.04 (1) and (2),
13 119.50 (3), 119.9000 (1), (1e), and (1m), subch. I (title) of ch. 119, and ch. 119 (title)
14 and SECTION 13 (2) and (7) of this act take effect on July 1, 2024.

15 (END)

Statutes affected:

Bill Text: 119.01, 119.02(intro.), 119.02, 119.02(1), 119.02(2), 119.04(1), 119.04, 119.04(2),
119.50(3), 119.50