

February 16, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my opposition to AB-971. This bill is far too wide in its scope and it is extremely problematic regarding the verbage and potential side effects for the students of Wisconsin.

While I recognize that there are stakeholders who believe that they are acting on, and promoting legislation that is seemingly in the best interest of children, I implore you to take a pause to consider if AB971 is truly comprehensive in its aim to serve *all* students.

To make a blanket statement that a third grade student must score proficient or above on the state reading test in order to be promoted to the fourth grade is, forgive me, simply ludicrous. To base the advancement status of a *third grade child on one single summative assessment* without taking into consideration their educational history, family history, formative assessments, anecdotal notes, social/emotional status, not to mention failing to take into account whether they have had achievement gaps based on lack of opportunities, simply does not make rational sense.

Sunsetting the Achievement Gap Reduction Program is short sighted. Currently, districts that are under contract in the AGR program are able to maintain smaller class sizes. Smaller class sizes mean that more 1:1 and small group work can be achieved. Taking that away under the guise that the money would be better spent to increase licensure of reading teachers is problematic. Find other money to support increasing licensure of reading teachers. It shouldn't be either or. What good will licensure of reading teachers be if the teacher is trying to attend to the learning needs of 20 or more students in classrooms 4k-2nd grade. These are the years where it is most crucial to meet individual learning needs. The pandemic has placed an additional stressor on students. Many are averaging 2 years behind in their social emotional regulatory behaviors. How will having a licensed reading teacher in a class of 20 or more emotionally dysregulated children solve the perceived reading crisis?

I'm curious how taking away the parental right of opting a child out of testing is beneficial in any way. Will taking away that right help them to become better readers? Critical thinkers? Has anyone paused to consider that pushing stricter testing mandates on schools, administrators, and teachers might actually create more harm than good?

What does "often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities" allude to? What IS expected? And for whom? By singling out a privileged group, what becomes of the population that doesn't fit in that mold?

It is all fine and good to mandate that a school report assessment findings to parents and provide said parents with a plan for helping their child move forward in their learning. This should be an ongoing, regularly occurring part of the relationship between school and home. My concern becomes, at what point is the cultural, ethnic, and social identity of the child factored

into the equation? When does one look at a situation and determine that perhaps the child has the cognitive ability to achieve success, but has grossly lacked opportunities to learn based on factors completely out of their control? Bills such as AB971 continue to force the hand of administrators and teachers. Students are in school buildings a mere 7-8 hours a day. That leaves 16-17 additional hours of which educators have zero control of what is happening in the lives of their students.

The items laid out in this bill clearly indicate that it has been thrown together with only a cursory view of what is actually needed in order to support and lift each and every student in their learning trajectory. Every child deserves an expert teacher that is able to provide individual, comprehensive, responsive, culturally respectful teaching that lifts and supports them in their growth as critical thinkers and problem solvers in an ever changing world.

Can AB971 guarantee that?

Sincerely,
Ryanne E. Deschane
ryanned@gmail.com
Waunakee, Wisconsin
K/1 educator

Committee on Education members -

My name is Bryn Horton. I am the Vice President of the Sun Prairie Area School District Board of Education and I am speaking on behalf of the Board.

We oppose AB971. It is not lost on us that the latest slate of bills written and introduced have supposedly been about parent choice and yet in this bill, the authors are proposing to take away parent choice when it comes to required standardized testing.

It has been proven time and again that standardized testing (namely the state-mandated, once-a-year test) does not accurately affect a student's abilities. Once again, the state is working to take away teacher voice in a classroom. If a teacher works with a student every day, they have a more accurate idea of whether that student can read or not. To require a student to be held back a grade based on a one-day test is not how we should be running our schools.

Please fully fund special education so that we can use our General Fund money how it is meant to be spent - on our students in the classroom. Please re-think our over-reliance on standardized testing as the sole way to assess how a student is performing. Please remember that school boards are elected by their communities to run their school districts and allow them to do their jobs.

Thank you!



Wisconsin State Reading Association

WSRA... providing leadership, advocacy, and expertise

To: Representative Jeremy Thiesfeldt, Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Education
From: Kathy Champeau, WSRA Legislative Policy Committee Chair
Date: Wednesday, February 16, 2022
Re: **Testimony Explaining Opposition to Assembly Bill 971**

The Wisconsin State Reading Association opposes Assembly Bill 971 because the side effects of this bill would be detrimental to Wisconsin students and the educators trying to ensure that all students' literacy needs are met. In no way is opposition to this bill to be characterized that the WSRA is not serious about improving literacy learning for all Wisconsin students. In fact, the opposite is true. The WSRA has repeatedly forwarded recommendations to, as well as testified before, state legislators addressing root causes and the systemic changes necessary to improve literacy learning in Wisconsin.

Efficacy Studies Needed

WSRA understands that any legislation is a mandate. When legislation potentially impacts tens of thousands of the 872,436 Wisconsin students and their parents, the 57,551 Wisconsin teachers, and all 464 public school districts, the WSRA urges that efficacy studies be an integral part of proposed education legislation. Wisconsin schools do not have the necessary resources to overhaul programs and practices that are working for them and to change course by implementing legislation that either has already been proven ineffective or has no efficacy studies to support its implementation. Nor would underperforming Wisconsin schools benefit as well. Research has proven in many different aspects of education, "Something is not necessarily better than nothing", especially as a large-scale mandate.

Reasons for not supporting AB 971 include but are not limited to:

Item #1 Promotion of pupils from the third grade to the fourth grade

Item #6 Parents opt-out of pupils from statewide examinations

Retention is used as the solution for systemic issues and students become its casualty.

- a. Contradicts federal government legislation (Individual with Disabilities Act, IDEA,) which states the importance of the use of multiple kinds of

assessments and the recommendations of national professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association, the National Council on Measurement in Education, and the American Evaluation Association that opposes the use of a single assessment to make important educational decisions for individual students, such as grade retention.

- b. Of the top six states/jurisdictions that score significantly above the national average on the NAEP 2019 fourth grade reading assessment, none of them have state-mandated retention legislation.
- c. Negative effects of retention of students in the elementary grades are widely documented. Oftentimes it is argued that a state (Mississippi, for example) does not retain many third graders. That is because the overwhelming numbers of retentions happen in K-2.
- d. Negative effects are characterized by dropout rates of students as they reach middle and early high school. Some students are retained more than once with no benefit.
- e. Negative effects are blatantly an equity issue:
 - African American males are over-represented in retention rates, (for example, Mississippi);
 - Retained students are not guaranteed better services the second and third time around (i.e. lack of reading teachers, access to highly qualified teachers, emergency licensures, reduced licensure requirements, and paraprofessionals in teaching roles);
 - High poverty schools document difficulty retaining teachers thus employing teachers with emergency licensures or using paraprofessionals as teachers.
- f. Retention becomes the intervention when responsive teaching is what is needed but not accessible to all students. Not every student has access to a licensed reading teacher nor does every district have a reading specialist coordinating an effective and cohesive K-12 program. Not every district has money allocated to ongoing literacy professional development to address the complex needs of thousands of diverse students.
- g. Eliminates parents' rights for opting their child out of high stakes assessments, the instrument used to make retention decisions. Parents know their child best and often understand the serious negative effects high stakes tests have on their child.
- h. Retention unnecessarily wastes precious taxpayer dollars for a practice that does proven harm to students without addressing root causes.

Item #2 Assessment of reading readiness**Item #5 Programs to identify and address pupils with dyslexia**

- i. Increases the amount of testing by mandating diagnostic reading assessments in 13 areas reducing valuable instructional time when all 13 areas are not necessary.
- j. Creates an unnecessary financial and workload burden on school districts with no discernible advantage for students and encumbers rather than supports school districts. See statement above.
- k. Legislated diagnostic assessments of students at risk of reading difficulties acts as a proxy for the expertise of reading teachers and reading specialists. In what other profession, does legislation mandate which diagnostic tools must be used for all clients/patients? Clinical psychologists? Dentists? Physicians? Physical therapists? Orthopedic therapists? Speech and language pathologists?
- l. Narrowly focuses on and foregrounds a particular group of students, those with dyslexia. AB 971 states that additional annual diagnostic assessment is mandatory for “the pupil [who] is at risk of reading difficulty; or 3) the pupil has been identified as having characteristics of dyslexia”. Students identified as dyslexic *are* students with reading difficulties. The law by default, marginalizes all other students with reading difficulties.
- m. Pathologizes normal reading development of four-year olds before they have had the opportunity to learn thus placing these children on a deficit trajectory.
- n. There is no agreed upon standardized tool that can be used to identify students with dyslexia with an agreed upon list of characteristics. Dyslexia clinics across the country have different sets of criteria. There is no standardized, practical assessment tool that can be administered to determine consistently which students have reading difficulties that are neurobiological in origin and which are not. Yet, this legislation defines dyslexia as neurobiological in origin which has no useful or practical value. As a result, those students identified as dyslexic vary across the country and across the state.

Item #3 Grants to increase licensure of reading teachers**Item #4 Sunsets the Achievement Gap Reduction program**

- a. WSRA supports the provision of the bill: “award grants...to provide support and financial assistance to their licensed teachers for the purpose of obtaining additional licensure as reading teachers...and a bonus payment of \$1,000.” This, however, is only for one year, 2023-2024. This should be an ongoing grant.
- b. The above statement, however, is diminished by Section 32 which WSRA does not support. It states “financial assistance...for the purpose of obtaining

a...*permit or certificate as a reading teacher*". This is woefully inadequate and does not meet the criteria to become a licensed reading teacher.

- c. While increasing the number of available reading teachers would be a positive step forward, it will not begin to make up for the number of students who will lose much needed support with the permanent elimination of the Achievement Gap Reduction Funding.

If you should have any questions or wish to speak further about this issue, I can be reached at: krchamp@aol.com.

Thank you,

References

American Educational Research Association: AERA Position Statement on High-Stakes Testing in Pre-K – 12 Education. (2000). <https://www.aera.net/>

American Evaluation Association: Position Statement on HIGH STAKES TESTING In PreK-12 Education. <https://www.eval.org/Policy-Advocacy/Policy-Statements/High-Stakes-Testing>

American Psychological Association <https://www.apa.org/>

Individuals with Disabilities Act <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>

National Assessment of Educational Progress <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>

National Council on Measurement in Education: The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. <https://www.ncme.org/publications/testing-standards>

Smith, D. (2001). *Is too much riding on high stakes tests?* American Psychological Association. December 2001, Vol 32, No. 11.



**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