

Assembly argues over budget provision on Racine Unified School District

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Assembly Democrats say the biennial budget would re-segregate Racine-area schools by letting villages in the area vote to create their own school districts.

But Republicans say the district has failed students with “embarrassing” test scores and graduation rates, adding that major changes are needed at the district.

“What’s hurting [students] is a school district that fails and education they don’t get and opportunities they never receive,” said Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester.

The provision would give the Racine district a one-year extension before a possible state takeover under the Opportunity Schools and Partnership Program, which was created in the last budget and targets underperforming school districts. But it also sets up a process for area villages to form their own school districts, rather than going into the OSPP.

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Democrats, whose amendments on the issue have so far been rejected, said Racine parents should be able to vote on whether those districts split off. Dem Rep. Cory Mason, who’s running for Racine mayor, called it a “secession plan” and said the state should at least study whether the move would harm minorities and those with disabilities.

He also said Republicans shouldn’t “stand here with a straight face” after underfunding school districts and then saying the state will help by “seizing their schools and splitting up the districts.”

Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca, D-Kenosha, also said Racine residents voiced their opposition at a local town hall about not being able to vote on communities' exit from their district.

"We had over 100 people on a Packer Sunday show up, and they are just hopping mad that we are going to change the process so that people can no longer vote," he said

But Rep. Tom Weatherston, R-Caledonia, predicted that not every community would decide to split away from the district and that he wasn't sure how the "racial imbalances" would happen, as the city of Racine is about 60 percent white.

And Weatherston said he trusts Racine Unified to fix its issues this year and not go into the OSPP.

"We can't afford to keep letting the kids fail," he said.