

Dane County Executive Parisi: Expands driver's license program to six more school districts

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced he is partnering with six school districts to expand his Access to Opportunity Initiative and help teenagers who otherwise could not afford driver's education an opportunity to earn their licenses. Parisi started the program in the Madison School District in the summer of 2015, helping 100 young people each year earn their driver's license without their families having to worry about how to afford the more than \$400 price tag of the course. Now the program is being expanded to six more Dane County schools, with 119 more students getting into a class they might not otherwise be able to afford.

"A driver's license plays a key role in providing the opportunity Dane County's younger residents need to avoid limitations in employment and economic standing, but it comes at a price many families struggle to afford," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. "These new partnerships will help a greater number of our youth learn how to drive and will open the doors of opportunity to more people in our community."

The school districts of Deerfield, DeForest, Marshall, McFarland, Middleton-Cross Plains, and Verona are all joining Dane County's driver's license program.

Approximately 20 students from each of these districts, or 119 participants in total, will receive admission and fee waiver to the Driver's Education Summer Scholars Program. Enrollment for the program is valued at \$400 per person. The County Executive allocated \$94,800 in his 2018 budget for the driver's license scholarship

program.

“I am very appreciative of these scholarships and the benefit it will have on students who receive them,” said DeForest Area High School Principal Machell Schwarz. “Having the ability to obtain a driver’s license is an important first step toward independence and mobility. These scholarships help kids take advantage of opportunities that they might not otherwise have ever had.”

In 2016, Dane County partnered with all four Madison Metropolitan School District high schools, the Cooperative Extension, and AAA Wisconsin to help 100 Madison school kids who otherwise could not afford driver’s education a chance to earn their licenses. A total of 90 students enrolled in the program passed the classroom portion and began accumulating behind the wheel experience. Dane County hopes to see these positive results continue in the Madison School District and spread to the new school district partnerships.

“We have had concerned staff and community members working on supporting students in getting their driver’s licenses for years,” said Laura Love, Director of Secondary Education at the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. “We are so pleased to participate in the Driver’s Ed Scholars Program for our students starting in 2017, as this will mean more students have access to this asset that will help them get to where they need to go for further education, for jobs, and for their futures.”

County Executive Parisi launched Access to Opportunity in his 2015 budget to break down barriers to success that too many people face in the community. The initiative’s pilot phase of the driver’s license program included students at Madison East High School and James Madison Memorial High School. This latest expansion of the program will support more youth in obtaining a driver’s license and overcoming a significant barrier for disadvantaged people in Dane County.