

Rep. Pope: Republicans to parents of special needs students: “We know better than you”

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 12, 2017

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Madison, Wisconsin – Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee recently approved a motion that would change the way that open enrollment transfers work for Special Education Students. Representative Sonyd Pope (D-Mt. Horeb), the ranking Democrat on the Assembly Committee on Education responded to these changes as they will negatively affect students with special needs and their resident districts.

“The actions taken by the Republicans on this issue are consistent with the last six years of failed policies. This is again a policy crafted in a back room deal, out of sight from the public and stakeholders, and harmful to the people it affects the most,” said Rep. Pope. “This irresponsible policy-making shows yet again, that Republicans are more interested in pushing their agenda than listening to the people they represent.”

The open enrollment changes include a provision allowing a nonresident district accepting a special needs student through open enrollment to qualify for as much as \$30,000 for that student. In contrast, a special needs student in their district of residence has to use existing means to support that child, using the special education categorical dollars that reimburse at less than 30%. This dynamic incentivizes students and their families to seek education outside of their home district and punishes taxpayers of districts with high populations of students with special needs.

“I’m not sure that Republicans know what they are doing to taxpayers and parents by implementing this policy,” Rep. Pope said. “Rather than pitting schools against each other, perhaps Republicans could try adequately funding special education, which they have held flat for nearly a decade.”

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