

Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: Statement on Wisconsin Superintendent Evers's Debate Remarks

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March 29, 2017 – Milwaukee, WI – Yesterday, at a state superintendent candidate forum at Marquette University Law School, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers criticized a recent WILL study, Apples to Apples: The Definitive Look at Test Scores in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. While we are happy that he looked at our study, we wish he better understood it. Below is a response from WILL President Rick Esenberg:

“Our study compared outcomes between all K-12 schools in Wisconsin – traditional public, public charter, and private schools in the choice programs. In doing so, it controlled for a variety of socioeconomic factors such as race, poverty, etc. As we acknowledged, we did not control for special needs or learning disabilities because the data simply do not exist for an accurate comparison of the two populations. An academic study found that reported disability rates in MPCP schools were lower than actual disability rates because MPCP schools lack the financial incentives to report disabilities that are available to public schools. Our study does control for socioeconomic status – something which may be correlated with special needs status, but we cannot control for what we cannot measure.

“We hope that someday it will be possible to do such a comparison and we have made a request to DPI for such data. This request has, thus far, been ignored. There

are reforms that could enhance the likelihood that special needs students will participate in the choice program – such as expanding access to the Special Needs Scholarship Program and increased voucher funding – but, unfortunately Superintendent Evers is not an advocate for that.

“No study is perfect. But ours is the most sophisticated and carefully controlled evaluation of test scores in K-12 schools since the School Choice Demonstration Project (SCDP). Like the SCDP, it contradicts the common narrative among certain politicians and reporters that students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program underperform or perform the same as their peers at Milwaukee Public Schools.

“It is unfortunate that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction will not acknowledge that or concede that his assumptions about the choice program may be completely wrong.”