

# Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Study explores how school districts comply with open records laws

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MPS, MMSD struggle with transparency while RUSD, Green Bay earn “A”s  
November 14, 2017 – Milwaukee, WI – While it is well-documented how effective state agencies are at complying with open records laws, it is less clear how school districts are performing. This question finally gets answered in a new WILL report, *Let There Be Light*, authored by WILL Attorney Libby Sobic.

By obtaining data on all open records requests filed in the last two years at select districts, the report documents the average response time for open records requests for twelve of Wisconsin’s largest school districts.

Some of the main findings are:

School districts do not consistently follow the state’s best practices, such as tracking the requests they receive and responding within 10 business days. Some districts like Racine Unified, Green Bay, and Appleton have average response times around 10 business days. But more than half of the districts surveyed have a response time greater than that.

Milwaukee Public School District does not follow the spirit of the state’s open records laws. Even though state law requires districts to comply with open records requests “as soon as practicable and without delay,” it takes MPS, on average, 30

business days to respond to an open records request (195 requests in two years). While MPS certainly receives more requests than other districts, they are put to shame by the speed of compliance at big state agencies, such as the Department of Public Instruction (114 requests, avg. response 12.5 days) and Department of Natural Resources (7,966 requests, avg. response 10.3 days).

Madison Metropolitan School District earns an “F” for transparency. MMSD told WILL that they do not keep track of how quickly they comply with requests – unlike other districts. They tried to charge WILL \$1,148 to put together an answer. Put another way, in order for the public to determine how Madison Schools comply with open records requests, they need to spend over a thousand dollars. Our takeaway? School districts should follow the best practices of Governor Walker’s 2016 executive order to state agencies when responding to open records requests. The full study can be found [here](#) and data accessed [here](#).