

# Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: Governor Evers' budget targets school choice: What you need to know

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For more information, contact:  
Collin Roth | WILL Director of Communication  
collin@will-law.org | 414-727-7418

Proposal threatens to end school choice as Wisconsin knows it  
The News: This morning, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that Governor Tony Evers will propose freezing enrollment in Wisconsin's parental choice programs and curtailing the expansion of independent public charter schools in his budget proposal, set to be introduced on Thursday. The proposals represent the most brazen attack on school choice in Wisconsin in nearly a decade.

According to state test scores, a staggering 83% of students were not proficient in Math at Milwaukee Public Schools. Nearly 80% of low-income students at Green Bay public schools are not proficient in English. In Madison, the home of one of the worst racial achievement gaps in the country, 90% of African Americans are not proficient in English. These numbers are similar at many rural public schools.

Evers' plans would make these situations worse by halting public charter and choice schools, many of which have better academics and are safer than their public school peers.

Dive Deeper: Just weeks into office, Evers is targeting school choice in his budget

proposal – a sweeping document full of policy priorities. Governor Evers has long been a vocal critic of school choice. He called the expansion of school choice “morally wrong” in 2012 and said he would phase out the voucher program on the campaign trail. Here is what Evers’ budget proposal does:

1.) Freezes the number of slots available in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the Racine Parental Choice Program (RCPC), and the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) in Fiscal Year 2021 based on Fiscal Year 2020 headcount.

Why it matters: This would likely prevent some of the highest performing schools in Wisconsin from expanding and make it incredibly difficult for new schools to enter the program. Parents would have fewer educational options, leaving more students trapped at low performing traditional public schools. With vouchers outperforming their public school peers, the freeze would cripple Milwaukee K-12 education.

2.) Claims of savings. Administration officials claim that implementation of these changes will result in \$3 million in savings.

Why it matters: The source of these savings and who will benefit is unclear. Existing research suggests the substantially lower per student spending on choice students has led to savings of \$820 and \$1,202 per student in the state.

3.) Pausing the authority of entities to authorize new independent charter schools without permission from DPI and freezing the authority of the Office of Educational Opportunity to authorize new schools from the enactment of the budget through July 1, 2023.

Why it matters: Under Evers’ plan, independent schools would need to get a permission slip from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, an organization hostile to school choice, in order to expand. A bizarre – and perhaps disastrous – plan.

Led by schools like Milwaukee Collegiate Academy and Rocketship, independent public charter schools are about 5 percentage points more likely to be proficient in reading and 8 percentage points in math, compared to MPS.

Independent public charter schools – public schools which have less red tape than traditional schools – were expanded under the later Walker budgets to move into other parts of the state. The curtailing of the new authorizer at University of

Wisconsin, comes days after news broke of the expansion of a charter in Madison (One City).

4.) Prohibits new students from enrolling in the Special Needs Scholarship Program (SNSP) beginning in FY21.

Why it matters: All children – even those with special needs – deserve the ability to choose their own school. The Special Needs Scholarship Program, used by 650 students, is a school voucher that more accurately reflects the cost of educating students with special needs.

Evers' unconscionable proposal to pause enrollment would hurt special needs children, the most vulnerable in our society.

5.) Requiring Wisconsin property tax bills to reflect information about the gross aid reduced from a school district to pay for students in the parental choice program.

Why it matters: While Evers may describe this as promoting “transparency,” it is little more than a means of hurting public support for school choice. There are many variables that effect property tax bills. For instance, when families move to another city or choose to pay for a private school. No one has proposed including those costs, yet it would be just as logical if Evers believes schools should continue to receive funding for kids they no longer educate.

6.) Requiring schools participating in choice programs to be fully accredited instead of pre-accredited.

Why it matters: Depending on the wording, this recommendation could create a bottleneck for new private schools to enter the voucher program. DPI has a long history of abusive practices when it comes to auditing; this proposal would give bureaucrats more power.

7.) Require all teachers at a school participating in a parental choice program to be licensed by July 1, 2022.

Why it matters: In a time of teacher shortages, this will make it even more difficult for private schools to find qualified teachers. One of the best aspects of school choice is that private schools can offer different curricula than traditional public schools. Sometimes, licensed teachers may not be the best fit for those alternative curriculums.

The Quote: WILL Executive Vice President CJ Szafir said, “Instead of working with the legislature to help high-performing schools expand, Governor Evers has doubled down on politics, siding with special interests over children. His budget would freeze the growth of the highest performing schools in Milwaukee and some of the best in the state. Governor Evers is putting himself in front of the schoolhouse doors, telling low-income children that they cannot go to the best schools.”

The Facts about School Choice: School choice in Wisconsin has been the subject of a number of rigorous academic studies and research, concluding that:

- Higher proficiency in reading and math for students in private and public charter schools.
- Students attending choice schools are less likely to commit crimes.
- School choice results in more money per student for public schools.
- \$500 million in economic benefits resulting from the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.
- Parents in Milwaukee are choosing schools based upon quality. Evers’ budget would make this more difficult.
- Private schools in the voucher program are already highly regulated by the Department of Public Instruction. Some of the financial regulations have led to the removal of low-performing schools from the program.
- School choice is popular in Wisconsin. Charter schools and private voucher programs boast surging enrollment and statewide popularity.

Call to Action: The Republican leadership in the legislature should reject every line in Governor Evers’ K-12 education budget. They should start-over, focusing on expanding high performing public charter and private schools in the voucher program, giving more parents across Wisconsin educational opportunities, and making school funding more equitable and transparent.

WILL’s education reform agenda can be found [here](#).