

# WILL: Study identifies high-performing school deserts in Wisconsin

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The News: The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) released a new report identifying 134 Wisconsin ZIP codes with 40,000 school-age children that have no high-performing school options within ten miles. The report, [Without A Choice: Wisconsin's High-performing School Deserts](#), sheds light on the rural regions of Wisconsin where students lack access to high-performing schools.

The Study: Wisconsin's education reform and school choice debate often focuses on our urban areas. Despite the number of low-performing schools in Wisconsin's cities, it is the rural regions where students lack ready access to nearby high-performing schools of any kind. [Without A Choice: Wisconsin's High-performing School Deserts](#), by Research Director Will Flanders and Policy Associate Jessica Holmberg, uses WILL's School Performance Rankings to identify Wisconsin ZIP codes with high-performing school deserts and provides some policy solutions to address the issue.

- Wisconsin has 134 ZIP codes with up to 40,112 school-age children with no high-performing school options within 10 miles. 134 ZIP codes across 49 counties have no high-performing school options—public, charter, or private—within 10 miles. High-performing school deserts represent regions of the state lacking educational equity and opportunity.
- High-performing school deserts are most common in rural areas. Shawano County (11) and Langlade County (7) lead the way with the most ZIP codes without easy access to high-performing schools. Another eight Wisconsin counties have four or more ZIP codes without high-performing school options.

WILL Solutions: The vast majority of Wisconsin's high-performing school deserts

have no private schools participating in the state's school choice programs or public charter schools. Removing enrollment limitations on the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program and encouraging more public-school districts and government bodies to authorize and create public charter schools would help. Additionally, policies that increase the ability of students to access courses online, particularly the Part-Time Open Enrollment Program, should be expanded to break down barriers to learning opportunities.

The Quotes: WILL Research Director Will Flanders said, "Wisconsin famously pioneered school choice with the development of the Milwaukee voucher program. But until every Wisconsin family has ready access to high-performing schools, the goal of school choice remains out of reach. We must do better to increase the number of high-performing schools in Wisconsin."

Wade Reimer, President of Shepherd's Watch in Mattoon, Wisconsin said, "This report reveals that too many Wisconsin children, particularly in our rural communities, have no access to high performing schools. Closing the education opportunity gap in Wisconsin must increasingly account for these children. They need real options, and soon."

Read More:

- "[Without A Choice: Wisconsin's High-performing School Deserts,](#)" Will Flanders and Jessica Holmberg, July 2020
- "[WILL School Performance Rankings,](#)" March 2020
- "[WILL Fights for School Choice in Rural Wisconsin,](#)" July 2019