

Rep. Kitchens: Disappointed in veto of reading bill

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MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) is voicing his disappointment in Gov. Evers' decision to veto his bipartisan bill that ensures Wisconsin's schools have the framework and tools they need to teach all students to read proficiently.

“It is a shame that our self-proclaimed ‘Education Governor’ is more concerned about protecting the failed status quo than he is with actually helping our children learn to read and live productive lives,” Rep. Kitchens said. “Is this bill a magic bullet that will solve all of our problems? Absolutely not. But we have to try something different because what we are doing right now simply is not working. It is unacceptable that the governor thinks it is ok to keep failing our kids.”

In his veto message, Gov. Evers proclaims that he objects to “fundamentally overhauling Wisconsin literacy instruction and intervention without evidence that more statewide, mandatory testing is the best approach for our students, and without providing the funding needed for implementation.”

“Some of the states that previously had the worst reading scores in the nation have enacted many of the same provisions in my bill and are now seeing vast improvements,” Rep. Kitchens said. “When making important decisions, Gov. Evers always says we must follow the science. Well, all I am asking him to do here is to listen to his own advice.”

Rep. Kitchens noted that his legislation calls for increased screenings, which take a few minutes to perform. This allows schools to catch struggling readers early and intervene. He also pointed out that the funding is already there for the additional screenings.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, close to 65 percent of fourth graders in Wisconsin are not proficient readers, with 34 percent failing to meet even basic standards.

Of the 42 states that report separate reading scores for African American students, Wisconsin ranks dead last in reading achievement, falling 31 places since 1992. During that same time frame, reading achievement for white students has dropped from 6th to 27th and Hispanic students from 1st to 28th.