

Rep. Kitchens: Reading bill vetoed again by Governor

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MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) has released the following statement regarding Gov. Evers once again vetoing his bill that ensures Wisconsin's schools have the necessary framework and tools to teach all students to read proficiently:

“When the self-proclaimed ‘education governor’ vetoed the Senate companion bill last year, he claimed he did so because he objects to ‘fundamentally overhauling Wisconsin literacy instruction and intervention without evidence that more statewide, mandatory testing is the best approach for our students.’ There is plenty of data available that shows the states that have passed similar legislation have seen their reading scores improve dramatically. Gov. Evers always likes to say that we must follow the science. Apparently, he believes that we shouldn’t follow the science if it upsets the education establishment.

“Gov. Evers also said that he vetoed the Senate companion because it did not provide the funding needed for implementation. That is why we brought forward an amendment to the Assembly bill that sets aside millions to get the program up and running. The governor should have had no more excuses with our amended bill, yet he vetoed it again. Our children and families deserve better than this. I will not stop fighting until we enact legislation that helps all our students who are struggling with literacy.”

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 timeframe, reading achievement for white students has dropped from 6th to 27th and Hispanic students from 1st to 28th.

Research has shown that children who cannot read at grade level in fourth grade will struggle to graduate from high school and are far less likely to lead productive lives. About 85 percent of juvenile offenders are functionally illiterate, as are 70 percent of prison inmates. More than 75 percent of those on welfare have difficulties in reading the simplest texts.