

Rep. Shelton: Fights for public schools on the assembly floor

Posted on Thursday, Jun 15, 2023

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MADISON – In Tuesday’s floor session, the Assembly voted to pass [Senate Bill 330](#), the companion bill to [AB 305 heard in the Assembly Committee on Education](#) yesterday morning. This fast-tracked legislation will drastically increase per pupil funding for voucher and independent charter schools and raise the low revenue limit adjustment.

Rep. Kristina Shelton (D – Green Bay) spoke out on the floor against SB 330 – another step in the steady and relentless march toward privatization of our state’s education system – and gave this edited speech on the floor:

“SB 330 will send hundreds of millions of public dollars into private institutions with limited to no public oversight, accountability, and transparency.

These private schools are places where blatant discrimination against students from the LGBTQ+ community and students with disabilities is legal under current state law. Private schools receiving vouchers are funded with public money where students and parents have no recourse if they are being treated unfairly.

In contrast, Wisconsin public schools, overseen by locally elected officials, must serve all kids, regardless of disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, economic background, and learning style.

As responsible stewards of public dollars, entrusted to uphold our constitutional rights and public accountability, this legislative body must do all we can to support public education first. Every kid in Wisconsin deserves the right to a fully funded, fully supported public school.

After a decade of pushing our public schools into positions of fiscal disaster and

failing to meet the needs of our students, you show up now as if you're the heroes of the story. We are not fooled.

This is one of the greatest giveaways of public money to private schools in Wisconsin history. In addition to the hundreds of millions of additional new dollars, recent action taken by Joint Finance Republicans will increase property taxes over the next two years by an estimated \$647 million.

The most recent counts show the voucher programs have grown to over 50,000 students with the Statewide program enrollment cap to be lifted in just a few years. The state spent nearly \$450 million this year on vouchers, and these programs lead to over \$230 million in aid reduction for resident school districts. Twenty percent of private schools in the voucher program have 90%+ of their students attending on a voucher. How is it possible that schools with over 50% from vouchers are not counted as public schools?

This experiment has yet to yield any results that prove that private voucher schools perform any better in the long term. To date, there has been no credible research to suggest that vouchers improve academic performance.

This isn't parental choice. This is about schools picking their students based on who they'd like to serve. And discriminating against those who they choose not to. And yes, this does happen. In 2022, two students from Fox Valley Lutheran High School [were threatened with expulsion](#) for being gay. This is legal under Wisconsin law. Public schools can't discriminate and are legally required to educate all.

Educating all students, but especially those with disabilities, is expensive and labor intensive. It's a burden Wisconsin has almost solely shifted back to public schools and property tax payers. As outlined, SB 330 only reimburses public schools at a measly 33% while the Special Needs Scholarship Voucher pays over 90%.

If we are going to talk about equal funding, let's first commit to an equal commitment for all schools receiving public dollars to accountability, transparency, and upholding the constitution. Instead, we've got two systems operating under two very different sets of standards.

Since this deal was announced last Thursday, these numbers have already changed - on top of the reported \$12,000 for high school voucher students, we now have an additional \$368, exceeding the \$325 that is being reported for public schools. The

give away has already grown.

Good education policy happens when you work with and listen to stakeholders to meet our children's needs and uphold their rights.

Instead, we have a slash and burn style of politics that pits Wisconsinites against one another under the disingenuous promises that somehow, just somehow, private voucher schools will save us from years of dismantling, underfunding, and disrespecting our public schools.

As an educator, mother, and champion for public schools, I will never stop fighting against the privatization of our public schools and the abandonment of our public institutions of common good."