

Stephen McManus: Four potential bipartisan reforms for Wisconsin students

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All across Wisconsin, students are well into the swing of things. So too, are Wisconsin legislators who also had several months off this summer. Now that they are back to work in Madison, I'd like to suggest a few assignments for them.

In the last several sessions, Wisconsin lawmakers have worked together to forge bipartisan compromises and have advanced several pro-student education reforms. So, I am hopeful this can continue. Here are four simple yet significant reforms lawmakers can and should pass in the coming months. It is important to know that virtual schools have been operating in Wisconsin for more than 20 years. Moreover, a movement that started with a couple of schools has now grown to nearly 60 virtual schools serving the K-12 population.

Permit Remote/Home Testing (See the legislation [here](#))

States across the country are realizing the foolishness of prohibiting the remote proctoring of important exams. There is no reason, for example, that online charter schools and their students are forced to travel great distances at great expense to take the Forward Exam and other standardized tests. Every year, students in virtual schools have to trek to a strange location and take a high-impact test under unnecessarily challenging circumstances. Imagine: Your child has to get up at 4:00 a.m. to travel to some new location and then proceed with a stressful test. These situations most likely result in lower scores and lower participation rates, which undermine the purpose of the test and the validity of the data collected. I grew up in Arizona and my undergraduate degree is in Secondary Education. Online students take tests at home all the time and safeguards can be put in place to ensure the validity of at home tests.

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Allow Extra Curricular Participation

Online Charter school students should have the same opportunities as homeschooled students to participate in the extracurricular activities of their 'home' districts. Their parents' tax dollars help finance these facilities. Right now, only online charter school students are expressly prohibited from participating in sports and other clubs offered by the "local/home" district. This discrimination cannot be justified and must end.

Increase Per Pupil Funding

Children who attend online charter schools are not worth a mere fraction of their peers who attend geographically-assigned schools. Yet, state law treats them this way. The school funding formula should be modernized to recognize the real world in 2023. Online education is here to stay, but the funding disparity between children in charter schools and other public schools remains, and it is downright immoral. Some help may be on the way. [SB 652](#) was recently introduced and would help narrow the funding gap.

Eliminate Open Enrollment Veto

Presently, a charter student's 'home' district and the state DPI have the power to deny an open enrollment application to a charter school that is willing to take and educate them. If a Wisconsin school district is willing to enroll a student, neither another district nor the state should be able to prevent that. It makes no sense. In essence, it is a veto that betrays the fundamental promise of the Wisconsin Open Enrollment option, which by the way is the most used and most popular form of School Choice in the state.

Together, policy makers and education reform advocates can continue to do right by the children of our State. It is not a hefty load of work, but these four reforms would help tens of thousands of kids all across Wisconsin.

-McManus and his wife live and have raised their family in Elm Grove. Their children have attended both traditional brick and mortar and public online charter schools.
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