

WASB: Supports financial transparency for all taxpayer-supported schools

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The Wisconsin Association of School Boards has concerns that a proposed school finance dashboard may exclude data on private schools that directly impacts public school district budgets and taxpayers.

2021 Wisconsin Act 89 requires the Department of Public Instruction to create an online portal that displays financial data for public schools, including independent charter schools. The WASB supported the legislation that became 2021 Act 89 to provide the public with transparency in school budgeting.

School district funding and finances are complex, and creating a user-friendly, simple portal for the public is no easy task. To accomplish this, the act created an 11-person advisory committee to advise DPI on the portal's development, including recommendations on what information would be featured. The committee was made up of six Republican appointees, three Democratic appointees and two appointees by State Superintendent Jill Underly. The committee included state Sens. Jeff Smith (D-Brunswick) and Duey Stroebel (R-Saukville).

The committee completed its work and unanimously recommended a broad set of financial data be included in the portal. This data includes revenues in a school district's budget that are spent on non-public school students and the impact vouchers and independent charters have on school district budgets.

The committee's recommendations were submitted to the Joint Finance Committee for legislative review as required by law. A coalition of school choice advocates objected to the inclusion of the above-mentioned information and a member on the

Joint Finance Committee has held up approval of the recommendations.

The WASB urges legislators to include financial data related to private schools that receive taxpayer funds in any portal developed to provide a complete and accurate picture of public school district finances.

The WASB further urges legislators to respect the time and work of the bipartisan committee of legislators and citizens from around the state who worked on these recommendations and implement them in full to provide maximum transparency and access to the public.