

Dairyland Sentinel: Again enlists help of IRG to get additional public records from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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DELEVAN, Wis. — The Dairyland Sentinel is turning to the Institute for Reforming Government (IRG) for the second time this month to compel the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to release records related to its “Waterpark Workshop.”

The Institute for Reforming Government’s Center for Investigative Oversight sent a demand letter Friday to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) after the agency failed to produce a signed and executed contract with Data Recognition Corporation (DRC). The Dairyland Sentinel originally requested the contract on Feb. 4, 2026, seeking details on the vendor that coordinated a 2024 standards-setting retreat.

“If Superintendent Jill Underly and her staff choose to continue hiding behind the terms of a contract with a vendor, they at least should have to produce the contract,” said Brian Fraley, publisher of the Dairyland Sentinel.

The demand for the contract follows a year-long investigation into a \$368,885 four-day event at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells. Records previously obtained by the Sentinel revealed that 88 hand-picked educators were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements preventing them from sharing committee discussions about changes to the state’s Forward Exam with the public.

Jacob J. Curtis, general counsel and director of the Center for Investigative Oversight for the IRG, noted in the demand letter that state law requires records to be

provided “as soon as practicable and without delay.” The agency acknowledged the request on Feb. 6 but has not provided the document.

“The records custodian has two choices: comply or deny,” Curtis said.

The 2024 workshop led to a redefinition of state proficiency standards, causing student proficiency rates to jump despite no improvement in actual test performance. This statistical shift and the lack of transparency regarding the cost and content of Waterpark Workshop prompted the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance to pause millions in funding for DPI operations earlier this month.

“I realize by publicizing our open records request, we lose a potential scoop, but DPI’s continued foot dragging on releasing public records is a concern for everyone in Wisconsin, and that is more important than any exclusive reporting the Dairyland Sentinel may forgo by laying our cards on the table,” Fraley said.

The DPI has claimed it has no official recordings, transcripts, or meeting minutes from the event, despite producing a several-hundred-page document as a result of the workshop. IRG indicated it is prepared to exercise enforcement rights on behalf of the Dairyland Sentinel, under Chapter 19 of the Wisconsin Statutes if the contract is not released promptly.**About the Dairyland Sentinel:** The Dairyland Sentinel is a Wisconsin-based non profit, founded in 2023, that celebrates Wisconsin’s history and culture, and covers current events at DairylandSentinel.com. In addition to the website, they publish a free weekday [Key Reads](#) newsletter that curates original reporting as well as the day’s top Wisconsin-focused stories from news outlets across the nation

About the IRG Center for Investigative Oversight The Center for Investigative Oversight is a division of the Institute for Reforming Government, a non-profit think tank based in Wisconsin. The Center focuses on government transparency, accountability, and ensuring that state agencies adhere to public records and open meetings laws.

For more information on this issue: <https://dairylandsentinel.com/dpi-stonewalls-public-wheres-the-secret-waterpark-workshop-contract/>