



Testimony to the Assembly Health Committee in Opposition to Assembly Bill 1, Relating to Government Actions to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic

January 5, 2021

The Wisconsin Education Association Council or WEAC represents teachers and other public school employees in every part of Wisconsin. These are the people working on the front lines of our public education system and who know first-hand what needs to be done to promote safe, healthy, and effective learning environments.

WEAC opposes AB 1 because it does not do what is necessary to adequately address the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Most importantly, it does not create statewide gating criteria guidance for opening schools.

Because of the seriously dangerous situations that have been created due to inconsistent and politically driven public health decisions at the local level in the state and to prevent these situations moving forward, WEAC is calling for a statewide, binding, and effective metric for school districts in making decisions about appropriate instructional models during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, WEAC recommends the model developed by the Harvard Global Health Institute, as explained in *The Path to Zero and Schools: Achieving Pandemic Resilient Teaching and Learning Spaces* (Harvard Model).

Unfortunately, AB 1 does not include anything close to this standard. In fact, it moves in the opposite direction of forcing more schools to open in an unhealthy and unsafe manner.

Our concerns with the bill include:

The two-thirds school board vote for virtual instruction would lead to more unhealthy and unsafe learning environments: This is designed to force school boards to do in-person learning, even if a majority of school board members believes it is not healthy or safe to take such action.

The open enrollment changes will create more chaos: Encouraging more students and families to move from school district to school district will only create more chaos in our education system than already exists due to the pandemic.

A civil liability exemption is dangerous: It is necessary for these protections to exist for school district students and employees.

Rather than pass AB 1, WEAC encourages legislators to work with Governor Evers to truly address the needs of schools, the students who attend them, and the people who work in them. WEAC stands ready to work with any and all state policymakers to ensure that our schools are healthy and safe. We always welcome the opportunity to be part of the discussion to support and strengthen our state's public schools.

Ron Martin, President
Bob Baxter, Executive Director