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(FORM UPDATED: 08/11/2010)

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ... PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS

1997-98

(session year)

Senate

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on Education...

COMMITTEE NOTICES ...

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INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

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 - (**ab** = Assembly Bill) (**ar** = Assembly Resolution) (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
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* Contents organized for archiving by: Stefanie Rose (LRB) (December 2012)

Senate

Record of Committee Proceedings

Committee on Education

Senate Bill 473

Relating to: a periodic study of the public schools.
By Senator Jauch.

February 25, 1998 Referred to committee on Education.

March 11, 1998 **PUBLIC HEARING HELD**

Present: (8) Senators C. Potter, Jauch, Shibilski,
Grobschmidt, Darling, Huelsman, Roessler and
Fitzgerald.
Absent: (0) None.

Appearances for

- Senator Bob Jauch
- Russ Allen for WEAC

Appearances against

- None.

Appearances for Information Only

- None.

Registrations for

- Jim Lynch for School Administrators Alliance

Registrations against

- None.

March 11, 1998 **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Present: (7) Senators C. Potter, Shibilski, Grobschmidt,
Darling, Huelsman, Roessler and Fitzgerald.
Absent: (1) Senator Jauch.

Moved by Senator Roessler, seconded by Senator Grobschmidt,
that **Senate Bill 473** be recommended for passage.

Ayes: (6) Senators C. Potter, Jauch (by polling),
Shibilski, Grobschmidt, Darling and
Roessler.

Noes: (2) Senators Huelsman and Fitzgerald.

Absent: (0) None.

PASSAGE RECOMMENDED, Ayes 6, Noes 2, Absent 0

Paul Rusk
Committee Clerk



WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

March 11, 1998

Affiliated with the National Education Association

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education

From: Russ Allen, PhD

Research and Professional Development Consultant

WEAC and WFT support Senate Bill 473 which requires the State Superintendent to conduct and report to the legislature a study of the physical condition and capacity of the public schools and their suitability for educational programs. This study is to be done at least once every five years.

Currently, there is no systematic information collected in Wisconsin about the condition and/or suitability of public school buildings. At one time the Department of Public Instruction employed a school facilities consultant; however, this position was eliminated during budget cuts. Likewise, the Department of Commerce has limited responsibility for investigating public school buildings in Wisconsin as they relate to safety and code violations. Investigations are done only on a request basis.

We learned these facts nearly four years ago when we were asked to gather information on the condition, and educational suitability of public schools in Wisconsin. Because there were no data, we approached the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators and asked for their participation in a study to gather baseline information. Questionnaires were sent to all building principals in Wisconsin; information on 60% of buildings was collected.

The Research Report you have before you summarizes some of the information gathered. (These are examples of the kinds of information that we believe should be collected and reported by the DPI). Note that the paper speaks to statewide patterns (typically averages or percents). There is no information about specific buildings (we assured anonymity in order to

Terry Craney, President

Charles N. Lentz, Executive Secretary

enhance participation).

Among the information gathered was the following:

- Age of the building
- Enrollment (numbers, grades served, number and responsibilities of staff)
- Overall physical condition (including health and safety)
- Maintenance practices/problems/needs
- Professional opinions about building adequacy (identification of problem areas)
- Use of security devices (e.g., surveillance cameras, metal detectors, etc.)
- Use of portable classrooms and non-instructional spaces for instruction
- Size and adequacy of library media centers
- Existence and adequacy of speciality rooms (for subjects such as art, and music)
- Status of technology

WEAC and WFT support this bill because we believe that the systematic and standardized collecting, analyzing, and reporting of data about Wisconsin's public school buildings is a fundamental responsibility of the Department of Public Instruction. It is as important as collecting information about test scores, student enrollment, per pupil expenditures, FTE staff, and state aids.

Standardized evaluations of school buildings by an external, objective source will provide valuable information to school boards and communities. This information also will allow state officials to determine the effects on school buildings, if any, of state level policies. The conditions of buildings do matter and can have a significant effect on student attitudes and behaviors. Fundamentally, we believe that this proposed legislation will help the state to better ensure equal educational opportunities for all students.

RESEARCH PAPER

Wisconsin's Public School
Buildings

Over the past decade, there have been numerous studies which have concluded that a significant proportion of the nation's school buildings have problems related to inadequate maintenance, obsolescence, environmental hazards, overcrowding, and unsound structure. Buildings with these characteristics are most likely to be found in urban and rural school districts.

Because not much was known about Wisconsin's school buildings, the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA) and the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) jointly participated to gather information in three areas: (1) Building Characteristics, (2) Student Programs and Services, and (3) Working Conditions.

Questionnaires were developed and sent to all building principals during the spring and fall of 1994. The final data set included questionnaires from at least one principal in 345 of the state's 427 districts (a "district return rate" of 81%). As for the buildings themselves, information was collected for slightly fewer than 60% (1,127) of the total number of buildings in the state.

The Bottom Eight and One-Half Percent

In general, principals report that most school buildings in Wisconsin are in reasonably good shape. However, slightly more than ten percent of the buildings (10.2%) were identified by the principals as being in poor physical condition. Statewide, this represents about 206

buildings. Likewise, about one-fourth of all buildings (27.3% or 552 throughout the state) were judged as not meeting student and program needs.

There is some overlap of the two sets. In other words, there is a group of school buildings, about 8.5%, or an estimated 172 buildings statewide, which are judged to be both in poor physical condition and inadequate for meeting program and student needs. In contrast, there is a larger set of buildings, 52% or approximately 1,050 buildings statewide, which have a positive rating both for physical condition and for meeting program and student needs.

The 172 lowest-rated buildings are somewhat more likely to be found in rural or urban areas, whereas the 1,050 top-rated buildings are more likely to be a feature of suburban or small city school districts.

Characteristics of the Lowest-Rated buildings

They tend to be older: 67% were built prior to 1950, compared with only 15% of the group of top-rated buildings.

They tend to be more crowded: 19% of the lowest-rated buildings make use of portable classrooms compared with fewer than 5% of the buildings judged most positively.



They have poorer library media facilities: Nearly 15% do not have a separate library media center, compared with only 4% in the group of 1,050 buildings receiving positive ratings. Furthermore, even if it exists, the library media center tends to be quite small. In 29% of these buildings the library media center is the same size or smaller than a typical classroom. This compares with 8% for the positively-rated set.

Building Characteristics

Number of Teachers and Students: The average school building in Wisconsin has a staff of 29 teachers (the median number is 25) and a student body which averages 461 students (median number of students is 413). Senior high schools tend to have the most students and teachers, while elementary schools tend to be the smallest.

Age of Buildings: Three-fourths of Wisconsin's public school buildings were built before 1970, nearly one-fourth before 1940. About two percent were built in the 19th Century. Most of the existing buildings were constructed during the 1950's and 1960's. These buildings have been the target of considerable criticism because of their relatively poor construction. A 1989 study of the nation's school buildings by the Education Writers Association concluded that buildings of this age are "wearing out quickly and have severe repair needs. . . Many construction experts say the buildings were intended to last only about 30 years. If so, their time is up" (Lewis, et. al, p. 2).

Major Renovations: Nearly one-fourth (23.3%) of the principals report that their building has never been renovated. Among buildings fifty years of age or older, only 10% have undergone a major renovation.

Safety and Security: From the perspective of politicians and many in the general public, the nation's public schools are dangerous places to be. For example, in

1994, 35% of U.S. adults viewed "lack of discipline" and "fighting/violence/gangs" as the most serious problems in our schools (Gallup, 1994).

This level of concern about violence and safety has not resulted in the widespread use of security measures in Wisconsin's schools. In fact, more than one-half of all public school buildings in Wisconsin (52%) have no security measures beyond night-time lighting and door locks. In contrast, 1.2% of buildings have metal detectors, while 3.2% have television surveillance equipment. In addition, nearly one-third (30%) have motion detectors for night-time use. A few buildings employ security police (2.4%), while slightly less than one-third (30.4%) have a police liaison program.

Portable Classrooms: One-eighth of all school buildings make use of portable classrooms. These buildings average slightly more than two portable classrooms each (2.27). However, there are more extreme cases: twenty buildings use from three to ten portable classrooms.

Air Conditioning: Air conditioning is a rarity in the majority of classrooms in Wisconsin; nearly two-thirds of the buildings do not have a single classroom which is air conditioned. At the other extreme, in nearly 15% of the buildings all of the classrooms are air conditioned.

Student Programs and Services

Computers: On average there are about 40 computers in each school building, or about one computer for every ten students. Although the average is 40, 5.4% of buildings have 100 or more computers for student use. In contrast, 5.2% of buildings have 10 or fewer computers. These figures remind us of the inequities in student access to the use of this important technology. It also is important to understand that irrespective of the number of computers in a building, the majority tend to be old and incapable of using the software packages and new hardware developed over the past five to ten years.

In short, there are few Wisconsin school buildings which are ready for the "information super highway."

Library Media Center: Six percent of Wisconsin's school buildings do not have a separate space for a library/media center. Of these, 75% serve elementary age students. Among those buildings which have a separate room for a library media center, nearly eight percent are not staffed by a licensed, professional librarian. Furthermore, many library media centers are marginal, at best. Four percent of principals report that their library media center is smaller than a typical classroom, while an additional 11% indicate it is about the same size.

Emergency Nursing Services: One of the state's minimal educational standards requires that all school districts provide emergency nursing services during the school day and at school-sponsored activities. However, this does not mean that a student who becomes ill or gets injured will receive nursing care in a timely manner.

About one-fourth of school buildings do not provide the services of a licensed, Registered Nurse. About the same proportion (31%) do not even have a nurse's office or sick room. Even among the buildings which provide nursing services, the nurse is in the building for only about one hour each day.

Specialty Rooms: All public schools in Wisconsin are required to offer specialized courses in the arts and other enrichment areas. However, schools are not required to have a speciality room for instruction. Nonetheless, most schools have set aside speciality rooms, in which these subjects are taught by certified, licensed teachers. The greatest percent of buildings have speciality rooms for art (87%), followed by a computer lab (79%), and rooms for chorus/choir (67%) and band/orchestra (64%).

A Parent Center: Research shows that parent and community involvement and support are essential for a quality school system. However, only a small percent of school buildings (6%) have added a parent center to encourage parents and community members to visit the schools.

Working Conditions

Use of a Private Telephone: At a time when approximately two-thirds of Americans use computers in their work, the majority of teachers do not have immediate access to a private telephone. In more than one-half of the buildings (58%) there are four or fewer private telephones available. In fact, 36% of principals report that they have only one or two telephones, while 6.5% report that there is not a single private telephone in the building for use by teachers.

Professional Library: A professional library for teachers and administrators can be found in two-thirds of Wisconsin's public school buildings. As would be expected, these libraries vary considerably in quality.

Photocopy and Fax Machines: Fax machines are found in fewer than one-half (42%) of Wisconsin's public school buildings. As for photocopy machines, there is an average of nearly two per building. Still, 46% of buildings have only a single photocopy machine which is available for teacher use.

Conclusion

In any quantitative study similar to this one, there is a tendency to focus on the average or "typical" condition, and to disregard or minimize those cases at the extremes. It is important that this not be done.

Thus, it needs to be emphasized that even though the vast majority of Wisconsin's school buildings are in good condition and meeting program and student needs, there is a significant group of buildings (in the range of eight to nine percent, or 172 buildings) which fall near the bottom on most the indicators of quality included in this study.

Furthermore, in our focus on numbers and quantitative measures, we must not forget the human dimension. Ultimately, we need to keep in mind that the 172 buildings judged inadequate by the principals in Wisconsin have an enrollment of nearly 75,000 students whose lives are affected on a daily basis by substandard school facilities.

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Wisconsin Senate Assistant Republican Leader
Senator Brian D. Rude

MEMO TO: MEMBERS, SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
SENATOR CALVIN POTTER - CHAIR

FROM: SENATOR BRIAN RUDE *BR*

DATE: MARCH 11, 1998

RE: SENTE BILL 462

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before today in support of Senate Bill 462 relating to requirements for driver education courses. I would especially like to thank Senator Potter for his speedy hearing on this bill.

Over the course of the past several years, a growing number of fatal traffic deaths have involved vehicles and trains at rail crossings. Some interesting facts to consider:

- a vehicle-train crash occurs about every 90 minutes;
- two motorists are killed daily in vehicle-train crashes;
- a motorist is 30 times more likely to die in a vehicle-train crash than in other motor vehicle accidents;
- more people die in highway-rail crashes each year than airplane crashes;
- over 50% of grade crossing crashes occur at crossings where active warning devices exist; and,
- a train traveling 30 mph will travel over one-half mile before it can stop and a train traveling 50 mph will require 1.5 miles to stop.

Nearly all of these accidents could be avoided if drivers are properly educated about rail crossing safety issues. As a result, this legislation would require certain driver education courses to acquaint students with the hazards posed by railroad crossings and to provide instruction in safely dealing with such hazards. Current law requires similar instruction with the hazards posed by farm machinery and animals on highways.

This is not a burdensome requirement and in fact an organization already exists which provides free rail crossing safety instruction. Operation Lifesaver is a nonprofit, nationwide public education program whose mission is dedicated to reducing crashes,

injuries and fatalities at intersections where roadways meet railways and along railroad rights-of-way.

The Wisconsin Operation Lifesaver program was established in 1985 and works cooperatively with the Department of Transportation, schools, civic groups, railroads, rail workers, professional driver organizations, law enforcement agencies and other government agencies to prevent these needless grade crossing tragedies. Operation Lifesaver offers free safety presentations including speakers, film presentation and literature for businesses, professional and civic groups, schools and numerous associations and organizations.

It's time the statutes reflect the importance of rail crossing education and passage of SB 462 will accomplish this in an inexpensive and simple manner.