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## WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ACT MEMO

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<b>2015 Wisconsin Act 212</b> [2015 Senate Bill 640]	<b>School Accountability, Audits for Choice Schools, and Civics Exam for Special Needs Students</b>
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2015 Wisconsin Act 212 makes changes to mathematical formulas used for “school report cards” in the school and school district accountability system. Secondly, it alters procedures for independent financial audits of private schools participating in the Milwaukee parental choice program, the Racine parental choice program, or the statewide parental choice program (“choice schools”). Lastly, it individualizes the state civics exam requirements as applied to students with special needs.

### **SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTS**

Provisions in the 2015-17 Biennial Budget, 2015 Wisconsin Act 55 (“the Budget”), made changes to the calculation of metrics of school and school district performance for purposes of the accountability reports commonly referred to as “school report cards.” Current law requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to weight test scores to account for the length of time students are enrolled in a school or school district before taking a test used for purposes of the accountability report, and to exclude information about certain students who changed schools for the ninth grade.

Wisconsin Act 212 alters the Budget’s changes to the calculation of school report card ratings for the school accountability reports. It eliminates the weighting of test scores to account for the length of enrollment, and eliminates the provision excluding scores from students who changed schools for the ninth grade.

### **FINANCIAL INFORMATION ABOUT CHOICE SCHOOLS**

Current law requires choice schools to submit an annual independent financial audit to DPI. Wisconsin Act 212 clarifies that, for purposes of this audit, in order for a cost to be an eligible education expense, an independent auditor must test the cost and confirm it is

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This memo provides a brief description of the Act. For more detailed information, consult the text of the law and related legislative documents at the Legislature’s Web site at: <http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov>.

reasonable under a written school policy. The Act also replaces the audit certification process created in the Budget with a process and deadline for notifying a choice school regarding satisfaction of the audit requirements. Finally, under the Act, a choice school must maintain a cash and investment balance that is at least equal to its reserve balance. In the event it ceases to participate or is barred from the program, the school must refund its reserve balance to DPI.

### **CIVICS EXAM AS A GRADUATION REQUIREMENT**

Current law requires that, beginning in the 2016-17 school year, students may not receive a high school diploma from a public, charter, or choice school without first attaining a passing score on a civics exam that is identical to the civics exam required for U.S. citizenship. Under changes made in the Budget, students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in effect must take the civics exam, but are exempted from the requirement to attain a passing score on the exam in order to graduate.

Wisconsin Act 212 replaces the Budget's universal treatment of the state civics exam requirements for special needs students with an individualized determination. Under the Act, a special needs student's IEP will govern the civics exam requirements. The IEP team must determine the appropriateness of administering the state civics exam, as well as whether it is appropriate to require that the student pass the civics exam in order to graduate.

*Effective date:* March 3, 2016. The provisions concerning financial audits of choice schools first apply to a financial audit of the 2015-16 school year.

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