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Assembly Committee on Education  
AB 561 – Credit Recovery Classes  
September 16, 2021

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the Committee for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 561. This legislation aims to make public the information regarding the number and grade level of students that attend credit recovery courses along with the subject matter of the course.

While current law allows schools to provide credit recovery, or “alternative education” courses to help ensure that students are provided with a means to receive a diploma, there is no mechanism for the state to collect information on students who are struggling in school.

Assembly Bill 561 addresses this issue by requiring school boards to report to the Department of Public Instruction the number and grade level of pupils who attended a credit recovery course, as well as the subject of which recovery course was attended. Additionally, the Department of Public Instruction would be required to submit that information to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature.

This common sense legislation will give both the Department of Public Instruction and the State Legislature a more complete view of how Wisconsin’s students are performing. As a result, the state will have a more in depth understanding on how to best serve Wisconsin’s current and future students.

Thank you Committee members for your consideration of Assembly Bill 561.

Representative Cindi Duchow



# Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator · District 8

## Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Education

Assembly Bill 561: Credit Recovery Course Report

09/16/2021

Thank you committee members for hearing testimony on Assembly Bill 561.

Assembly Bill 561 requires a school board annually report to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) the number of pupils who attended a credit recovery course and the subject of that course.

According to a survey conducted by the USA TODAY NETWORK, of the 60 school districts surveyed, 90% have seen a rise in failure rates. In the same survey, one school showed 2 out of 5 high school students failed a class during first semester. Another school's fall failure rate was four times what it was in previous years. With passage of this bill, this information would be readily available without having to send surveys to every school district.

The facts above should concern every member of this committee. These facts are more alarming when we know schools across Wisconsin loosened grading standards last year. While some chose to freeze grades, others avoided giving failing grades at all. The Wisconsin State Journal highlighted this in an article and included some data from the Madison School District. At the middle school level, 3,608 failing grades, or 4.4% of the total, were assigned in the fall semester of 2019, but there were less than 60 for the fall semester of 2020, likely the result of grading mistakes or other special cases.

In April, FOX6 Milwaukee did a story about students struggling across southeast Wisconsin. Much of the devastating information highlighted above is documented in their findings as well, but a quote from one student continues to stick with me. She said, "We all stopped doing work because our teachers told us it didn't affect our grades either way unless they were getting better." We should be heartbroken by statements like that.

As policy makers we must continue to gather important and relevant information to try and fully understand the negative impacts and disruption COVID-19 has caused students in Wisconsin. Knowing how many kids in our schools attended a credit recovery course will be helpful, but we know it is only one piece of the puzzle.

Thank you for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 561. I hope to count on your support for the important bill.



WISCONSIN INSTITUTE FOR LAW & LIBERTY, INC.

September 16, 2021

Dear Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the Committee on Education,

I submit testimony today in support of Assembly Bill 561, a transparency bill that will inform parents, school leaders and policymakers about how our Wisconsin students are struggling in the classroom. This information is critical as Wisconsin continues to grapple with the impact of the pandemic and how much academic learning has been lost with the challenges from the last year and a half.

Without a doubt, **the pandemic resulted in learning loss for our students.** Information collected by the Department of Public Instruction reported that public schools failed to complete more than 10% of curriculum on average in the spring of 2020. Our review of this data found that, on average across all districts, about 12.5% of curriculum went incomplete during the 2020 spring semester. Larger districts completed marginally less curriculum on average. While disparities in completing curriculum varied across the 421 districts, districts with more low-income students completed less curriculum. **A WILL report determined that a district with 100% low-income students would be expected to complete 7% less curriculum than a district with no low-income students.**<sup>1</sup> This finding likely represents an underestimate of the amount of learning that was lost during the past two school years.

**The lack of completed curriculum and pandemic-related learning loss exasperated existing challenges for many Wisconsin students.** Prior to the pandemic, Wisconsin had the largest racial achievement gap for African American students (compared to their white peers) in the country.<sup>2</sup> The chart below demonstrates this concerning gap for African American students and how it has persisted for years prior to the pandemic.

District	Percent of African American student proficiency in English Language Arts 2015-16	Percent of White student proficiency in English Language Arts 2015-16	Percent of African American student proficiency in English Language Arts 2018-19	Percent of White student proficiency in English Language Arts 2018-19
Green Bay Area Public School	11.0%	45.9%	11.5%	43%
Madison Metropolitan School District	9%	54.2%	10.1%	57.1%
Milwaukee Public Schools	10.6%	44.6%	10.6%	45.4%
Racine Unified	7.4%	26.2%	5.7%	32.5%

<sup>1</sup> *Dreams Deferred: the Economic Cost of Learning Loss in Wisconsin*, Flanders, Will. February 2021. <https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/COVID-Learning-Loss-2021-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Wisconsin has biggest racial achievement gap in the country*. Rachael Vasquez. Wisconsin Public Radio. October 30, 2019. <https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-has-biggest-racial-achievement-gap-among-states>

But the above chart also highlights the fact that the overall student proficiency for all Wisconsin students is not good enough. **In 2018-19, only about 40% of all Wisconsin public school students were proficient in English Language Arts.** With such low proficiency across our student population, there must be students in nearly every school district that are participating in credit recovery courses or similar programs. **AB 561 will provide the much needed transparency to understand who these students are and how prevalent these programs should be.**

I believe that Assembly Bill 561 is a step in the right direction. **However, I encourage the bill authors to consider further defining what other programs or policies similar to a “credit recovery” are included.** Schools provide a variety of support systems to students throughout their educational career. AB 561 does not provide a clear definition of the requirement and how it may apply in other circumstances. For example, schools may offer flexibility to a student due to a learning disability that would result in them re-taking a class. As such, **I also recommend requiring school districts to submit information about what credit recovery programs they have and how a student qualifies.**

Thank you so much for the time. Do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Libby Sobic  
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Year	Proficient	Not Proficient	Total	Percentage Proficient
2018-19	40%	60%	100%	40%
2017-18	38%	62%	100%	38%
2016-17	35%	65%	100%	35%
2015-16	32%	68%	100%	32%