

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE

June 18, 2021

To the Honorable Members of the Assembly:

I am vetoing **Assembly Bill 59** in its entirety.

This bill increases the income eligibility threshold for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) for the 2021-22 school year to 300 percent of the federal poverty level; allows pupils to submit full-time open enrollment applications to more than three nonresident school districts in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years; and prohibits a resident school board from denying an alternative open enrollment application in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years if the application is made on the basis of best interest of the pupil. I am vetoing this bill because I object to its proposed changes to the WPCP and open enrollment processes for multiple reasons.

First, I object to diverting resources from school districts to private schools. While the bill authors present this bill as a temporary increase in the income threshold, students who participate in any choice program are not required to meet the income requirement in subsequent years of participation. Therefore, a one-time change in the WPCP income threshold has the potential for long-term financial impacts. Additionally, participation in the WPCP increased by over 30 percent in the 2019-20 school year and 25 percent in the 2020-21 school with the 220 percent income threshold in place, indicating that the current income threshold does not prevent program growth.

Further, I am concerned that the implementation of these proposed changes to the WPCP would increase property taxes in some school districts. Currently, 297 school districts have the potential for increased property taxes as a result of resident students participating in the WPCP. The bill would exacerbate not only property tax increases but the incoherence of Wisconsin's current school funding system among public and private schools in the state.

Additionally, the bill is not timely as the application period for the WPCP for the 2021-22 school year ended on April 15, 2021, leaving no time for parents of newly eligible students to apply.

Moreover, the temporary changes to the open enrollment alternative application procedure reduce the local decision-making ability of school boards. Meanwhile, expanding the number of nonresident school districts a student may apply to in each open enrollment period may result in an increased

administrative burden and uncertainty over which school district a student may end up attending.

Finally, in the 2020 open enrollment application period, only 11 of roughly 25,000 applicants were denied under the three school district limit, indicating the current is not as restrictive as portrayed. This is a bill that purports to address problems, but it unfortunately only creates more of them.

Respectfully submitted,
TONY EVERS
Governor