



Luther S. Olsen
State Senator
14th District

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Senator Luther Olsen
DATE: Tuesday, October 29, 2019
SUBJECT: Testimony for Senate Bill 495

Thank you members of the Senate Committee on Education for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 495 (SB 495).

This is a technical bill that makes several changes to the application and reporting deadlines for the parental choice program, but it does not impact eligibility, payments, or any other significant structure of the program and it will not have a fiscal impact.

Current law allows a private school to accept applications for the choice program from February 1st to April 20th. Following the application period private schools are required to report the number of applicants to the Department of Public Instruction no later than May 1st. This bill modifies the current reporting deadlines to ensure that they do not fall on weekends. It alters the application time period to be from the first weekday in February through the third Thursday in April and it moves the reporting deadline to the first weekday in May.

Lastly, this bill modifies current practice so that a private school may submit its accreditation via a notice which may be delivered electronically rather than with a letter as is current practice.

These minor modifications will make the process run smoother for both the Department of Public Instruction and School Choice Wisconsin, which will be testifying together in support of these changes.

Again, thank you for holding a hearing today. I ask for your support on SB 495 and I would be more than happy to answer any questions.

Senate Committee on Education
October 29, 2019

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Testimony on Senate Bill 495

Thank you Chairman Olsen and members of the committee for the opportunity to be here today to testify on this bill. My name is Tricia Collins and I am the Director of the School Management Services Team at the Department of Public Instruction. The School Management Services Team administers the private school voucher programs. The department supports the provisions included and appreciates the support for these changes from School Choice Wisconsin.

This bill includes three technical changes to the private school voucher programs.

First, schools participating in the Milwaukee, Racine, and Wisconsin Parental Choice Programs, as well as the Special Needs Scholarship Program, are required to meet certain accreditation provisions. State law lists the specific accrediting organizations the private schools may work with to obtain accreditation. One organization changed its name from AdvancED to Cognia Inc. This bill updates that organization's name.

Second, the bill changes the form in which schools have to annually report to the department that they continue to meet the accreditation requirements. Under current law, schools have to provide a letter from their accrediting entity confirming the school's accreditation status. Under the bill, schools would be required to provide notice from their accrediting entity of their accreditation status. This change provides the schools and department with more flexibility in reporting their accreditation status. For example, schools could meet this requirement by using an online form completed by the school's accrediting entity.

Lastly, the bill replaces the specific dates of February 1 and April 20 for the start and end dates of the student application period for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program and replaces the dates with the first weekday in February and third Thursday in April. It also changes the specific date by which schools have to verify student applications to the first weekday in May rather than May 1. Removing specific dates will eliminate these dates falling on weekends when participating schools and the department are not open.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.