

**Written Testimony for the
Special Committee on Building Wisconsin's Workforce
Wisconsin Legislative Council**

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I want to thank Chairperson Strachota and members of the committee for considering this written testimony. I have attended all but the first of your committee meetings and appreciate the work you are doing to *identify opportunities and make recommendations regarding the coordination of existing resources* (K-12 educational institutions, technical colleges, universities, government agencies, and private organizations) to address current and future Wisconsin workforce issues in targeted career and employment areas. To avoid duplication, I have waited until invited testimony was complete to share my thoughts with you. While I have consulted with many education professionals as part of my own investigation into the issues, I do not speak for our school district or any other agency. I am a 2nd term school board member with degrees and professional backgrounds in business and education, who is passionate about public education and has a great interest in the topic this committee is studying.

Like all Wisconsin school board representatives, my responsibility is to provide all of our students the opportunity to become productive and responsible 21st century citizens and to ensure taxpayers that their schools are fiscally responsible with their dollars. Given the charge of this committee, and the fact many decisions made at the state and federal levels often impact the operations of every school district around the state, I would like to share with you some stories from the trenches - successes, frustrations and "food for thought" - as you continue your deliberations. I will limit my comments to the following areas (they appear in no particular order):

- The increasing responsibilities of public schools
- What about Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs)?
- "School-supervised work-based opportunities for high school students", a sample success story and what will make or break these programs
- Mandating three years of math for all students (... at the expense of?)

The Increasing Responsibilities of Public Schools (see attachment)

I have had the opportunity to hear Mr. Jamie Vollmer speak on two separate occasions: initially at our school district's "welcome back" program for district staff in August 2007, and more recently at the 2008 Southwest WI Business/Education Summit in Mineral Point. In his presentation, he references "The Increasing Burden on America's Public Schools", which illustrates the growing responsibilities of public schools over the decades, with little change to school calendars. I've provided each committee member a copy of his document for review and consideration. In addition to an expanding curriculum and managing the logistics of mandated testing, our public schools are also

required to collect student immunization records, report this to the appropriate agency and then asked to follow up with parents when immunizations are not up to date. (Wasn't some of this once the responsibility of local health departments?)

I bring these to your attention not to complain, but to illustrate how some things have changed since many of us were in school. In spite of these mandates, there are phenomenal things happening in our classrooms. However, there is a great need for *constructive and productive* public dialogue around PreK-12 public education.

Cooperative Educational Service Agencies

I did not hear reference to the state's 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) during testimony. Section 116.02 of the Statutes states: "The cooperative educational service agencies are designed to serve educational needs in all areas of Wisconsin by serving as a link both between school districts and between school districts and the state. Cooperative educational service agencies may provide leadership, coordination and education services to school districts, University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges. Cooperative educational service agencies may facilitate communication and cooperation among all public and private schools, agencies and organizations that provide services to pupils." Created in 1963 to replace what were then county superintendents, they began operating in 1965 and were last reorganized in 1984 when 19 regions became the current 12.

CESAs make it possible for schools, regardless of size, to share equipment and resources which may be too expensive or inefficient for a single district to afford or manage. While smaller or more remote school districts may be greater users of CESA services, larger districts utilize their services as well. As regional economic initiatives have evolved (such as New North and Milwaukee 7), CESAs have begun to collaborate even more with regional workforce development boards. CESAs are non-taxing authorities and therefore act as independent private businesses, relying principally on fees from service contracts and grants to serve the identified needs of their area school districts. (They also get annual "seed money" of \$25,000 from the state and member schools pay an annual fee based on student count). The independence of CESAs provides each region the opportunity to adapt their offerings to the evolving needs of their "marketplace". The affect over time is that regions have tended to develop expertise in certain areas. (Note: School districts are not limited to purchasing services from their CESA. For instance, our school district purchases select services from several CESA regions, including CESA2 of which we are a member.)

While providing flexibility to meet the variety of needs, the CESA independent business model does have its disadvantages as well (and critics): (1) Services are provided by independent contractors who work for the agency, and the agency in turn takes a percentage of their fees. Some districts say costs are not competitive vs. other available options. However, for districts without full-time business managers or those in areas where resources to address student needs simply aren't as readily available, given the alternatives these costs may very well be worth it. (2) The degree and types of services vary by CESA region. For instance, some regions (not all) have consultants who provide

assistance to schools with their school-to-work initiatives. (3) Because they essentially compete with one another, there currently is no incentive for *genuine* coordination and collaboration across CESAs.

Whatever their current strengths or shortcomings, the business strategy side of me suggests CESAs may be a resource also worth considering as recommendations move forward. I could go on, but will stop with that.

Career pathways and school-to-work successes ... what can make or break programs

I am encouraged that committee members recognize the benefits of incorporating the "career pathways" approach to student academic planning and have expressed a desire to find ways to improve the effectiveness of school-supervised work-based opportunities, such as Youth Apprenticeships. I have seen a "Career Plan of Study" or pathway guide which has been developed in our school district for the "science, technology, engineering and mathematics" job cluster. Not only is it an effective academic planning guide, it provides concrete examples of career options (highlighting current or emerging occupations in our area) and references area employers and other key resources such as WISCareers. Our district offers many of the "School-Supervised Work-Based Opportunities" which Deb Mahaffey from the DPI referenced in her testimony and handout. In each of the last two school years, over 100 of our students have received state certificates through their school-to-work experiences. Area businesses have hired many of our students after they graduate, and these students are often required to demonstrate those "soft skills" that are so much in demand today.

[Note: I refer committee members to "*Are They Really Ready to Work?*", a 2006 in-depth study conducted in collaboration with The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Society for Human Resource Management. Among the study's findings is the following: for all three groups of new entrants into the workforce (high school, 2-year and 4-year graduates), survey results identified the applied skills of professionalism/work ethic, teamwork/collaboration, and oral communications as the top 3 "very important" skills, in combined rankings with basic knowledge and skills. This information is summarized on page 21 of the report, and a copy is attached for your reference.]

These work-based learning opportunities are for all students, regardless of their plans after high school. *Yet, there are some who perceive* these types of programs are "for those students" who aren't interested in continuing on to a 4-year college. Our experience in Waunakee proves that perception to be false. One of our 2002 graduates recently received her State of Wisconsin Physician Assistant license and credits her participation in our Health Youth Apprenticeship Program for helping make that possible. Upon graduation from high school, Elizabeth was a certified CNA and had 900 hours of experience working in an area nursing home and hospital oncology unit. In addition to learning practical patient care skills, she states she learned so much more about general business know-how, how to interview and present herself in meetings, time management, and basic life skills. She was able to stand out among other applicants when applying for graduate school, and said it was easier to grasp some of the concepts taught in medical

school classes because she could often relate back to a prior experience she had with a patient during her high school youth apprenticeship.

What makes or breaks successful school-to-work programs is not just having businesses available to "make it work", but more importantly, the resources to pull the pieces together locally and make them happen in a way that becomes a win-win for both students and businesses. Our school district is a member of the Dane County School Consortium, which operates under a "Youth Apprenticeship and School to Work Programs" Intergovernmental Cooperation agreement. (See Statute 66.0301, another tool which enables school districts to collaborate and share resources). We have a (wonderful!) school-to-career coordinator who, throughout the semesters, works with students one-on-one and their business "mentors" to ensure the work-education experiences are not only running smoothly, but also follow DPI/DWD guidelines to ensure proper certification. She builds relationships with area businesses, is a member of the local chamber of commerce, obtains grant funding, is integrating "career pathways" models into student academic planning documents and promotes "Wisconsin Jobs" whenever possible. (Attached is a recent "Wisconsin Jobs 2016" handout from the DWD which she makes available to interested students.)

Mandating three years of math ... at the expense of?

Before commenting on mathematics specifically, I would like to reference an article by Dr. Yong Zhao, a few slides from Mr. Golembeski's handout "Getting Old Draws Moisture: 2008 and beyond", and the following quote by Dana Gioia, Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts, from his April 1, 2008 testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee: "There is now an entire generation of young Americans who have not had the arts play a significant role in their intellectual and personal development ... As these young men and women enter the new global economy of the 21st century, many of them will not have had opportunities to develop the skills of innovation and creativity they need to succeed."

A copy of Yong Zhao's article entitled "*What Knowledge has the Most Worth?*" was handed out at an earlier committee meeting. (It appeared in the February, 2008 issue of *The School Administrator*). I will not restate Dr. Zhao's message here, but ask committee members to consider what he says about where we've tended to focus our energies since NCLB, and the potential impact on our historically competitive edge in areas such as creativity. (Several countries are currently ramping up their efforts to find ways of infusing creative thinking into their education systems.) In Mr. Golembeski's handout he references Dr. Richard Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class*. The bottom line: economies are driven by people's ability to solve problems in new ways.

Mandating three years of mathematics for all graduating high school students will send the message that math is considered important. Whether it will have the desired impact on the percentage of students who need remedial math in college depends on how many students entering college currently take only two years of math and, to some degree, when their last math class was taken (the closer to the test, the better the score).

More important, however, is the knowledge by math educators that the ability to retain and use mathematics in everyday life and in the workplace comes not just from “what” mathematics is taught, but “how” it is taught (applying math to real life situations). Many school districts around the state have, or are in the process of changing the way mathematics is taught so that all students have an opportunity to become more “engaged” with mathematics. (See the *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*, published in 2000 by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics). When rigor is combined with relevant applications in classroom instruction, students are required to think, which in turn increases their ability to learn. Retention is greater when students see the connections in what they learn. Combining rigor and relevance has also been shown to increase motivation (ref. Dr. Willard Daggett’s “Rigor/Relevance Framework” and the International Center for Leadership in Education). This is one premise behind successful STEM educational programs such as Project Lead the Way, which integrate science, technology, engineering and mathematics into project-based learning modules by groups of students.

Requiring another year of math *for all students* may have some unintended consequences. (For instance: What impact will it have on already tight schedules, including students who enroll in two-year youth apprenticeship programs? Will some become more disengaged with high school because they really don’t like math, and this will take away the opportunity to explore other potential areas of interest through electives?) All students learn in different ways, at different rates, are turned on by different topics, *and* have creative potential. The future of our economy depends on motivated, responsible students who are creative problem solvers. This requires not only intelligence, but thinking skills ... understanding not only “what”, but “why” or “why not”. These skills are entirely capable of being taught through multiple topics and school supported experiences, not just mathematics.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Attachments (3)

* *The Waunakee Community School District is north of Madison in Dane County. Covering 56 square miles, it serves the Village of Waunakee and portions of Westport, Vienna, Dane, Springfield and the City of Madison. 2008-09 student population: 3,528. Peggy is chair of the district’s Curriculum Committee.*

