



"LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE"

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TO: Senate Education Committee
FROM: Sheri Krause, Legislative Services Coordinator
DATE: January 17, 2008
RE: LRB 3144/6, related to online courses for elementary and secondary school pupils

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) has serious concerns regarding the provisions of LRB 3144/6 that would increase the state rules and regulations for all online courses taken by students enrolled in Wisconsin public schools and threaten the viability of the current public virtual charter schools.

The WASB supports the continuation of virtual charter schools and acknowledges that there have been legitimate questions raised about the viability of the current virtual charter schools under the provisions of LRB 3144/6. In addition, the WASB has serious concerns regarding the provisions that would impact all online courses, including:

Section 3: Professional Development

LRB 3144/6 would prohibit a person from teaching an online course in a public school unless he or she has completed a Department of Public Instruction (DPI)-approved professional development program that is designed to prepare a teacher for online teaching.

- School districts currently access online courses provided by higher education institutions, both in Wisconsin and out of state, as well as other experts who likely would not have access to a DPI-approved professional development program.
- This requirement would apply to all persons teaching an online course in a public school regardless of their experience, skills or abilities.

Section 14: Online Courses, Department Duties

LRB 3144/6 would require the DPI to establish instructional standards for all online courses taken by students enrolled in public schools and establish standards addressing the frequency, length and type of pupil-teacher contact, the assessment of pupil progress, and methods to measure pupil participation.

- The WASB has serious concerns about the potential for this provision to result in additional state mandates on all online courses and the narrowing of online learning opportunities.
- In April 2004, the Wisconsin Collaborative Online Network (WCON) Advisory Group, consisting of representatives from the WASB, DPI, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, the Wisconsin Education Association Council, CESAs, school districts, Wisconsin virtual schools and Wisconsin technical colleges, developed an "Online Policy and Standards Guidance Document" to help school districts implement and manage quality online learning opportunities for their students. These guidelines have been used extensively by boards as they established their policies for implementing online programs and managing online learning opportunities for their students.

- School districts across the state have been providing quality online learning opportunities for their students for a number of years now based on the state model academic standards and the appropriate policies and guidelines put in place by their local boards. Additional instructional standards are unnecessary and would impede the ability of districts to offer a wide spectrum of online courses and adapt programming to individual needs and evolving technologies.

Section 14: Online Courses, School Board Duties

School boards already meet many of the responsibilities outlined by LRB 3144/6. However, there are concerns in regards to the provisions that would require school boards to “ensure that all pupils enrolled in online courses reside in this state” and ensure that there are specified minutes or hours of direct contact with a teacher depending upon the age of the student and how many courses he or she is taking.

- State statutes 121.77 and 121.78 provide for the admission of nonresident students and tuition payments by school districts. It is the position of the WASB that it is unnecessary to limit school districts to enrolling only state residents in all of their online courses and programs.
- The WCON recommendations do not include specific hours or minutes of direct student-teacher contact time for online courses. It is the position of the WASB that student-teacher contact time is best determined locally based on individual circumstances.