

**Jan. 25, 2008****Delegates Support Growth Model Assessment System But Pass on Tax Disclosure Law**

A strong majority of delegates voiced their support Wednesday for the use of a growth model assessment system in demonstrating student achievement for the purpose of meeting state and federal accountability standards.

Observers, such as Amy Rashkin of the Janesville School District, believe the system would give faster feedback to teachers on the progress of their students. "Current testing models for NCLB [No Child Left Behind] take the majority of the school year to complete," Rashkin said. "With growth model assessments, most of those assessments can be done fairly quickly and teachers can get rapid feedback and make adjustments to the curriculum. I think this is a very important resolution to pass."

Although he was also in favor of the growth model system, Don Nelson, delegate for the Columbus School District, pointed out that high-performing districts will see little improvement while low-performing districts have the potential to improve by much greater margins. "We [school board members] are going to understand that," Nelson said. "But the public and Legislature may not."

However, Russ Carlsen, delegate for Racine Unified School District, said minority and low-income third grade students in one Racine elementary school have shown tremendous improvement because growth model assessments have given teachers the tools to effectively adjust their curriculum. "It is because we had changed our learning patterns of teaching for these students," Carlsen said. "The immediate testing that this provides with these models has been very advantageous for our school district."

After approving an amendment by Tim Deets, delegate for the Marshfield School District, clarifying that the model should be aligned with state and local standards, the delegate assembly passed the resolution.

**Two-thirds Funding**

Delegates approved a resolution calling an amendment put forth by Larry Anderson, delegate for the Burlington Area School District, that changed a resolution regarding supporting the state's commitment to two-thirds funding to read: The WASB supports a state commitment to provide two-thirds funding of state-wide school costs, the return to at least 82 percent of direct aid to schools be in the form of equalization aids and ensure that school districts receive state budget information and state aid payments in a timely manner.

Delegates were aware that the state Legislature's delay in passing the 2007-09 biennial state budget highlighted the need for the state to restore its two-thirds funding commitment, which was eliminated several years ago. Without it, the state budget delay meant school districts were unable to receive a general school aid increase for this school year.

**Tax Disclosure**

Delegates voiced strong opinions in favor of and against supporting a comprehensive tax disclosure law, but ultimately voted against the resolution.

James Holte, delegate for the Elk Mound Area School District, said forcing such

a disclosure law on businesses could discourage them from doing business in the state, “It seems to me we are contributing to the view that Wisconsin is not a good place for businesses.”

However, Ellen Lindgren, delegate for the Middleton Cross-Plains Area School District, said the resolution is not aimed at increasing taxes but advancing tax information to the public because, as Lindgren said, some businesses are carrying less of the tax burden than in years past. “If you’ve seen the pie chart over the last 20 years to see what the relative proportions of business taxes and property taxes are, you’ll know that the slice of the pie has gotten smaller and smaller for businesses,” Lindgren said.

Other delegates agreed that the resolution would shed more light on what and how much businesses are paying in taxes. However, concerns were raised that, collectively, school boards are not adequately prepared to analyze the information in-depth and that the overall tax structure would not be addressed. Delegates also noted such disclosures would not shed light on the amount of taxes paid by these businesses’ employees.

### **SAGE Flexibility**

Bob Kitchen, delegate for the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, said turning student achievement guarantee in education (SAGE) programs over to local school districts could put the funding for the programs at risk. “If we start loosening the requirements of the SAGE program, it will get to the point where the legislature will look at it and say, ‘Hey, this is no different than what you do for the other schools,’ and there will be a question as to continuing funding for the SAGE program.”

However, the benefits of greater local control swayed most delegates and the resolution was approved.

### **Other**

Additional resolutions passed by the delegate assembly included resolutions supporting exempting school security costs from revenue limits, establishing timely test results, increasing the secondary cost ceiling in the equalization aid formula, funding of special education services by cooperative public agencies, exempting schools from the state motor fuel tax, allowing renewable energy projects, and providing schools with cable and video services. A resolution to amend the existing WASB policy on exempting certain special education costs from revenue limits was not adopted.

Two resolutions circulated by Milwaukee Public Schools per the WASB bylaws on post-Sept. 15 resolution submittals were not approved for consideration.