



ROBIN J. VOS

SPEAKER OF THE WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

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For Further Information Contact:
Speaker Robin Vos (608) 266-3387

ICYMI: The Real Numbers on School Choice

Madison... Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) set the record straight on the taxpayer savings associated with parental choice programs in [his commentary that was published Sunday in the Racine Journal Times](#). The Racine County representative also corrected the inaccurate numbers on school choice that were part of an insert in December's property tax bills in Racine.

In the column, Speaker Vos called out Democrats for using taxpayer dollars to promote their opposition to school choice. "Democrats, including those in the Racine Unified School District, have taken their opposition of school choice to a new level by using tax dollars to create and mail false information to taxpayers," stated Speaker Vos.

The nonpartisan [Legislative Fiscal Bureau](#) reports it costs less to educate a school choice student. In addition, the academic results of choice students are the same or better than their public school peers.

Governor Tony Evers is proposing a freeze on the state's three parental choice programs in his budget request. He also specifically calls for this misleading information to be included in property tax bills in areas where school choice programs are present.

The following is the column, The Real Numbers on School Choice.

Insuring our children have the best education is something on which everyone agrees, regardless of political party. In the late 1990's, Republicans dramatically increased state support for education by setting a goal to have state taxpayers provide two-thirds of funding for public schools. That promise was broken under Governor Jim Doyle. After years of budget reforms, Republicans can once again provide two-thirds of the funding for K-12 schools this year.

We also believe parents should have every option available: home school, charter school, choice school, the neighborhood public school or open enrollment in a different public school. Democrats want to dramatically curtail those options, especially the one that helps low-income families.

In his proposed budget, Governor Tony Evers wants to freeze the parental school choice programs. Lately, Democrats, including those in the Racine Unified School District, have taken their opposition of school choice to a new level by using tax dollars to create and mail false information to taxpayers.

For some reason, opponents of school choice want children to stay in low-performing schools or schools that can't meet a student's learning needs. They have long tried to muddy the waters on the costs to taxpayers. Most recently, Racine city officials misled the public, sending inaccurate information on school choice along with local tax bills. Let me tell you why it was wrong.



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Here are basic facts from the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau:

- *Cost to educate a choice student K-8 = \$7,754*
- *Cost to educate a choice student in high school = \$8,400*
- *Cost to educate a RUSD public school student = \$10,710*
- *Cost to taxpayers if the school choice program were eliminated and choice students attended RUSD = over \$9 million MORE*

Here's how the funding actually works.

Public schools bill local taxpayers for each child in a choice school through a revenue limit adjustment. These are children who aren't present in the public school. RUSD levies to the maximum under revenue limits for the choice students as if they were enrolled in public school. That was the number included in the tax bill. However, there's more to the calculation.

Public school enrollment is smoothed by using a three-year rolling average to calculate the number of district students for revenue limits, which includes general aid payments from the state. That means a child leaving a public school to attend a choice school is counted as a pupil at the public school for three years under revenue limits, but at a diminishing amount each year. After three years, they're finally forced to stop claiming a child.

In addition, choice schools receive less money per child. According to the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, if Racine Choice ended and choice students returned to RUSD, taxpayers would pay \$9 million more.

The math on the tax bill was wrong. Two calculations were missing: the three-year rolling average AND the fact that if choice students were attending RUSD, taxpayers would pay \$9 million more to educate them.

These facts are also clear; choice programs are growing because more low-income parents want to enroll their children in them. In addition, choice students achieve higher ACT scores and their test scores are equal or better than their public school peers. With the increased popularity, a track record of success and cost savings, there's no reason to freeze school choice or continue a misleading, taxpayer-funded campaign against it.

We all want our kids to succeed. Let's hope in the future we use facts to prove our beliefs and not just misleading opinions.

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