



January 30, 2014

Dear Legislators,

As you continue to consider SB 286 and how to structure accountability for schools in Wisconsin, I'd like to give you an on-the-ground perspective, as an urban district working through a change process aimed at getting the best results for all children.

In Madison, our focus is on ensuring that every school is a thriving school that prepares every student for college, career and community. We know that to be successful, we must stay incredibly focused on the day-to-day work of great teaching and learning for every child –and we must be highly accountable to our community.

We need an environment that allows us to stay focused on what's most important and do it extremely well. Rather than support educators in doing their best work for our children, this bill would arbitrarily label schools as failing, provide preferential treatment for voucher schools and take improvement tools away from local districts.

I'd like to share with you a few of my concerns with the current version of the bill.

- First, it shifts the report cards from performance categories to A through F letter grades. This type of "grade" does not focus our schools or communities on the improvements needed to get the best outcomes for children, but rather on politically charged rankings.
- The bill would also require 5% of the state's schools to receive an "F" grade, regardless of where they fall on the report card calculation. While the report card formula defines performance measures for schools and the public, this provision arbitrarily labels schools as failing and makes those schools subject to sanctions, even if they are performing in a different category or on a trajectory of improvement.
- The bill also provides preferential treatment for voucher schools by allowing those schools to decide which test they'd like to use for the report card - rather than treating all schools equally.
- It also places unnecessary restrictions on school district actions for improvement. If a school is truly failing its students, we are responsible for taking action to dramatically improve it. This bill does not focus on creating a path to improvement. Rather, it limits local districts and locally elected school boards across the state by requiring only closure or charter conversion.

I encourage you to focus on true accountability that holds all schools to the same standards and supports them in getting the best results for students. I would be happy to talk with you more and welcome your questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Cheatham

Jennifer Cheatham, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Madison Metropolitan School District