



PO Box 1327 • Madison WI 53701-1327
608-268-5074 (Madison) • 866-849-2536 (toll-free) • 608-256-3370 (fax)
Email: info@wifamilyaction.org
Web site: www.wifamilyaction.org
Blog: <http://blog.wifamilyaction.com>

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 619
Senate Committee on Education
Julaine K. Appling, WFA President
March 6, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Olsen and committee members, for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 619. I am Julaine Appling, president of Wisconsin Family Action, an organization dedicated to strengthening, preserving and promoting marriage, family, life and liberty in The Badger state. Helping to ensure that parents have strong educational options and opportunities to be involved in the policies impacting the schools their children attend is extremely important to us.

We want to thank Senator Vukmir for introducing this bill that addresses some issues important to education and academic standards in our state.

It is reasonable and appropriate to assume that all of us want the students in Wisconsin's public schools to receive the best education possible and expect them to meet high standards in knowledge and skills. That's what we are here to discuss today. However, I submit that we can have the very best standards anyone can create, and we can have excellent teachers in our schools and we will still likely be disappointed in our rate of success. Fundamentally, we are dealing with a problem that is beyond the ability of standards and educators to fix and that is the breakdown of the family unit. As more and more students come from broken or dysfunctional homes, we will find it increasingly difficult to move these students to acceptable, let alone exceptional, academic performance. If state government is really interested in improving the academic performance and readiness of students, then at some point it must address strengthening families in a variety of ways.

That said, we find this particular bill to be a good step in establishing a clear process by which state academic standards are developed and adopted in Wisconsin. Heretofore, we have had no established process, at least not at the legislative level. Whatever process we have had has resided exclusively within the Department of Public Instruction.

To summarize, the positives we see in this bill are as follows:

1. It establishes a clear process for the development and adoption of state academic standards.
2. It ensures more involvement by Wisconsin stakeholders.
3. It involves more than DPI in the appointment of people to the advisory board.
4. It brings the process more into the light of day.
5. It requires opportunity for public input on the adoption of state academic standards by requiring three public hearings at various steps in the process and before different bodies.
6. It requires an appropriate measure of legislative oversight.
7. It ensures school districts retain discretion in curriculum choices and adoption.
8. It establishes a systematic review of and potential revision of state academic standards.
9. It ensures new model academic standards in English, reading and language arts and mathematics are proposed per the process within one year of the bill's enactment.
10. It emphasizes that all interested parties should be able to clearly discern that the standards are setting high standards.
11. It retains local control in that it makes no change to the current law that clearly does not require any school district to adopt the state model academic standards but does require all school districts to adopt standards.

Also, we are pleased that this bill addresses both of the concerns we have with and recommendations we made regarding AB 617, related to who appoints advisory committee members and the amount of time before the current standards in math and English were reviewed.

We do have one concern with SB 619 and that involves the literacy standards that Dr. Evers and DPI also unilaterally adopted for all of Wisconsin. These literacy standards for English and math are incorporated in the academic standards, but DPI also has adopted “Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” which fall under the Common Core State Standards umbrella. I believe the author, co-sponsors and this committee should look at potentially amending this bill to include these standards in the review, development and adoption process proscribed in this legislation.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer questions.