



WISCONSIN FAMILY ACTION
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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 463/ASSEMBLY BILL 488
SENATE & ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION – JOINT HEARING
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2021
JULAIN K. APPLING, PRESIDENT**

Thank you, Chairwoman Darling, Chairman Thiesfeldt and committee members, for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 463 and its companion AB 488, proposals that require school boards to make available to the public, information about learning materials and educational activities used for pupil instruction by posting it on the home page of the school districts' internet sites.

If you've ever poked around on any school district's or local school's website, you know it can be difficult to find any information regarding the curriculum content and materials used to provide instruction to our children.

I regularly talk to parents around the state who have tried various methods (website searches, requests via email and telephone, and in-person office visits) to obtain information about the specifics on what is being taught to their children, only to end up frustrated because they cannot find what they are not only looking for, but what they are entitled to know. The only option they are often left with is an open records request, which is cumbersome and can be expensive.

COVID lockdowns forcing schools to provide virtual instruction via Zoom and other web-based portals have provided a transparent window into what and how our children are taught. In many cases, this has been an alarming, eye-opening experience for parents.

One such example is Critical Race Theory. Despite a recent YouGov survey which shows 58% of Americans oppose CRT, including 72% of independents who believe teaching it is "bad for America," the nation's largest teachers' union (NEA) recently approved a plan to promote CRT in all 50 states and 14,000 local school districts. In the resolution, the union agreed to publicly "convey its support for CRT, oppose restrictions in state legislatures and use schools for political activism."

The union, which represents 3 million public school employees, approved funding for three separate items related to this issue: "increasing the implementation" of "critical race theory" in K-12 curricula, promoting critical race theory in local school districts, and attacking opponents of critical race theory, including parent organizations and conservative research centers.

Despite these overt actions, schools here in Wisconsin continue to tell inquiring parents that they are not teaching Critical Race Theory or training staff in it. Parents are not convinced they are getting the straight story, which precipitates their online research that all too often yields nothing because either the information is not available at all online or it is so buried, it's basically impossible for parents to find.

Students receiving a good education is crucial for the future of the county. That responsibility falls to *parents*, educators, and leaders alike. It's a partnership. And always, parents are the most important part of this cooperative effort. Always. Children are not wards of the state; they belong to their parents who have both the responsibility and the privilege of caring for them, which includes seeing that they are educated.

However, without transparency, parents, who are also taxpayers, have little to no insight as to what is actually occurring in the classrooms, what is actually taught.

The state budget for public schools totals nearly \$7.4 billion, representing a total of 34% of the state's General Purpose Revenue Fund. This does not account for tax dollars received at the local level nor federal aid. I'd say these numbers more than qualifies parents to have the right to easy access to instructional information.

Moving forward, the question is now clear: Who will decide what happens in public schools? Parents, voters, and state legislatures? Or the national teachers' union and its allies in the public-school bureaucracy?

According to US Department of Education, Wisconsin ranks the 9th highest in the nation. Obviously, we are doing something right, at least in comparison to other states. Given this, school districts and individual schools should be very happy to let parents scrutinize the content and instructional materials being used in every classroom and every program. Surely, they have nothing to hide.

The bills are specific in what must be made available because parents have learned that too often, as in other areas of life, truly "the devil is in the details." Without the specific requirements, parents would not have all the information they not only need but are entitled to as they consider and actively engage in the education of their children. Keeping the information updated should be a foregone conclusion; but again, it's not unreasonable to build in safeguards to ensure timely updates and notifications. Really, teachers and administrators and all staff should be happy to comply and should be thrilled to know parents want to know what is going on in the schools so that they can work together to provide the very best education possible for their children.

Frankly, our schools should welcome the transparency that comes with easy access to the specifics of what students are learning and the materials teachers are using in their everyday instruction. What's being proposed is reasonable. Opposing this bill or vetoing it will simply solidify in parents' thinking that schools and school districts are hiding something. I can't imagine that will settle well with parents who are already not happy with a number of things taking place in our schools.

We urge you to support this bill in committee and move it to the full Senate and Assembly for votes.

Thank you for your careful and thoughtful attention to our position on these bills. I am available for questions, should you have any.