

Joint Finance Committee Passes Omnibus Education Package on 12-4 Party Vote

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While the plan increases K-12 funding, it also expands School Choice in Wisconsin and approves Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Reform Plan allowing the County Executive to appoint a commissioner to run a type of recovery program for public schools.

MADISON - In a long debate Tuesday night, legislative Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) proposed an extreme plan for dismantling the public education system in Wisconsin. Finally, at about 1:30 in the morning Wednesday, the omnibus education motion came to the JFC. There it passed 12-4 on a party line vote just as it would have before the debate.

The Republican plan comes straight out of Gov. Scott Walker's campaign rhetoric. While the plan does include some additional K-12 public school funding, it also expands both Racine and the statewide school choice programs with an enrollment cap of one percent per district until total enrollment is 10 percent higher than it is now.

In a further slap at Milwaukee Public Schools, it creates the Opportunity Schools and Partnership Program (OSPP) in which County Executive Chris Abele appoints a commissioner to run a type of privatized recovery program for public schools. The commissioner would select one to three schools in the first few years and up to five schools starting in 2017 to be handed over to the OSPP program. The program would select an operator, public or private, to run the selected schools. Existing staff at these schools would have to reapply for employment and the commissioner would have discretion over employment at the schools.

According to the right wing [Maclver Institute](#) , "JFC Republicans introduced the package to deal

with the entire K-12 education agenda in one fell swoop."



According to Assembly Democratic Leader **Peter Barca** (D-Kenosha) in a statement released this morning:

"Last night, legislative Republicans proposed an extreme plan for dismantling our public education system that not only harms education – it also undermines the will of voters. As part of an extreme budget proposal, Republicans will drastically change the system of educating children with disabilities without even holding a public hearing to shovel more funds to the private voucher school community. Overall, the net effect of the changes is the millionaires who fund Republican campaigns were popping champagne corks celebrating their great fortune last night.

"This Republican plan further defunds public schools and destroys local control. The taxpayers of Racine certainly did not ask for 12 Republican legislators to dismantle their way of electing their local, democratically created school board. And that sort of disrespect and knee-capping of local control will be happening in communities across Wisconsin. It is clear this Republican education budget is not meant to serve our Wisconsin communities and values – it is meant to curry favor with Republican presidential primary voters and out-of-state special interest groups that bankroll legislative Republican campaigns.

"So-called 'Opportunity Schools and Partnership Programs' were not requested by Milwaukee or any of the other large cities that could be affected, no hearings were held and the effects could be devastating to our large school districts.

"Republicans continue to mislead the people of Wisconsin by claiming they have made schools 'whole' while they are only funding one element of our school formula and draining public schools of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars they are giving to private schools. The Republican end goal to allow unlimited taxpayer dollars to go to private schools signals the end of public education as we know it in this state.

“There are so many bad aspects of this Republican education budget, but I am especially appalled by their creation of a special education voucher system that takes additional money out of public schools and leaves parents and special needs students with no resources or rights. It is clear that by not requiring services for children with severe needs or complicated medical issues that this burden will still fall upon public schools. It is the height of arrogance to add an entirely new approach to educating children with disabilities without so much as a public hearing to allow educators an opportunity to offer their insights.

“Republicans’ arrogance of power knows no bounds and their disrespect of the citizens of this state to undermine local control and make dramatic and even radical changes to education late in the night without any notice, hearings or consultation with the communities they disrupt is a terrible abuse of power.”

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