

# DO YOU CARE ABOUT WISCONSIN SCHOOLS & EDUCATION GOALS?

I DO TOO. THIS IS MY PLAN TO IMPROVE THEM.



## THE WALKER PLAN

TO MAKE WISCONSIN'S  
EDUCATION SYSTEM  
WORLD CLASS

**Scott Walker**  
BELIEVE IN WISCONSIN AGAIN

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# ***Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century High Standards and Accountability***

*"We trust teachers, counselors and administrators to provide our children world-class instruction, to motivate them and to keep them safe. In the vast majority of cases, education professionals are succeeding, but allowing some schools to fail means too many students being left behind. By ensuring students are learning a year's worth of knowledge during each school year and giving schools the freedom to succeed, Wisconsin will once again become a model for the nation."*

*- Scott Walker*



For years, Wisconsin had the distinction of being a national leader in educational reform. From the groundbreaking Milwaukee Parental Choice Program to policies aimed at expanding the role of charter schools in communities across the state, Wisconsin was viewed as a pioneer in educational innovation and creativity. Wisconsin used to rank 3<sup>rd</sup> in fourth grade reading, now we're 30<sup>th</sup>.

School districts are often steered off track by one-size-fits-all mandates that suppress innovation. Once we eliminate outdated and unnecessary rules, schools will have the freedom to set high standards and the ability to meet them.

Fortunately, Wisconsin can again be a leader in educational excellence by refocusing on success in the classroom. Our students, our teachers, and our state's future depend on us taking this action.

## **Focus on Fundamentals**

Today, 33% of Wisconsin fourth graders cannot read at even a basic level – proof that Wisconsin’s educational system is failing our children. To turn things around, we have to put an end to social promotion for students who cannot read at the end of third grade. In fourth grade, reading becomes the primary tool for gaining knowledge in every other subject. To borrow a phrase used by others, fourth graders are no longer “learning to read,” they are “reading to learn.”

By establishing benchmark guidelines in grades K-3 and providing schools and teachers with flexibility and resources, we can identify children who need additional help well before they reach third grade.

At the same time, schools have to return their focus to the fundamentals of reading, writing, science and math to ensure basic skills are mastered. By establishing rigorous and comprehensive learning standards that are future-focused, discontinuing the use of outdated and ineffective tests, and using 21<sup>st</sup> century evaluation methods, teachers and parents can better judge a student’s academic achievement. Paired with a comprehensive data system that allows parents to track student progress, we can identify learning challenges early on and correct them before it’s too late.

This focus can be better implemented by reviewing all one-size-fits-all school mandates and eliminating as many as possible. We shouldn’t be micromanaging school districts, but rather setting high standards and giving districts the flexibility to meet them.

From there, schools can focus on teaching marketable skills such as those offered in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education programs. The jobs of tomorrow will require specific types of workers and by making STEM programs a priority, students will begin learning essential skills in elementary school.

## **Reform Failing Schools**

In the past year alone, Wisconsin has twice lost out on hundreds of millions of dollars of federal Race to the Top education funding because Governor Doyle and Madison politicians lack a real commitment to education reform.

We can’t begin putting meaningful reforms in place until we know which schools are failing and how. Schools should be graded just like students on a scale of A to F. Grades awarded under this rating system will be based on objective criteria such as graduation rates, passing rates, enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, standardized test scores, and teacher and administrator evaluations.

Persistently failing schools will be required to sign “turnaround contracts.” In exchange for a commitment of resources and support from the state, school boards and administrators will select one of four turnaround models.

- Transformation: administrators are replaced and staff is reviewed with student achievement as a major consideration.
- Turnaround: administrators and no less than 50% of the staff are replaced with student achievement as a major consideration.
- Restart: the school is closed and reopened as a charter school.
- Closure: the school is closed and students are enrolled elsewhere.

Schools that fail for three consecutive years must select an alternate model. A state funded "Turnaround Taskforce" will provide needed guidance to school districts ensuring that they don't drain financial resources from Wisconsin's many successful schools.

### **Recruit, Retain and Reward Great Teachers**

In every other profession, excellence is rewarded and teaching should be no different. To make sure our children are receiving the very best instruction, we have to reward the best teachers and provide support for the underperforming ones. Persistently underperforming teachers, however, cannot be allowed to continue to fail our students. Under my plan, teachers will be evaluated based on the following five criteria:

- planning and preparation,
- classroom environment,
- quality of instruction,
- professional responsibilities, and
- yearly student progress.

Teachers will receive an overall rating of "ineffective," "needs improvement," "satisfactory," or "exemplary." Teachers who are rated "ineffective" two years in a row will lose their teaching license, while all teachers rated as "satisfactory" or "exemplary" will be eligible for bonuses. While teachers should be held accountable for their students' progress, they cannot control what happens to students outside the classroom. That's why student evaluations are only one of five criteria used to evaluate teachers.

We will also create a new class of highly qualified, well-paid teachers who will be given the opportunity to advance in their career. These highly qualified teachers will be called on to mentor other teachers, while still devoting most of their time to classroom teaching.

Finally, we must streamline the licensing process and open the door to aspiring teachers with real world experience. We must also remove arbitrary barriers like residency requirements that keep qualified teachers out of struggling districts.

## **Finding Efficiencies**

School districts must be given the tools to reduce the burden on property taxpayers by sharing resources, pooling purchasing power, contracting for services, expanding the use of technology like online learning, and even voluntarily merging, when appropriate. Meanwhile, parents should have the ability to scrutinize spending decisions which is why I will facilitate local efforts to post expenditures online just as I have done in Milwaukee with the county budget.

The Qualified Economic Offer (QEO), which helped hold down local school costs for more than 15 years, will be restored and tied to revenue caps to align each district's expenses with their revenues. Mediation and arbitration changes will also be needed to ensure that local economic factors are considered along with other common sense factors when arbitrating teacher contracts. And we can save more than \$68 million per year by allowing school districts to enroll in the state health care plan.

We must also examine the mandates placed on school districts by the state, particularly those that are unfunded, and consider freeing districts from as many as possible. Untying the hands of local administrators will free them to innovate and find even more savings.

## **More Choices for Parents**

We need to provide more high quality educational opportunities for families, whether they live in rural districts or urban areas. School Choice, Charter schools and Virtual Charter schools are all serving students in innovative and effective ways. These options should be expanded.

Parents should have control over their child's education, not the government. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and charter schools around Wisconsin have been successfully serving students for over a decade. While these options aren't for everyone, they should be expanded and encouraged for parents who want them. I will remove the enrollment and eligibility caps on school choice and virtual charter schools. I will also encourage allowing more authorizers of independent charter schools so the entire state can benefit from this innovation.