

League of Women Voters

Wisconsin Education Study 2003-2005

Impact of Alternative Forms of Education and
No Child Left Behind Act
on Public K-12 School System

Education Study Survey Summary
December, 2004
Compiled by Connie Kanitz

Contents of the Report

| | |
|---|----|
| Title Page | 1 |
| I. Introduction | 2 |
| II. Summary of No Child Left Behind Responses | 3 |
| III. Summary of Charter School Responses | 6 |
| IV. Table 1 Charter School Responses | 8 |
| V. Table 2 Open Enrollment and Virtual School Responses | 9 |
| VI. Interview Questions | 10 |
| VII. List of Schools Interviewed | 10 |
| VIII. Education Study Committee Members | 10 |

I. Introduction

The charge given to the Education Committee from the State Convention was to find the impact of alternative forms of education on the public 1-12 school system with emphasis on virtual, home and charter schools, and study the effect of the “No Child Left Behind Act.” To study the effect of the “No Child Left Behind Act” and charter and virtual schools, the committee decided to ask local Leagues to interview school administrators to determine the impact of these forms of education and the law. The interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2004. Local League members interviewed twenty-two district administrators. This report represents a summary of these interviews. All the completed surveys are on file with the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin at their Madison office.

The first section includes the main themes of the interviews concerning the “No Child Left Behind Act.” The second section covers the narrative summaries of the questions 3-8 regarding Charter Schools. Questions 1 and 2 are summarized in Table 1. Table 2 tabulates the responses to the open enrollment questions and the virtual school questions.

Information regarding home schooling was not covered by the interview survey. Information on home schooling is found in the packet of materials mailed to local Leagues in November and on the Education Study web page found on the LWVWI web site (www.lwvwi.org)

II. A summary of responses from 22 school districts regarding the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on School Districts in WI

Some admirable qualities of the bill

- Recognition that testing is important.
- Sets standards which provide a bench mark for districts to evaluate progress of their students.
- Challenges each district to pay attention to academic achievement of subgroups in relation to overall achievement within the district. (e.g. special education, low socio-economic students and ELL)
- Increases focus on achievement of basic skills for all students.
- Improves understanding of performance of subgroups
- Increases awareness of where improvement is needed
- Allows districts to shift federal dollars to area of biggest need; funds from Title II, III, IV, can be shifted to Title I.
- NCLB Grants to improve reading
- Builds parent and community involvement

Changes that school districts have made as a result of NCLB

- Much more administrative and student time spent on testing and requirements of testing.
- Increased publicity efforts to fulfill obligations to inform public of aspects of NCLB. (Parent notification/approval of surveys, other notifications, contact information shared with military).
- More time and money allotted for teacher in-service and professional development. Professional development expanded
- Addition of an assessment coordinator to deal with logistics, testing, data analysis, reporting
- Software purchased to improve data collection and curriculum construction.
- Although a teacher mentoring program was already started, NCLB encouraged a further development and follow-up of the mentoring program (Appleton)
- Districts have reported aligning curriculum with state standards in the four core academic areas
- System wide school improvement plan developed. Improved planning, linking data to district improvement
- One district reported adding remedial classes, after school tutoring, and offering some academic classes in summer school. Resources were shifted to students in need of most academic help away from other needed programs.
- One district has made some staff reductions although retaining staff would have benefited students.
- Sturgeon Bay has had to hire an ELL Teacher and another early childhood teacher, and has purchased software to assist curriculum building and a student management system which allows parents to go online to keep track of their child's progress.
- Reallocation of resources. (i.e. one district made cuts in resources to Special Education, and another district cut 25% of Title V money, Innovative Programs, and moved it to Title I).
- Reading First grant received
- High school scheduling changes during 10th grade tests.
- Paraprofessional teacher aids in Title I eliminated due to requirement of 2-year degree in one district. That requirement prompted another district to extend that requirement to all paraprofessional aids.
- Parent Involvement Roundtable initiated to help generate more parent involvement in student learning.
- New math curriculum adopted to address current math scores.
- Changed drug prevention program because it wasn't on list of acceptable research based programs listed in NCLB Act.

- Extra funding received by Oshkosh has made it possible to reorganize and restructure as needed to achieve progress. The extra funding has also provided resources for a quality professional development program.
- The board of Education is “on board” offering resources and looking for best practices (Oshkosh)
- This particular district collects and analyses data-measures of academic progress for each student—so that the district knows who needs help before the state tests are given. (Janesville)

Challenges of the mechanics of testing

- Too much recordkeeping/too many administrative hours spent on recordkeeping.
- Increased student testing and preparation for testing takes away from teaching time. Testing is too specific and not broad enough to assess full breadth of a child’s education.
- A focus on the four core areas places resources for other programs at a lower priority: music, arts, languages, gifted, physical education.
- A school can be identified as needing improvement if they fall below the required proficiency percentage in **any one** of four areas: Test Participation, Graduation Rate, Reading Proficiency, Math Proficiency. (Test participation rate can be difficult to achieve if parents try to exempt their children from the test—NCLB does not allow them to exempt their kids; if students are still on the records but they have recently moved to another district; or if students are truant or merely absent).
- Parents may immediately lose confidence in a school which is identified as needing improvement even if that school can demonstrate to residents other measurements which show successes of the school. Also parents may withdraw their students from the school before remediation attempts have been put into place.
- Alternative tests may be given to students in special education if specified by the student’s IEP, but none of the students who take the alternative test can be classified as “proficient.” Even if they meet or exceed what is outlined in their IEP (Individual Educational Plan) they can only be classified as “basic” or “minimal.”
- Subgroups can affect the rating of the whole school, in fact one student’s score or failure to be tested can affect the school’s overall rating.
- Tests are administered in November and the results received in March. Results can’t readily be used to improve instruction.

Consequences of NCLB and interpretation of test data

- Students and teachers are fearful of high stakes of one test with possible negative consequences.
- Sanctions outweigh rewards. Punitive sanctions are not the way to get improvements.
- Not sufficient help given to school identified as “failing.” Taking away money certainly does not help.
- Comparisons of schools that occur when some are labeled as “failing” doesn’t take into account reasons behind the label
- Negative sanctions affect attitudes toward public schools. NCLB frames language and conversation about public education in a negative way.
- NCLB may ultimately result in a curriculum limited to what is deemed important by the law and the tests.
- Weakening of local control. Limits ability of school district to solve specific problems. (i.e. Hiring an aide for non-English speaking students when only available candidate lacks 2 year degree).
- The bar is lowered for some students when there are cuts in programs for gifted, arts, languages, and enrichment electives which has occurred from shifting resources to focus on assessed areas.
- Schools with high populations of special education , ELL, and low income students are punished for their diversity. These schools have a larger number of subgroups and higher student numbers in the

subgroups which ensures that their tests meet the minimum number to count. Many schools do not meet the minimum number in a subgroup, and the tests are not counted.

- May result in increasing racial tensions and conflict between exceptional education and regular education. With high stakes testing, schools are not as accepting of students who may cause negative sanctions. Special Education students become a liability for a school.

Concerns about funding

- Title 1 funds are redirected from current use to assist schools identified for improvement, some of the Title 1 programs may be squeezed out; summer school, preschool programs, and reading teachers.
- Several school districts expressed a concern about having to take on funding responsibility (i.e. away from other budget items/programs) if there is not a political will to provide adequate funding for the NCLB Act.
- Not adequate resources to help meet student needs, particularly special needs students.
- Funding will be taken away from other programs to comply with NCLB.
- Resources aren't available to support the increased accountability and challenges of NCLB
- No increase in Title funding, but increased accountability (LaCrosse)
- Stevens Point reports that they have not been able to access Eisenhower Funds and class size reduction grants as they had previously.

Concerns about shortcomings of the bill, possible faulty assumptions of the bill

- All students expected to meet the same bar rather than 100% of their potential. The expectation may be statistically impossible.
- Testing not necessary in all grade levels to prove accountability
- Other federal education acts do not always integrate with the NCLB.
- Difficult for ELL students to meet same academic standards after living in the U.S. for one year.
- Law allows only 1% of total population to be exempt from taking the test. Only the most severe physically and mentally handicapped students would be exempt.
- Oversimplifies achievement. When time and resources are focused on improving test scores, scores can go up without overall improvement in education.
- The measure of basic skills is too narrow a measure of achievement.
- Measuring student achievement with only one test is not enough to measure student's learning. A measure of a student's longitudinal progress is needed.
- Standardized tests tend to have a greater emphasis on rote memory skills and have limitations in their ability to assess higher level thinking skills.

Concerns of potential long-term impact

- Many superintendents agree that it is just a matter of time before all schools are identified as failing either because they aren't able to test the exact number of students required or because not all students or all subgroups are able to score at the required increased proficiency level. 100% of students reaching proficiency may not be statistically impossible.
- If more and more schools are identified as failing, will the long term outcome be more and more public schools replaced by private schools or most of public funds going to private schools? Private schools do not have to take any of these tests.

III. Charter Schools: Responses to Survey Questions 3 – 8.

3. Are charter schools meeting academic standards described in their charter?

4. How have the charter schools been held accountable to their charters?

Surveys indicated that the charter schools in their districts are meeting academic standards. A general response from school districts surveyed is that charter school students take the required state testing. The charter is held accountable to the school board and to parents. The measure of accountability is written into the charter. Annual goals may be written and reviewed. A formal status presentation may be given to the school board. Also some districts note that stats have improved in the following ways (particularly in charter schools for at risk students) higher graduation rate, fewer absences, fewer disciplinary incidents, parent and community involvement. Some of the alternative schools (such as Janesville) note that students have not been showing consistent improvement in test scores. Yet they do see progress in graduation rate, fewer absences, fewer disciplinary incidents, and increased parent and community involvement, but still need to work on fairly evaluating progress.

Regarding Milwaukee:

- Charter schools within MPS are evaluated by the Office of Research. Schools that are operated by non-profits, but have a charter with MPS (noninstrumentalities) hire their own evaluation firms to prepare reports for MPS.
- Charter Schools through the City of Milwaukee have a Charter School Review Committee which hires a monitoring firm and an accounting firm to monitor the schools
- Charter Schools through UW-Milwaukee, go through the Malcolm Baldrige process as part of the renewal process.

5. Is the cost per student in the charter school(s) the same as for the non-charter district schools? If not, why not?

Most districts said that the cost per student is the same for students in charter schools as for students in noncharter schools. The general rule is that Charter Schools cannot use Charter money for staffing of on-going operational costs—that comes from the regular school funding. Charter School grants are used primarily for planning, teacher training, and special materials (including technology).

An example in Appleton is that sometimes schools have to give up some things that noncharter schools have in order to keep the costs the same per student. The Classical Charter school in Appleton wanted to have Spanish taught from K-8. They have given up a full time media specialist, a gifted and talented specialist, and a guidance counselor and have these responsibilities covered in other ways in order to keep their costs in line with noncharter student costs.

The Neenah survey reports that their charter costs are higher per student than for a noncharter student. It was noted that Neenah still has not received grants to pay for some of its additional expenses.

Milwaukee notes that charter schools not operated by the district generated a per pupil payment of \$7,050 in 2003-04 as compared to \$11,736 in the Milwaukee Public Schools in 2003-2004.

6. Are there innovations in your district's charter schools? What are they?

Many of the innovations are briefly referenced in the chart summarizing charter school surveys. Here are a few additional comments regarding Milwaukee Public Schools. In Milwaukee, charter schools provide an ability for a wider array of people to participate in educating the city's children. (i.e. the YMCA of Greater Milwaukee participated in public education by delivering K4-8th grade services to about 500 children. Five colleges and universities joined together to create the Milwaukee Academy of Science, which serves about 850 students. Marva Collins Prep School was started by a couple in

Milwaukee inspired by the Marva Collins schools in Chicago. To find out more about Milwaukee's Public Schools in an Era of Choice see www.schoolchoicewi.org/data/research/NPSrespon ds_03.pdf

Responses are combined which address the following two questions.

7. Do charter schools bring any innovations to the non-charter schools in your district?

8. What is the impact of the charter schools on the non-charter schools in your district?

Many districts report that there is a sharing with staff of curriculum, technology, and/ or project units that have been developed.

A few samples of themes from the surveys include:

- Oshkosh reports that charter high schools are expected to influence practice and policy at 2 traditional high schools and encourages district-wide-at-risk restructure that will organize around kids' needs.
- Charter schools force the whole community to take a new look at the educational process.
- Charter schools help establish collaborative, interdisciplinary projects.
- Appleton reports that the charter schools developed "scope and sequence charts" for each grade level in the recruitment process. Traditional schools also found it helpful to do so.
- Charters provide broader education opportunities.
- In some instances, charter schools helped to alleviate overcrowding in some buildings.
- Novanet used in the Door County charter school is now used by some Southern Door students.
- Stevens Point reports that some curriculum which originates in the charter school is shared with other teachers in the district. If the program itself is not transferable, the desire to emulate the process of better serving students does transfer.
- In Madison, after the charter school purchased a technology-based reading program for adolescent readers, other schools saw its usefulness, and nearly every middle school, a few elementary and a few high schools have purchased one.
- In Madison, their charter middle school provides an option for middle school students. Its small size addresses needs of students who won't do as well in a larger setting. Middleton reports they have found their alternative charter school can partner with regular programs at the high school.
- In Beloit, project-based teaching methods are observed by other teachers and provide opportunities for professional growth.

Some negative impact

- There is a concern about skimming some kids off of the ability to be in charter school.
- Sometimes at risk kids and their families may find a barrier to accessing a charter school. For example in Appleton where they welcome up to 20% of their enrollment of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch (which matches the district wide level of students with free/reduced lunch) the real number of students attending is far lower than 20%, possibly related to a problem of the family being able to provide daily transportation to the school which probably lies outside the neighborhood in which they live.
- There may be some anxiety/tension between staff from charter and noncharter schools over the additional start-up funds and technology that they have available to them and the additional space allotted to them.

IV. Table 1. Charter School Responses

| School District | # charter schools | Charter School Name & grades | Approach |
|--|-------------------|---|---|
| NE WI | | | |
| Oshkosh | 5 | Environmental Elementary Charter | Environmental focus |
| | | Experimental Aircraft Association | Aviation theme in 4 core areas |
| | | ALPS | GT project based |
| | | Journeys | Project based |
| | | East High School | Alternative HS/at risk students |
| Neenah | 1 | Alliance Charter (K-3) | Montessori Method |
| Menasha | 1 | a charter school within a school | Environmental focus |
| Appleton | 9 | Classical School K-8 | Content centered |
| | | Central Alternative 10-12 | At risk students |
| | | Community Learning School (7-8) | At risk students |
| | | eschool (9-12) | Learning via computer |
| | | Odyssey-Magella (5-8) | Gifted |
| | | Renaissance School for the Arts (9-12) | Integrated arts |
| | | Tesla Engineering (9-12) | Engineering centered curriculum |
| | | Valley New School | Project based, technology & research |
| | | Wisconsin Connections Academy | Learning via computer |
| | | Far NE WI | |
| Door County | 1 | 1 charter school shared amongst Southern Door, Sturgeon Bay, Sevastopol | At risk High School students, Door County |
| NW/Central WI | | | |
| LaCrosse | 5 | | 1 charter serves at risk students |
| WI Rapids | 0 | | closed a HS charter for at risk students opened 5 yrs. ago , current proposal for fall 2005 for a health career charter school |
| River Falls | 2 | River Falls Montessori Charter Academy K-2 | Montessori method |
| | | Renaissance Alternate Charter Grades 10-12 | Mentoring apprenticeships |
| Stevens Point | 5 | C.A.R.E. (7-9) | At risk students |
| | | Jackson Environmental Discovery Center P-K-6 | Environmental focus |
| | | McDill Academies (K-6) | 4 Academies: Math, Language Arts, Sciences, Humanities |
| | | McKinley Center (K-6) | technology |
| | | WI River Academy (in Point Area HS) | interdisciplinary, experiential located within SP HS |
| | | Washington Service-Learning Center (K-6) | Integrates community service and curriculum |
| | | | 5 more new charter proposals |
| S WI | | | |
| Middleton | 1 | Middleton Alternative Senior High | At risk students (10-12 grades) |
| Madison | 2 | Nuestro Mundo Elementary | Bilingual focus: English/Spanish |
| | | James C. Wright Middle School | Technology focus |
| Milwaukee 13,000 students in Milwaukee's 34 charter schools | 34 | 13 operate within the school system | See notes about innovations |
| | | 11 independently operated, chartered by MPS | www.schoolchoicewi.org/dataresearch/ChartersReport.pdf |
| | | Additional 10 schools chartered by City of Milwaukee UW-M, and MATC | |

| | | | |
|------------|---|--|--|
| Janesville | 1 | Alternative High School, Jan 05 Charter school is International Charter School in depth study of international business, international education or international language | current charter school serves at risk students HS students , new Jan 05 charter school for HS 1/2 day reg. school, 1/2 day charter school |
| Beloit | 1 | Synectic approach | project oriented learning, school within a school |

V. Table 2. Open Enrollment and Virtual School Stats

| School District | Open enrollment 2002-2003: Students coming into district, leaving district, net + or - | Open enrollment 2002-3 financial net + or - | # students enrolled full time in a virtual school |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| NE WI | | | |
| Fond du Lac | 74-69=+5 | (+) \$15,168 | no data* |
| Oshkosh | No Data | | 20 |
| Neenah | 71-54=+17 | + \$90,100 | no data |
| Menasha | | negligible effect | 0 |
| Appleton | 387-82=+315 | + \$1,650,915 | 2003-4: 18 Appleton students, 374 total students in Appleton virtual school |
| Appleton | School year 2004-2005: 734 - 178= +556 | school year 2004 - 2005: +\$3,080,248 | |
| Green Bay | | -\$278,648 | 22 |
| West De Pere | | - \$250,000 | (2-4) |
| Howard Suamico | | negligible effect | No data |
| Far NE WI | | | |
| Door County | | | |
| Southern Door | 60-60=0 | No change | 3 |
| Sturgeon Bay | | Slight net gain | 30 |
| Sevastopol | | No Data | No data |
| NW/Central WI | | | |
| LaCrosse | | net gain | 3 |
| Holmen | -30 students | -\$157,230 | No data |
| WI Rapids | | slight gain due to home-schoolers entering a virtual school | 30 |
| Stevens Point | - 30 students | (2003-4) -\$240,134 | 14 |
| S & SE WI | | | |
| Middleton | 13-6=7 | +\$36,687 | 0 |
| Madison | | No data | 0 |
| Milwaukee | | No data | No data |
| Whitewater | | -\$60,022 | 0 |
| Janesville | | slight net gain | 0 |
| Beloit | | negligible effect | 8 |

* No data= no data collected

VI. LWVWI Education Study 2003-2005 Interview Questions

No Child Left Behind Act

1. What is the impact of the NCLB legislation in your district?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges that this legislation has for your district?
3. Has your district made any changes as a result of this legislation? If so, what are they?

Open Enrollment

1. For the school year 2002/03, what was the net financial effect of open enrollment on the state aid payment to your district?

Virtual School

1. Are there students attending a virtual school full-time from your district? Yes____ No____
If yes, how many students? _____ Virtual school name_____

Charter Schools

1. Do you have charter schools in your district? Whom do they serve
2. What different approaches to curriculum or instruction do the charter schools use?
3. Are these charter schools meeting academic standards described in their charter?
4. How have the charter schools been held accountable to their charters?
5. Is the cost per student in the charter school(s) the same as for the non-charter district schools
6. Are there innovations in your district's charter schools? What are they? Most of them are on paper.
7. Do charter schools bring any innovations to the non-charter schools in your district?
8. What is the impact (positive/negative, educationally and financially) of the charter schools on the non-charter schools in your district?

VII. List of School Districts Interviewed

Northeast WI

| | | | |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|
| Fond du Lac | Oshkosh | Neenah | Menasha |
| Appleton | Green Bay | West DePere | Howard Suamico |

Far Northeast

| | | | |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|------------|
| Door County | Southern Door | Sturgeon Bay | Sevastopol |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|------------|

North West WI

| | | | |
|-------------|--------|-----------|---------------|
| LaCrosse | Holmen | WI Rapids | Stevens Point |
| River Falls | | | |

South and South East WI

| | | | |
|------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Middleton | Madison | Milwaukee | Whitewater |
| Janesville | Beloit | | |

VIII. Education Study Committee Members

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Leslie Benson – Fond du Lac | Dotty Juengst – Green Bay |
| Connie Kanitz – Appleton | Elizabeth Kruck – LaCrosse |
| Carol Carstensen - Madison | |