



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 193:
MANDATORY PUPIL EXAMINATION OPT OUT**
Presented to the Senate Committee on Education Reform
By Kim Wadas, Associate Director
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On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 193. By providing parents and guardians with the tools to evaluate and direct how their children are assessed, SB 193 affirms the essential Catholic teaching that a parent is the primary educator of their child.

We are grateful that SB 193 extends a parent's ability to excuse his or her student from taking certain state knowledge and concepts examinations. As current school accountability measures track student progress in grades three through twelve, it makes sense that any parental option to forgo the administration of pupil examinations apply in all these grades.

Senate Bill 193 also alters the current school accountability determination process by correcting an inequity in how test participation within a school is assessed. Currently, a school is penalized if less than 95 percent of the student population that is subject to mandatory testing participates. This includes students whose parents have asked that they be excused from testing. For parental choice program schools – where the student population subject to mandatory assessment can be small – families of students required to take state examinations opt out because test-taking can identify these students as being from families of limited means. Soon parental choice programs will be evaluated under the school accountability system and having just two students out of 20 refrain from test administration will result in a less than 95 percent test participation rate.

While the WCC supports the expansion of the parental opt out and school accountability measures, we would like to take this opportunity to raise a concern regarding the notice requirements under Senate Bill 193. Senate Bill 193 requires that schools, including choice program schools, provide an annual assessment summary notice to all student families on or before the start of the school year. Among other things, the summary must list the tests used, the grades tested, anticipated testing dates, the duration of the exams, the anticipated instructional time necessary to prepare for and administer the tests, the purpose of the examinations, how test data will be used, and information on how a family may opt to have a student excused from test administration.

The notice provision is unusual in that it would apply to all families within a choice program school, regardless of whether a student is participating in a parental choice program. Such a requirement would be unprecedented in its application to private school students who are not parental choice program participants. These students are not required to take state assessments. Furthermore, it is unclear how the DPI could verify such notice has been provided to all private

school families within a choice program school. Therefore, we respectfully request that this language be altered to align with other notice requirements applicable to choice program schools.

Overall, Senate Bill 193 allows for greater parental engagement and ensures fairness within the school accountability system. By recognizing the distinctive ways in which Catholic schools operate, we can development consistent and fair practices and obtain measures of performance that foster useful and reliable results. This will ensure a transparent system that maintains accountability without altering the unique character and climate of our Catholic schools.