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Proposed legislation subjects kids to political whipsaw

By State Superintendent Tony Evers

Wake up Wisconsin. Proposed legislation to create a Model Academic Standards Board is more than just another committee. Senate Bill 619 is a partisan takeover of the bedrock of schooling: the standards that describe what our kids should know and be able to do in each academic subject area.

The bill would set up the repeal of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics and have legislators shape and debate standards on the floor of the Legislature. Every parent and educator should be alarmed. This bill would hand over what is taught in our schools to partisan politics. Beyond the Common Core, are we ready for our legislators to debate and legislate academic standards related to evolution, creationism, and climate change when they take up the science standards? What about topics like civil liberties and civil rights, genocide, religious history, and political movements when they take up social studies? All of this and more is on the table with this proposed legislation.

During hearings conducted on the Common Core, we heard compelling tales about early results and the increased opportunities for all kids to succeed in college and career. I am so proud of all the work Wisconsin educators have done to implement the Common Core. The endorsements and testimony in favor of the Common Core were and continue to be overwhelming. They include students, parents, educators, the University of Wisconsin System, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, and the editorial boards of a number of Wisconsin media. Why throw all of this away? I can't believe this is what the citizens of Wisconsin want: untrained, unqualified legislators writing standards for our schools.

In the end, this bill will not build the economy, create jobs, or advance the skills of graduates. We need to continue doing what is right and implement the new standards that our teachers and others across the state and the country have worked so hard on and are showing good results. In these difficult economic times, the last thing we need to do is send a message across the state, and frankly across the nation, that Wisconsin is stepping backward.

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We need our businesses to grow and to be comfortable knowing that our schools and students are moving forward with world-class standards and education that will prepare our children for college and careers.

This bill is craziness. Our children's education will be subject to the whipsaw of elections every two years when one party or another is in power. Educational standards are meant to set a foundation for learning. They are not supposed to change every few years.

As a grandfather of school-age children, I am concerned for my grandkids and for all of Wisconsin's children. Please don't hand over what is taught to the politicians. To do so will relegate our kids to a future that is neither college nor career ready. Rather, our children's future will be decided by whatever ideology is represented by the political map. This is wrong. Senate Bill 619 is wrong. I encourage citizens to contact your legislators and ask them to oppose this power grab and reject Senate Bill 619.

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NOTES: A high resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/eis_vm-media. This editorial is available electronically at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/files/eis/pdf/dpinr2014_28.pdf. The state superintendent's video message on the Common Core State Standards can be found at <http://youtu.be/Z7fNt5HocvY>.