

Editorial: There's a lot to like in proposal for school assessment

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The collaborative effort between Gov. Scott Walker and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers on a system to gauge the quality of **education** in Wisconsin is most welcome.

These two men come from widely divergent political philosophies, so the fact that they are coming together on this most important issue lends a **greatdeal** of credence to their plan.

Their plan calls for a standardized method of testing as well as a system for judging the effectiveness of teachers that can be used to evaluate their **performance** and in part determine how much they are paid. It will also be a tool used to determine if a teacher is retained or fired.

Walker and Evers hope their plan will eventually replace the federal government's No Child Left Behind program, so they must win approval from the Department of Education. No Child Left Behind was a good idea, but its implementation and lack of funding support left too many schools in the state struggling to meet unclear and often impossible standards. It was good in concept, but weak in practicality.

What Walker and Evers are shooting for is much better for schools because it will offer a testing system that better evaluates student progress and does it in a much more quickly so learning problems are tackled earlier. Under the current method for testing, called the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination, there is too much lag time between the time a student takes the test and the time the results are available to indicate where the student is falling behind.

The program creates a statewide **database** on student grades and courses taken to better evaluate student progress and performance.

Also, Walker and Evers are proposing that every school that accepts public funding — charter schools, **virtual** schools and voucher schools — would be subject to the same rules and testing methods, which isn't the case today.

This alone is one reason to back this effort because it would put all schools on an

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Not everyone is on board with the program, which was only announced in **general** form a week or so ago. The state teachers union and many Democrats are skeptical of Walker's intentions, based on what happened to collective bargaining for public employees and cuts in state aid for schools earlier this year.

While there are valid questions on how the program will be implemented and what criteria will be used to evaluate teachers, it is better for everyone if everyone is working to make the system better.

We urge Walker and Evers to be open to wide ranging discussion on their quality-control program. At the same time, skeptics and critics need to be part of the debate and not merely lob critical comments from the sidelines.

We're not expecting this idea to merely be rubber-stamped.

However, Wisconsin has for years tried to find ways that will make our schools better and hold teachers and school administrators more accountable. Political differences have often been a huge stumbling block on the path to this goal.

We hope that by working together, Walker and Evers can bridge that divide and come up with the right approach to improving education in Wisconsin.

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