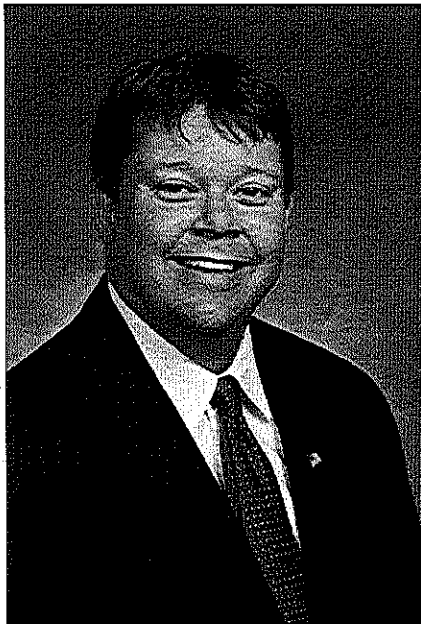


EDITOR'S PICK

School crime stats would be included in state report cards under GOP bill

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Jagler

The number and type of crimes committed at high schools, at their events and on school buses would be printed on the state's school report cards under a bill being circulated this week.

Any public high school, public charter high school or private voucher high school would be required to track reports of criminal activity beginning in the 2017-18 school year and submit the data to the state Department of Public Instruction annually under the bill authored by Rep. John Jagler, R-Watertown.

Jagler said the idea of the bill was triggered by a large fight in September at Milwaukee's Barack Obama School of Career and Technical Education. He said he subsequently learned from police department employees that Milwaukee

police are often called to the school, but Jagler could not find related data from the state Department of Justice or DPI.

“I was kind of surprised that the information wasn’t there, or wasn’t easily available — and I was kind of surprised the data wasn’t being tracked,” he said. “To me, I don’t know how anybody can think this information shouldn’t be available to parents.”

Schools are required to track the number and type of incidents that result in suspensions and expulsions, which DPI publishes on its website. Jagler said sometimes school incidents are handed off to police officers without official discipline being handed down by school officials, causing the DPI data to be an incomplete picture.

If the legislation is successful, state report cards would list the total number of incidents per 100 students reported by the school or school district, the average total number of incidents per 100 students reported statewide, the total number of violent incidents per 100 students and the associated statewide average.

Currently, state report cards include information about student academics, such as averages of students' scores on standardized tests by subject matter, graduation rates, and attendance and truancy rates, and the percentage of students taking standardized tests.

Each school and district receives a score based on the report card's data. The bill would prohibit crime data from being used to calculate the school's report card rating.

"I don't want anyone to use it as a stick," Jagler said.

The bill requires the DOJ to work with DPI to develop a reporting system for schools to track homicides, sexual assaults, aggravated assaults, cases of arson, possession of alcohol, drugs or firearms and disorderly conduct.

Tom McCarthy, spokesman for the DPI, said in an email the proposal could be expensive for districts and local law enforcement, depending on the final bill's details, "Both in staff time for reporting and the creation of data systems for collection/display."

Jagler said for parents, the data would be "worth whatever burden it may cause to compile the information."

Dan Rossmiller, lobbyist for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, said he supports the bill's provision not to include a school's crime statistics in the report card calculation, but "the bill could potentially give a wrong impression if it requires reporting on things schools have little control over."

The bill would track crimes that occurred on school grounds, at school-sanctioned events and on school buses — regardless of whether they occurred during the traditional school day — that are reported to a school principal, school security staff or to local law enforcement.

Rossmiller said schools can't help where they are located and it takes "not just schools but city and village and law enforcement efforts to make sure that neighborhoods around schools are safe."

In response, Jagler said he would be open to discussing those concerns in order to develop a final bill.

Jim Bender, president of voucher school advocacy group School Choice Wisconsin, said Jagler's bill "will hopefully spark a very important conversation about school safety, school culture and informing parents about the overall educational environment."

Rossmiller said aside from being another mandate for schools, he did not know until more details are known whether the organization would ultimately support the proposal.

“I can tell you that school boards take student safety very seriously,” he said. “If students do not feel safe in school, they can’t learn and achieve to their potential.”

The bill is backed by Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, according to his spokeswoman Kit Beyer. Spokeswomen for Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, and Gov. Scott Walker did not respond to requests late Thursday seeking comment.

A spokeswoman for Madison School District did not respond to a request late Thursday for information about what data the district collects and how it reports it.

Molly Beck | Wisconsin State Journal ([https://host-dot-madison-dot-com.bloxcms.com/users/profile/Molly Beck](https://host-dot-madison-dot-com.bloxcms.com/users/profile/Molly%20Beck))

Molly Beck covers politics and state government for the Wisconsin State Journal.

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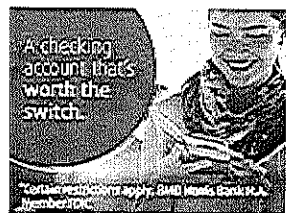
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