



Tony Evers

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

March 30, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the Assembly:

I am vetoing Assembly Bill 602 in its entirety.

This bill would require the Governor to elect to participate in the new nationwide federal voucher program created by Republican members of the U.S. Congress and President Donald Trump under the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act, also known as the 'Big Beautiful Bill,' Public Law 119-21 by July 1, 2026 for the 2027 calendar year (and annually thereafter). I must veto this bill in its entirety because I object to the nationwide expansion of a private voucher school program.

The 'Big Beautiful Bill' created the first major federal program to effectively redirect public funds to private school tuition through tax incentives. It is the first-ever federal effort to fund private school scholarships through vouchers the federal government will pay individuals in exchange for donating to organizations that award scholarships to attend private schools. The voucher program is designed to function similarly to how public funds are essentially being used to support private schools in more than a dozen states across the country. More specifically, this nationwide voucher program incentivizes individuals to donate as much as \$1,700 toward organizations providing private school tuition scholarships in order to receive a generous tax benefit: deducting as much as \$1,700 from their tax bill.

Put another way, the federal government is now going to use public funds that should be used for public schools to essentially reimburse donors for helping fund private schools instead. No joke.

This nationwide voucher program has no student achievement metrics, no school accountability measures, no minimum or maximum scholarship size, no certain end date, and no cap on how much the federal government can spend. Republicans in Washington have given private voucher expansion carte blanche to run roughshod over public education in this country—and a blank check to do so at taxpayer expense, clearly without any regard for whether it actually does what is best for kids.

Estimates indicate this private voucher program will cost American taxpayers billions of dollars, with some projecting costs as high as \$51 billion a year. Some have projected the costs may ultimately be even higher. Never mind the fact that many questions remain about how this program will be implemented and executed as the U.S. Department of Treasury has not yet completed the rulemaking process. All the while, President Trump and the Trump Administration take new steps every day to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education piece by piece while Republican members of Congress do nothing to stop them.



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All taken together, the Wisconsin State Legislature expects me to sign this bill to force myself to formally opt Wisconsin into this private voucher school program and wholly ignore potential consequences with which Wisconsinites are already all too familiar.

Decades after the proliferation of voucher schools in Wisconsin, Wisconsinites are uniquely situated to understand what is at stake. As a former science teacher, principal, superintendent, state superintendent, and a son of the state that created the nation's first-ever private school voucher program, I have spent decades of my life watching the impacts that draining public funds from public schools to fund private voucher school programs instead has had on kids, schools, and public education in Wisconsin. Wisconsinites have, too.

With each passing school year, public school districts continue to endure capped and prorated state funding, strict revenue limits, and the need to go to referenda in many cases just to keep up with inflationary pressures to provide a quality education for their kids. Even now, the Legislature has simultaneously failed to act on my calls to increase funding for special education to ensure the state meets the targets promised in our bipartisan budget.

Public funds should go to public schools. Period. Proponents of this nationwide voucher expansion have implored me to support and opt into this program, insisting the program will benefit public school students, families, and schools, too. Perhaps I am wrong and maybe it will.

Nevertheless, right now, I have no such comfort, and my decades of experience in public education in the state with the first and oldest modern voucher program tell me the opposite will be true. Therefore, I must veto this bill its entirety. What's best for our kids is what's best for our state, and it remains unclear how this bill will do what's best for the more than 800,000 Wisconsin public school kids for whom the state has a constitutional obligation to adequately provide and invest in public education.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Evers".

Tony Evers
Governor