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Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of Assembly Bill 968, a proposal by Representative Wittke and Senator Darling regarding the creation of a charter-school-authorizing board to allow for more opportunities for independent charter schools.

Wisconsin’s public charter schools can be authorized either by a local school district or a different governmental entity. Since the early 1990s, Wisconsin has grown the list of approved entities that can authorize charter schools. Today, there are seven categories of government entities that can authorize charter schools. The number of entities that can approve charter schools often used by opponents as justification for not adding more. But the reality is that most do not use this authority. In fact, out of 34 entities with the authority to authorize charter schools, only 5 of them—about 14%—actually use it.¹

Government Entity with Authorizing Power	Number of Charter Schools 2021-22
Common Council of the City of Milwaukee	7
Waukesha County Executive	0
College of Menominee Nation	0
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College	2
UW-System Office of Educational Opportunity	7
Any Chancellor of the UW System	
UW-Milwaukee	15
UW-Parkside	1
UW-Eau Claire	0
UW-Green Bay	0
UW-La Crosse	0
UW-Madison	0
UW-Oshkosh	0
UW-Platteville	0
UW-River Falls	0
UW-Stevens Point	0

¹ DPI Quick Facts Wisconsin Charter Schools, https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/parental-education-options/Charter-Schools/pdf/Wisconsin_Charter_Schools_Quick_Facts.pdf



Government Entity with Authorizing Power	Number of Charter Schools 2021-22
UW-Stout	0
UW-Superior	0
UW-Whitewater	0
Each technical college district board	
Gateway Technical College	0
MATC	0
Blackhawk	0
CVTC	0
Fox Valley	0
Lakeshore	0
Madison College	0
Mid-State	0
Moraine Park	0
Nicolet College	0
Northcentral	0
Northeast	0
Northwood Tech	0
Southwest	0
Waukesha County	0
Western	0

The lack of active authorizers became a problem for Lake Country Classical Academy (LCCA), a charter school that opened this year in Oconomowoc. The school leadership spent a year-and-a-half reaching out to independent charter-school authorizers and local school districts. They met with a couple different school districts in the Lake Country area and even considered being an instrumentality charter school of either district, but neither district was interested. Ultimately, the leadership applied with three of the six independent authorizers, and fortunately the LCO Ojibwe College stepped up to support LCCA.

Once LCCA was authorized, they experienced a high demand for this alternative education option—a classical, content-rich curriculum paired with a more traditional pedagogy. Currently enrollment stands at approximately 400 students in grades K-9, which includes some families driving more than an hour each direction to get their kids to and from LCCA every day. The school recently held their lottery for new students for the 2022-23 school year. 96% of the current student population is returning next year, with a total of 471 students enrolled for next year. Another 265 students are currently on the waitlist, which is a huge testament to the community demand for alternative choices in public education.

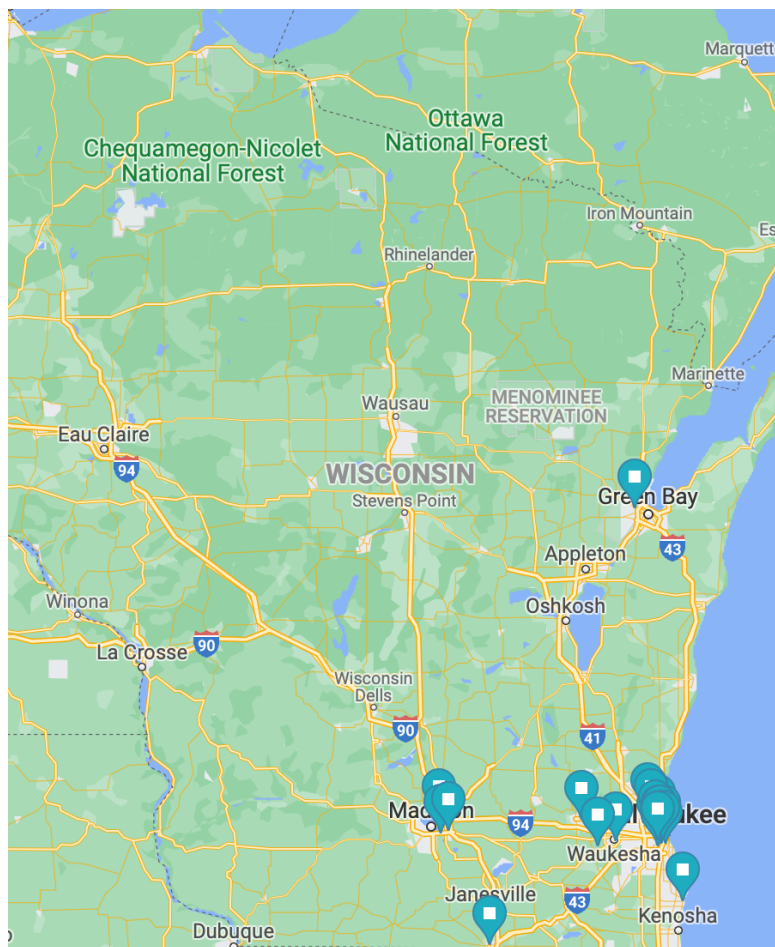
This demand for charter schools is not unique to LCCA. For example, the Office of Educational Opportunity more than doubled its number of charter schools from three in 2020-21 to seven in 2021-22. They are in the process of adding six more schools, four of which will open this fall,



and two more the following September. Similarly, charter school enrollment has grown over the last few years. In 2018-2019, enrollment in independent charter schools was just of 8,000 students. By 2021-22, average enrollment is expected to be around 10,500.²

AB 968 is the right response to the lack of participating authorizers and increased demand from Wisconsin parents. By creating The Charter School Authorizing Board, AB 968 gives the board the authority to authorize additional independent charter schools. This board could have a statewide focus and expand charter schools into new areas across the state.

Currently, many of the 32 independent charter schools are limited to urban areas, such as Milwaukee and Madison. Creating another authorizer that is not regionally specific will expand the options available for school leaders and parents. AB 968 also creates a board that is represented by the Department of Public Instruction, the state legislators and community members. The breadth of these appointments can expand the community representation statewide.



² DPI Historical Chart -Headcount and FTE of independent charter schools. The 2021-22 FTE count is not yet audited. <https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/charter-schools/current/2r-membership>



We urge the committee to support AB 968 and provide additional high-quality, public-school options to Wisconsin families.

Thank you,

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