



[Home](#) » [News](#) » [Politics](#)

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[Election 2010](#)

Walker would grade schools

GOP governor hopeful would lift choice program cap

By [Lee Bergquist](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Wauwatosa - Republican gubernatorial candidate Scott Walker called for a [series of education reforms](#), ranging from an expansion of Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program to a system of grading schools and demanding accountability from those that fail.

Walker, the Milwaukee County executive, said as governor he would also reward the best teachers, but fire those rated ineffective two years in a row.

The reforms would represent a sharp departure from the current system, but they also closely resemble a plan pushed earlier this summer by fellow Republican Mark Neumann.

Walker also would ensure schools focus on the basics - especially reading - and not simply advance students even though they are failing to read at grade level.

[Only 33%](#) of Wisconsin's fourth-graders scored at a level considered proficient as measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress, a federal report found this year.

Standing outside Wauwatosa East High School, Walker said that objective criteria such as standardized tests would be used so that all schools would be graded A through F.

Failing schools would be required to sign a contract aimed at turning them around. In exchange for receiving more resources, school boards and administrators would have to select one of several models for improvement.

In one model, administrators would be replaced; in another, administrators and half the staff would be replaced; in a third, the school would be closed and replaced with a charter school; and in another, the students would be sent to other schools.

In Milwaukee, Walker would lift the cap on the choice program, which allows taxpayer money to be used for private schools, including religious schools. The cap is now 22,000 students.

Neumann's spokesman Chris Lato said in a statement that Walker's plan "appears to be a shorter, similar

version of a comprehensive education reform plan that Mark released back in June, which stresses grading schools and teachers, and requiring students to measurably advance academically every year."

Democratic candidate and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett was critical of Walker.

"Scott Walker has zero credibility on education reform," said Barrett's spokesman Phil Walzak in a statement.

"When the push to bring real change and accountability to the Milwaukee Public Schools system was under way, Scott Walker washed his hands of the children and stood on the sidelines because he thought it would be better for his political career."

Also on Friday, after ignoring Neumann in recent weeks and focusing on Barrett, the Walker campaign criticized Neumann, a Nashotah developer and builder, for some of his business transactions.

A [column](#) by Daniel Bice of the Journal Sentinel reported on a crack in the concrete foundation of the home of a Kenosha man who couldn't get the builder to fix it. The home was built by a company in which Neumann is a partner. The column also details complaints of a dairy farmer over the sale of 85 acres in Washington County to Neumann's company. The deal later collapsed.

In the story, Lato noted that the highlighted instances were isolated.

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