



**Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities**  
**2023 Assembly Bill 370**

*Guaranteed admission to University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges*

September 7, 2023

Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities:

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony for information only on Assembly Bill 370 related to guaranteed admission to University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges. The University of Wisconsin-Madison shares the goal of the authors in ensuring that the best and brightest students in Wisconsin know they have a place at our public institutions of higher education but have several concerns with the legislation in its current form.

UW-Madison employs a holistic admissions process that takes into consideration several different criteria when reviewing applications. First and foremost, admissions counselors are looking for academic excellence reflected through coursework and grades. Beyond academics, the Admissions team looks for qualities such as leadership, concern for others and the community, achievement in the arts and athletics, and potential for contribution to the UW-Madison community. This process is balanced with three major enrollment goals in mind: first, the campus meets the Board of Regents requirement to enroll 5,200 first year and transfer students from Wisconsin and Minnesota, second to enroll a class that includes students from all corners of our state, and third, to enroll approximately 1,000 transfer students.

The landscape of high school opportunities varies widely across our state with schools and school districts providing the best educational experiences they can given their local needs and resources. Our holistic process is intended to acknowledge these differences across high schools. Each applicant to the UW-Madison receives a minimum of two reads by different application reviewers. These holistic reads attempt to account for a student's academic performance in the context of what their school offers noting that what is offered in one high school or county is not necessarily offered to the same extent at every other high school or county.

A typical admitted student will have demonstrated four years of English and math, 3-4 years of social studies, science, a world language, and two years of fine arts. As a required part of the holistic review, applicants can share more about themselves through two essays. SAT and ACT scores can be submitted as supplemental material. Our admissions requirements, process, and timelines are frequently communicated to schools and school districts and community-based organizations engaged in the college going process.

UW-Madison Office of Admissions & Recruitment prides itself on establishing relationships with high schools across Wisconsin and beyond. The goal is to account for the wide variety of educational opportunities present across the state and the desire to capture wide representation from talented and impressive graduates from all 72 Wisconsin counties. Admissions staff are familiar with the course offerings in school districts in urban, suburban,

and rural districts alike. These considerations are considered when deciding whether to admit a student.

The bill in its current form is unworkable for several reasons: first, it requires K-12 schools to rank their students in a shared way that does not fully account for the many different reasons that schools and school districts have chosen to their own systems. It essentially limits or removes what schools and school districts across the state have deliberately elected to do with weighting GPAs, providing class rank and how they present their transcripts. Currently, not all schools and school districts rank their students or provide what is referred to as a “weighted” grade point average (GPA). In fact, many of our larger schools and school districts deliberately do not participate in a GPA weighting or ranking systems after determining that it was not best for their particular environment. Requiring a ranking system will not only require that schools and school boards determine how best to approach a nuanced and detailed process, but it would also require understanding, if not agreement, among parents who have already set the academic course of their students, many of whom have taken courses or sets of coursework that they cannot retroactively change. To be clear, this is not an impossible change. But it is more complicated than it might appear and one that deserves very careful consideration of the costs as well as the benefits.

Furthermore, and even more concerning, the proposal suggests that this ranking could be based on a mixture of GPA and standardized test scores, along with other types of scholastic merit that remain undefined in the bill. There is no clean or easy way to blend together these different components. Furthermore, this would look very different at high schools across the state. Some would use weighted or unweighted GPA, some would potentially incorporate test scores – and if so, this would mean that rankings at that school could radically change after every testing opportunity, meaning that students would never fully know where they stood, no matter their course load or their academic achievements--some would use other criteria. For context, Texas is the only other state that has guaranteed admission based solely on rank. However, they have consistent ranking, grading and transcript systems across all K-12 schools. For this incoming freshman class at UW-Madison, only 28% of students provided class rank in their application. Of those who provided class rank, 68% of those incoming first-year students are from the top 15% of their class. Most of those below the 15 percent mark came from highly resourced schools where a great many students pursue extremely rigorous course loads and show high academic strength.

Second, the current bill provides guaranteed admission for homeschool students or online students based on standardized test alone. This is extremely problematic from our perspective. Test scores standing alone are not an effective measure of college success. Also, UW-Madison values and appreciates the unique experiences and strengths that homeschooled applicants bring to our campus and student body. They often have access to highly rigorous and personalized courses that delve deeply into the student’s specific areas of interest. We currently have guidance for homeschooled students that requires submitting of additional information that can help admissions counselors put each student’s educational journey into context and help assess the level of rigor the student reached. A proposal for homeschooled students driven solely by test scores would not be educationally sound or fair. It might even incentivize those who are very strong test takers to move from a school setting to homeschooling, and we should be worried about an admissions approach that might generate such incentives.

As previously mentioned, a typical admitted student at UW-Madison will have demonstrated academic success in a necessary range of high school courses, including multiple years of math, English, science, social studies, a world language, among other classes. Further, Regent policy requires a set of given courses for admission to UW institutions. Assembly Bill 370 does not include any requirements that students receiving guaranteed admission take the suggested number of years in these courses. That would obviously be critical to any guaranteed admission program.

For all these reasons, we have significant concerns with this bill and believe that in current form it does not serve

our state or our shared goals. However, notwithstanding our concerns with this bill in its current form, we also wish to say clearly that UW-Madison shares the goal of the authors and others to ensure that the best and brightest Wisconsin students can attend their state's flagship campus. We are willing to engage in that discussion to create something that is both workable for our universities and achieves these goals.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact this legislation would have on UW-Madison. If you have questions, please reach out to UW-Madison Senior Director of State Relations Crystal Potts ([crystal.potts@wisc.edu](mailto:crystal.potts@wisc.edu); 608-265-4105).