

# **P** IS FOR PAYOFF

**2005 – 2014**

**Inside the Bradley Foundation's Campaign to  
Privatize Education in Wisconsin**



December 2015

## **Bradley Foundation Research Update**

Research by One Wisconsin Institute in 2013 exposed a massive, coordinated propaganda campaign, underwritten by the right wing Bradley Foundation from 2001 through 2011, to support the radical privatization of public education in Wisconsin and across the country.

Based on a review of IRS tax records and Bradley Foundation reports, not only has their propaganda campaign continued, but also it has expanded. Spending over the last decade on more than 130 organizations supportive of their education privatization agenda and working to advance their cause exceeded \$108 million.

### **BRADLEY FOUNDATION SPENDING OVER THE LAST DECADE ON MORE THAN 130 ORGANIZATIONS EXCEEDED \$108 MILLION**

Many of the same organizations first identified as participants in the Bradley Foundation's anti-public education campaign continue to be funded to carry out aspects of the campaign — from attacking public schools to try to manufacture a "crisis" to promoting and lobbying for the expansion of voucher program and producing pro-privatization "pseudo-science."

Bradley has also brought in new groups to implement new tactics. Chief among them, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty (WILL) that has received the majority of its funding from the Bradley Foundation in since its inception in 2011 and is housed in offices literally around the corner from the Bradley's.

In service of the goals of its benefactor, WILL has undertaken an aggressive campaign of actual and threatened litigation to ward off scrutiny of and crackdowns on voucher program abuses, to force taxpayers to underwrite transportation for private school voucher students and to advocate for further expansion of the voucher program in the media and with the release of pseudo-science.

Bradley Foundation head Michael Grebe has also continued to leverage not just the \$850 million plus in assets under his control but also his status as campaign insider — serving as chair of both Scott Walker's 2014 gubernatorial and 2016 presidential campaign and being intimately involved with the prior election of a newly appointed, right-wing state Supreme Court Justice.

In Wisconsin, the fallout continues — efforts to require voucher accountability have been spiked while the program has been massively expanded statewide. Voucher funds

are now directly drained from public schools to pay for students, even though the overwhelming majority of new students participating through the expanded program were already attending the private school.

According to the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, the voucher program will cost Wisconsin taxpayers over \$1.1 billion from 2011 through the end of the 2015-17 budget cycle while another analysis finds that an additional up to \$800 million will be larded on the voucher program over the next decade to foot the bill for the program expansion.

The success of the Bradley backed pro-voucher movement is even more disturbing in the context of the dramatic reductions in state K-12 public school funding.<sup>1</sup> In fact a new report finds that Wisconsin schools have suffered the 4th biggest cuts in in the nation through 2014.<sup>2</sup>

**THE VOUCHER PROGRAM WILL COST WISCONSIN TAXPAYERS OVER \$1.1 BILLION FROM 2011 THROUGH THE END OF THE 2015-17 BUDGET CYCLE**

## **A New Angle – The Wisconsin Institute For Law And Liberty**

Conceived in 2011, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty has been the de facto law firm for the pet projects of the Bradley Foundation and its favored political allies, like Gov. Scott Walker.

According to their 2011 IRS Form 990, WILL disclosed raising \$505,000 in contributions and grants. The 2011 IRS Form 990 filed by the Bradley Foundation reports a grant of \$500,000 to WILL to “support general operations.” WILL’s 2012 IRS Form 990 reveals that the organization received \$653,128 in contributions and grants. A review of the Bradley Foundation’s IRS Form 990 for the same year indicates that they provided or had approved a total of \$500,000 to WILL to again support “general operations.”

In total, WILL reported raising \$1,158,128 in gifts, grants, contributions and membership fees in tax years 2011 and 2012. The Bradley Foundation reports having provided or approved \$1 million, nearly ninety percent, of funding for WILL general operations over those same years.

In subsequent years the Bradley gravy train has rolled on for WILL, receiving a total of \$2.125 million from the Bradley Foundation from its inception in 2011 through 2014.

And WILL is working to pay back on Bradley's investment.

## **Protecting Vouchers Via Walker Administration Power Grab**

Among the first acts of Gov. Walker upon taking office was to try to grab more power for himself by giving himself veto power over administrative rules promulgated by state agencies to implement state laws (2011 WI Act 21).

Legal action was undertaken to prevent this power grab from diminishing the authority of the state constitutional office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. On behalf of representatives of the private voucher school industry, WILL filed a court brief arguing on behalf of Walker's power grab.<sup>3</sup>

Most recently Executive Director of WILL argued before the Wisconsin State Supreme Court on behalf of the Bradley-funded School Choice Wisconsin to uphold the legality of the Walker administration's power grab that would hamper the ability of the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction to make administrative rules to crack down on waste, fraud and abuse in the private school voucher program. The WILL staff member who argued before the court had earlier recommended one of the conservative members be appointed to a open court spot. And Bradley head Michael Grebe assisted that same justice in her previous campaign.<sup>4</sup>



WILL President Rick Esenberg

## **Preventing Scrutiny Of Private Voucher Schools**

Bradley supported organizations and politicians, including WILL, are working to prevent scrutiny of the Wisconsin private school voucher program at the federal level in addition to the state level.<sup>5</sup>

## **SERIOUS CONCERNS HAVE BEEN RAISED ABOUT VOUCHER SCHOOLS' POSSIBLE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Serious concerns have been raised about voucher schools' possible discrimination against students with disabilities that, if found true, would run afoul of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The U.S. Department of Justice, via the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI), has requested information from voucher schools as part of their inquiry.

WILL quickly issued a “public comment” seeking to quash any transparency and accountability for the voucher program. They advised voucher schools to not cooperate with the state Department of Public Instruction and federal investigators and deny requests for information.<sup>6</sup>

In what looks to be a retaliatory act, WILL has filed a lawsuit naming the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Department of Public Instruction and several public school districts as defendants in which they allege the state public school open enrollment program is discriminating against children, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.<sup>7</sup>

WILL has also acted as legal counsel for voucher schools, helping a private religious school in the voucher program avoid being held accountable by the Department of Public Instruction in a dispute over the school’s compliance with an independent audit requirement. Conveniently, WILL was able to help the voucher school in part because the legislature changed state law to restrain state regulators power to challenge the accuracy of the information provided by private schools.<sup>8</sup>

**WILL HAS BEEN HEAVILY INVOLVED IN EFFORTS  
TO ENACT A STATE LAW TO COMPEL MPS TO  
SELL BUILDINGS IT OWNS TO PRIVATE  
VOUCHER SCHOOLS**

### **Forcing More Public Expenditures To Subsidize Private Voucher Schools**

In addition to the \$1 billion plus that will be doled out by the state legislature for the private school voucher program through 2017, the Bradley-subsidized WILL has used legal saber rattling to try to force additional public expenditures to subsidize the voucher school program.

The financially-strapped Racine Unified School District, which has sought additional funds to meet the educational needs of its students via referenda to exceed state imposed revenue caps, recently found itself in WILL’s legal crosshairs.

WILL threatened to sue the school district unless it waived a fee to transport some private school students to their private schools on publicly funded public school buses.<sup>9</sup>

## **Forcing Sales Of Public School District Property To Private School Operators**

Always a target of conservative ire, the Milwaukee Public School District (MPS) has, predictably, been subjected to the attentions of WILL.

Most recently, in service of the private school voucher program, WILL has been heavily involved in efforts to enact a state law to compel MPS to sell buildings it owns to private voucher schools. WILL concocted a study to provide cover for the legislative power grab, the results of which were dutifully, and favorably, reported by Bradley funded groups.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequent efforts by the school district to manage district owned property for the benefit of the district and its students,<sup>11</sup> like planning for future expansions or new educational initiatives involving the use of said properties, have been attacked in the media by WILL as anti-voucher.<sup>12</sup>

## **What's Old Is New Again: Pseudo-Science**

A well worn strategy of the Bradley-funded pro-voucher propaganda campaign is the use of pseudo-science and slanted reports produced by their intellectual infrastructure.

## **A STRATEGY OF THE PRO-VOUCHER PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN IS THE USE OF PSEUDO-SCIENCE AND SLANTED REPORTS**

Working in concert with the right wing media, many of whom like talk radio's Charlie Sykes or the Wisconsin Reporter "news" service are beneficiaries of Bradley's largesse, fawning coverage is devoted to the pro-voucher promotional material masquerading as research and analysis to drive a mainstream media narrative and provide cover for legislative action by allied politicians.

In service of the Bradley pro-privatization effort WILL employs both an "education policy director" and an "education research analyst." Materials produced by WILL include commentary by their executive director regularly appearing on the website of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "policy briefs" to advance pro-voucher arguments and attack public education, a report on K-12 education financing in Wisconsin and an analysis of properties owned by the Milwaukee Public School District.

## **An Old Standby – The American Federation For Children**

Ensuring the legislature is packed with elected officials owing their positions of power to outside special interest spending has been a touchstone for private voucher school advocates. From operating a conduit to funnel contributions from wealthy right-wing ideologues from across the nation into Wisconsin state legislative races to the millions spent by the American Federation for Children (AFC), voucher backers have spent big, and made sure elected officials know it.

The Bradley Foundation provides significant financial support to the Alliance for School Choice, \$350,000 through 2013. According to the American Federation for Children the Alliance, “works closely” with them to advance the privatization of public education.

In Wisconsin the operations of the American Federation for Children are overseen by disgraced former Assembly Republican Speaker Scott Jensen. AFC bragged of pouring \$2.3 million into 2012 state legislative races, claiming their spending helped install nine pro-privatization legislators. Their 2014 spending on state legislative races neared \$1 million, covering 20 targeted seats and bringing additional pro-privatization lackeys to both the state Senate and Assembly.



Disgraced former Assembly Republican Speaker Scott Jensen

## **SINCE 2010, AFC HAS SPENT AT LEAST \$4.5 MILLION TO ELECT LEGISLATORS WHO HAVE VOTED TO EXPAND THE VOUCHER PROGRAM**

In total, since 2010, AFC has spent at least \$4.5 million to elect legislators who have voted to expand the voucher program, voted drain resources from public education to do it and failed to demand accountability for the hundreds of millions in public tax dollars flowing to private schools.

# Here's How The Money Gets Spent

## Bradley Foundation Aggregate Support By Participating Organizations

Organization	Grant Total
Alliance for Choice in Education	\$175,000
Alliance for School Choice	\$350,000
American Center for School Choice	\$115,000
American Conservative Union Foundation	\$420,000
American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research	\$4,310,000
American Majority	\$1,323,720
Americans for Prosperity Foundation	\$455,000
Association of American Educators	\$1,357,500
Barry Goldwater Institute for Public Policy Research	\$565,000
Bishop's Creek Community Development Corporation	\$10,000
Black Alliance for Educational Options	\$1,475,000
Bradley Technology and Trade School Foundation, Inc.	\$40,000
Cascade Policy Institute	\$25,000
Catholic Memorial High School	\$33,500
Center for Education Reform	\$620,000
Center for Neighborhood Enterprise	\$5,286,000
Center for Policy Studies	\$20,000
Center for Teaching Entrepreneurship	\$115,000
Center for Union Facts	\$440,000
Center for Union Facts	\$1,050,000
Charter Growth Fund	\$28,525,000
Common Core	\$125,000
Cristo Rey Network	\$805,000
Democracy Prep Public Schools	\$50,000



<b>Organization</b>	<b>Grant Total</b>
Divine Savior Holy Angels High School	\$177,000
Donors Trust	\$3,134,292
Douglas County Educational Foundation	\$50,000
Dr. Howard L. Fuller Education Foundation, Inc	\$40,000
Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund	\$25,000
Eastbrook Academy	\$80,000
Economics Wisconsin	\$1,181,200
Education Action Group Foundation	\$390,000
Evergreen Freedom Foundation	\$215,000
Excellent Education for Everyone	\$150,000
Family Leader	\$45,000
Florida School Choice Fund	\$325,000
Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability	\$625,000
Foundation for Excellence in Education	\$435,000
Foundation for Opportunity in Education	\$75,000
Franklin Center for Government & Public Integrity	\$455,500
Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, Inc	\$1,352,000
GreatSchools, Inc	\$105,000
Harvard University	\$50,000
Heartland Institute	\$647,500
Heritage Foundation	\$623,500
High Jump	\$10,000
Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options	\$475,000
Hispanics for School Choice	\$35,000
Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace	\$1,595,000
Hope Christian Schools	\$385,000
Hope Online Learning Academy Co-op	\$25,000
Independence Institute	\$745,000

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Grant Total</b>
Institute for Justice	\$1,872,500
Intercollegiate Studies Institute	\$1,940,000
John K. Maciver Institute for Public Policy	\$955,000
John William Pope Center For Higher Education Policy	\$29,000
KIPP Foundation	\$50,000
Lad Lake, Inc	\$50,000
Lutheran High School Association of Greater Milwaukee	\$13,350
Lutheran Urban Mission Initiative	\$88,575
M.H.S., Inc - Messmer Catholic School	\$2,512,500
Mackinac Center for Public Policy	\$690,000
Marquette University	\$1,730,000
Marquette University High School	\$115,000
Marquette University High School Foundation, Inc	\$20,000
Media Research Center, Inc	\$1,520,000
Messmer Catholic Schools	\$400,000
Messmer High School	\$37,860
Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium	\$75,000
Milwaukee Charter School Advocates	\$240,000
Milwaukee College Preparatory School	\$877,500
Milwaukee Collegiate Academy	\$95,000
Milwaukee University Graduate School Cooperative	\$75,000
MMAC Community Support Foundation, Inc	\$355,000
Mount Calvary Lutheran Church & School	\$243,400
Nation Center for Policy Analysis	\$1,222,500
National Association of Scholars, Inc	\$580,000
National Center for Policy Analysis	\$1,425,000
National Council on Teacher Quality	\$445,000
Nativity Jesuit Middle School	\$60,000

Organization	Grant Total
New River Education Fund	\$40,000
Notre Dame Middle School	\$120,000
OCPA Liberty Foundation	\$400,000
Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy	\$476,000
Parents Challenge	\$75,000
Parents in Charge Foundation	\$100,000
Partners Advancing Values in Education, Inc	\$5,158,000
Partnership for Educational Justice	\$200,000
Pathways to College	\$150,000
Perspectives Charter School	\$60,000
Philanthropy Roundtable	\$2,505,000
Pius XI High School	\$169,000
Prager University Foundation	\$290,000
Prep for Prep	\$25,000
Princeton University	\$99,000
Providence - St. Mel	\$100,000
RAND Corporation	\$175,000
Risen Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church and School	\$860,000
Rocketship Education	\$375,000
Sagamore Institute (for Policy Research)	\$777,000
School Choice Foundation	\$75,000
School Choice Illinois	\$25,000
School Choice Ohio	\$100,000
School Choice Wisconsin, Inc	\$2,690,000
School Sisters of Saint Francis	\$230,000
Schools That Can Milwaukee	\$180,000
SEED Foundation	\$300,000
Seton Education Partners	\$300,000

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Grant Total</b>
Shoreland Lutheran High School	\$25,000
SOAR of Racine	\$160,000
St. Boniface Parish	\$500
St. Catherine School	\$2,000
St. Joan Antida High School, Inc	\$485,000
St. John's Northwestern Military Academy	\$117,500
St. Marcus Lutheran School	\$1,000,000
St. Martin de Porres High School	\$1,000
St. Matthias Parish	\$1,500
St. Robert Parish	\$500
St. Thomas More High School	\$240,000
St. Thomas More School Faculty Fund	\$2,000
State Policy Network	\$220,000
Texas Public Policy Foundation	\$165,000
Thomas B. Fordham Institute	\$522,500
United Community Center	\$617,500
University of Arkansas	\$250,000
University of California - Los Angeles	\$33,000
University of Washington	\$500,000
Washington Scholarship Fund	\$300,000
Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty	\$2,125,000
Wisconsin Lutheran College	\$655,000
Wisconsin Lutheran High School	\$295,000
Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc	\$5,400,000
Wisconsin Public Charter Schools Institute	\$50,000
Yeshiva Elementary School	\$315,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$108,395,897</b>

## Conclusion

The Bradley Foundation has left no dollar unspent in their effort to advance their radical education privatization agenda. Our updated investigation finds that over 130 organizations in Wisconsin and across the country have been larded with in excess of \$108 million from the foundation for their participation in the education privatization propaganda campaign.

With over \$850 million in assets they play the long game, supporting groups year in and year out to carry out a comprehensive propaganda campaign - demonizing teachers and denigrating public schools, promoting their "solution" to a crisis of their manufacturing, justifying their privatization agenda with pseudo-science and packing government with sycophantic politicians.

In recent years the campaign has adopted new techniques, introducing litigation and the threat of legal action as strategies to get what they want.

Meanwhile Bradley Foundation head Michael Grebe operates from Gov. Walker's inner circle to advance his agenda. While he may have failed in his attempt to become the ultimate man behind the curtain when Scott Walker's presidential campaign imploded, the legacy Grebe leaves behind as his foundation tenure nears its end includes a drastic reshaping of Wisconsin's education landscape.

Wisconsin families are left paying the price as billions of dollars that could have been used for public education are siphoned off for the ideologically driven experiment that underwrites children being placed in unaccountable private institutions in which overall they perform no better than their public school peers.

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See our previous report, first released in April 2013, at [onewi.org/p-is-for-payoff](http://onewi.org/p-is-for-payoff).

Special thanks to One Wisconsin Intern Luke Mathers for his work in compiling the research for this report.

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