Anti-sweatshop student groups at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee are celebrating the university's decision this week to endorse a program designed to protect the rights of the workers who sew university logo apparel.

Student groups have been pushing the school to endorse the Designated Suppliers Program, which requires university licensees to verify the source of their apparel from factories that pay a living wage and allow workers to unionize, among other requirements.

This week, students got word from university administrators that they would sign on.

An 11 a.m. rally planned for Friday will now be a celebration instead of agitation, said graduate student Dana Schultz, an organizer with Milwaukee Students for a Democratic Society.

"It feels amazing," Schultz said. "A lot of dedicated people have put hours and hours into this. It seems like an easy thing for a university to do, but it's a commitment and it's putting the university's name behind something to ensure clothes are made responsibly."

As part of the effort to get UWM to endorse the program, Milwaukee Students for a Democratic Society and the Milwaukee Graduate Assistant Association staged a protest last fall. In recent weeks, students hung a "sweatshop clothesline" in front of Chancellor Carlos Santiago's office. University apparel such as basketball t-shirts are hung up on the clothesline with facts about sweatshops.

Some 45 colleges and universities across the country have penned policy statements in support of the program, including UW-Madison and Marquette University.

UWM previously said it supported the principles of the Designated Supplier Program but felt "the program may pose legal, logistical, and economic issues as it is currently structured, concerns shared by other institutions and organizations." The school stopped short of endorsing the program.

Schultz got an e-mail from UWM Vice Chancellor Tom Luljak this week that said the university had agreed to sign on, a move that would make it the 46th university on the list.

UWM appears ready to participate as a member of the Designated Suppliers Program working group, a body of representatives from colleges that support the program and are working to come up with revisions to the plan. Marquette University has a similar commitment.

Schultz said UWM's new commitment won't likely translate into changes in who supplies university apparel. The hope is that UWM's suppliers would all be certified under the Designated Suppliers Program's strict standards.

"If in fact all of our clothes are made from factories that treat workers with respect, then it shouldn't be a problem at all," she said.