



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

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Walker to cut public schools, expand private school vouchers

State budget based on ideology, not evidence, is devastating to public schools

MADISON — Two years after Gov. Scott Walker proposed a biennial budget plan that froze allowable school district revenues under revenue caps, he is now advancing a budget plan that, if passed, would significantly cut aid to Wisconsin's public schools in the first year of the biennium. This would be combined with the expansion of private school vouchers that do not result in higher levels of achievement for students.

In his biennial budget address last night, the governor indicated that his 2015-17 budget would remove the cap on voucher school participation statewide and keep public school revenues essentially flat. However, Walker's budget plan actually cuts the amount school districts can spend by \$150 per pupil in the first year.

"Considering that the administration anticipates a 4.7 percent increase in general revenues in the first year of the biennium, I am shocked that the governor is proposing a \$150 per-pupil cut," said John Forester, director of government relations for the School Administrators Alliance (SAA). "Furthermore, the administration's bait-and-switch on this issue is very disappointing, to say the least."

In seeking to eliminate the current enrollment cap in the various Wisconsin school voucher programs, the governor is also seeking to fund the dramatic voucher expansion by taking money that would have otherwise gone to students' local public schools. When coupled with Walker's consistent underfunding of public schools, this would be devastating to students throughout the state.

"Despite overwhelming evidence that private school vouchers do not improve student achievement and lack adequate accountability to the public, Gov. Walker continues to pursue private school voucher expansion," said Forester. "The ultimate objective of voucher advocates is a statewide system of private school vouchers for all Wisconsin children. This siphons critical resources away from students in public schools, leaving most school districts in Wisconsin with no choice but to implement greater reductions on quality educational opportunities for their students. This reckless expansion of taxpayer-funded private school vouchers results in diminishing educational opportunities for Wisconsin public school children."

Gov. Walker's budget proposal provides for additional categorical aid spending for rural schools in the areas of high-cost transportation, sparsity aid and school technology. Although these investments are much needed and appreciated, the benefits for rural schools will be overwhelmed by the governor's



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proposed cut in per-pupil revenues. Without a significant revenue increase, many rural districts will be forced to make extremely difficult decisions, ultimately harming the students they serve.

Forester also notes that Walker's education proposals in his budget plan are clearly based on ideology and political expediency, rather than evidence.

"If our objective is to improve student achievement for all Wisconsin children and close achievement gaps, research indicates that we should address the impact of poverty on student learning, invest in quality early learning opportunities for impoverished children and focus on the recruitment, retention and preparation of high-quality teachers and school leaders," said Forester. "Unfortunately, the governor's policy prescriptions — voucher and charter school expansion, dismantling Wisconsin's nationally recognized school accountability system and weakening standards for teacher preparation and licensing — simply will not move the needle for kids."

Rather than continuing to defund public education and privatizing the education of Wisconsin public school children, the SAA is calling on the governor and legislature to reaffirm the state's commitment to the state's public schools. While Gov. Walker continues to boast about Wisconsin's high ACT test scores, graduation rates and other measures of educational excellence, those results have actually been made possible by generations of Wisconsin citizens investing in a quality system of public schools.

"In the days and weeks to come, we will work with legislators of both parties to encourage them to do the right thing and provide more resources to Wisconsin's public schools and students," said Forester. "Budgets are about choices. They are about priorities. It's clear that the 860,000 public school students in Wisconsin are not Gov. Walker's priority."

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