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Will Wisconsin Betray its Children Yet Again?

Heather DuBois Bourenane, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Public Education Network, issued the following statement today:

Wisconsin has done everything it can to map out to its elected officials exactly what our students need to succeed. There are no mysteries surrounding what this will take or whether we can afford it. The state has a moral and Constitutional charge to make sure every student in every public school has equal opportunity to thrive, and the public hearings on the state budget have made clear that it is failing to meet that obligation.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding laid out a clear blueprint toward school funding fairness. The Governor's budget proposal set a first foot on a path toward making that fairness a reality. The public hearings of the Joint Committee on Finance affirmed near-universal support for an education budget that directly reflected the priority needs of Wisconsin's children.

And yet, in the past two days, leaders of the majority party have sent a clear message to Wisconsin: we heard you, and we do not care what you say, and we do not care what your kids need. Today, the powerful Joint Committee on Finance is expected to pass, on party line votes, a watered-down version of the budget that preserves an unfair status quo and perpetuates existing inequities in and across our public schools.

- *Their \$200/student "increase" doesn't even keep pace with inflation.*
- *Their measly 3% increase to the reimbursement rate for special education funding is an insult to every child in every public school, and barely makes a dent in the \$1 billion/year special education funding gap that forces districts to steal money from their general funds to cover mandated special ed costs.*
- *Their failure to make essential and serious investments in English language learners, mental health needs, and rural challenges send a clear message that the people of Wisconsin hear loud and clear.*

Were the past eighteen months just a charade? Were all those public hearings just a waste of the time and talents of parents, educators and school leaders who testified – not to mention the citizen members and experts who served on the bipartisan panel, taking time off unpaid to travel the state?

Our kids are once again being used as pawns in partisan games and we're not falling for it. The budget being cheered by GOP leadership is an investment in widening our gaps and keeping Wisconsin at the bottom of the pack in funding for students with disabilities and English language learners.

The plan the Governor put on the table is a common sense, affordable, necessary first step toward leveling the unequal playing field in Wisconsin. We demand nothing less, and we call on all members of the legislature to fight for funding fairness and restore those critical investments to the budget that reaches the Governor's desk. 860,000 kids are counting on us.

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How much does the Wisconsin legislature value students with disabilities?

90%

private voucher kids

2017: Joint Finance shoves last-minute, unvetted proposal into budget that allows over 90% reimbursement for additional costs of services for students getting special needs voucher. Services do not need to be approved by IEP team. No limit on spending or need for proof of impact.

25%

public school kids

2019: Public begs to end 10 year freeze on special ed funding for public schools. Evers & bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission propose 60% reimbursement of actual, mandated costs. Joint Finance trashes budget, says 60% "not going to happen" but retains 90% rate for private school students.

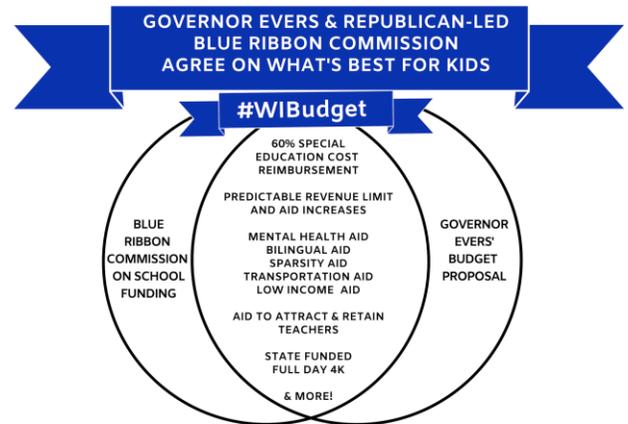
Restoring our public school commitment to

60%

is a first step toward funding fairness.



Do your job.
860,000 kids are counting on a budget that meets their needs.



**Let's build the blue ribbon budget our kids deserve.
860,000 children are counting on us.**

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