



June 12, 2021
A 2nd open letter to Fox Valley Legislators

Dear Legislator,

Finally, Wisconsin has an opportunity to reinvest in preK-12 public schools. A decade of cutting corners and surviving by referendum has created an untenable situation. But now, a healthy financial situation gives Wisconsin a unique opportunity to make up for lost time. "We can't afford it" no longer stands.

Taking inflation into account, public schools have yet to recover from the significant reductions in school spending in the 2011-2013 state budget. Since then, state budgets have left many districts unable to cover basic operating costs resulting in the passage of approximately 400 referenda. As a result, Wisconsin ranks 49th in the nation in per pupil spending increases from 2011 to 2018 at 4.3%, compared to 18.9% nationwide.

The federal funding from the American Rescue Plan is one-time money which is dependent on Wisconsin maintaining its funding support of public education. The ARP is not meant to fund the ongoing needs of our schools. That is the constitutional responsibility of the Wisconsin Legislature.

As you work with your colleagues to develop a PreK-12 public education funding plan in the state budget, Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education, representing a coalition of hundreds of advocates and community leaders, asks you to **support the following**:

- Include a minimum **per pupil increase of \$200 in 2021-22 and \$204 in 2022-23**. The costs of operating schools (salaries, insurance, utilities, etc.) continue to rise due to inflation. Unless schools have a way to obtain additional resources to meet these higher operating costs, they must cut programs and staff, diminishing opportunities for students. Attracting and retaining quality staff depends on adequate funding.
- The **special education reimbursement should be a guaranteed rate of 60%** for both public and private schools. While public schools' special education costs are reimbursed at **30%**, Special Needs Vouchers for private schools are reimbursed for **100%** of costs up to \$19,500 per pupil, and up to **90%** of costs beyond \$19,500.
- Provide a significant increase in resources for **school-based mental health services** to students and staff. We support the proposed \$46.5 million expansion in Mental Health Categorical Aid.

- Allow school districts with **full-time 4K programs to count each child as a full-time student** in their enrollment reports.
- Allow school districts to use **the greater of student counts** in September 2019 or 2020 to mitigate the effects of the temporary drop in student membership counts (which affect both revenue limit calculations and per pupil aid allocations) caused by the pandemic.
- Build off the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission recommendations from the last state budget which increases support for **students of poverty and English language learners**.
- **Pause the planned increase in the school voucher program**. An alternative funding source should be identified that does not negatively impact public schools.

Please work with your colleagues to fulfill **Wisconsin's constitutional responsibility** to fund preK-12 public schools adequately and equitably. FCA4PE's coalition of hundreds of Fox Valley public school advocates and community leaders looks forward to your support for PreK-12 funding in the 2021-23 state budget.

Sincerely,

Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education

FOX CITIES ADVOCATES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION is a non-partisan, issue-oriented coalition of hundreds of Fox Valley public school advocates and community leaders whose focus is on finding common ground regarding growth and improvement of public education. Advocates support quality public education in the Appleton Area School District, Little Chute Area School District, Kaukauna School District, Kimberly Area School District, Neenah Joint School District and Menasha Joint School District.

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