

WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK RK

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Public School Supporters Applaud Budget Recommendation To Restore Funding to Meet Needs of Students with Disabilities

Madison, Wisconsin. Wisconsin Public Education Network (WPEN) partners around the state reacted with uniform excitement this morning to Dr. Tony Evers' plan to increase special education funding in the 2019 - 2021 education budget, aligning it with the actual needs of students and schools after a decade of flat funding.

Dr. Julie Underwood, University of Wisconsin-Madison, explained the importance of this recommendation: "The cost of implementing the federal statutory right to an appropriate education for children with disabilities falls on local districts. With increasing numbers of students with disabilities, increased costs for services, and sharp declines in state and federal funds for special education, Wisconsin public schools have had to rob Peter to pay Paul to fulfill their federal obligation. Statewide, this is a \$1 billion shortfall in special education budgets. Districts take dollars from their general fund to fill the hole in their special education budgets. Evers' proposal to get to 60% reimbursement in 2019 and move to 90% would help every district in the state. Each dollar provided to districts will assist all children - both those with and without disabilities."

"If we're serious about overcoming our gaps in Wisconsin, we need to ensure *every* student has equal opportunity to succeed. In the last decade, we have just made those gaps wider," said Heather DuBois Bourenane, WPEN director and parent of students in Sun Prairie public schools, which would see up to \$9,967,968 in new state aid under the proposal. "Making sure every district meets the needs of its most vulnerable students without cutting other services is an initiative everyone in the state can cheer for."

The investment would be transformative for districts across the state. The impact is clear in this interactive map from Milwaukee Public Schools, which shows what 90% reimbursement would mean for every school district: <https://k12mps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6f6188df3e3b4f2985e642386d54afab>.

"As a long-time advocate for our public schools across the state, I have immense gratitude to Tony Evers for his bold move," said Ellen Lindgren, Community Advocates for Public Education, Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. "His request to increase funding to match that which goes to private voucher schools will benefit every school district and every student in our public schools. It is now up to the legislature to enact this, or give us a reason why our public school students are worth so much less to them than the students in private schools who are being subsidized by our tax dollars."

Tom Beebe of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools added, "Many years ago, politicians on both sides of the aisle understood the value and necessity of the state paying its fair share. Supt. Evers' budget puts resources, fairness and common-sense back in our public school classrooms and communities."

Eau Claire Area School District board member Chris Hambuch-Boyle applauded the measure, and called on others in Wisconsin to let decision-makers know they support this bold initiative: "It is time that ALL public school voices come together loudly to demand equity of funding and shine a laser focus on the facts."

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