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Joint Finance Committee Fails to Invest in Students at a Critical Time

GOP leaders risk losing billions in federal funding through proposed budget

OCONOMOWOC — The Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA) is extremely disappointed in the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) for choosing not to invest in K-12 education in its 2021-23 biennium budget.

The JFC has voted to invest a mere \$128 million of new state dollars toward K-12 education at a time when revenue estimates indicate there is close to \$2 billion available in this biennial budget. By making this decision, the JFC will take away opportunities from Wisconsin students—and ultimately our state’s future workforce.

“The Joint Finance Committee continued to reference the federal stimulus dollars coming into Wisconsin as a source of new money for K-12 education,” said Terri Phillips, SWSA Executive Director. “What they fail to acknowledge is that these dollars are specifically targeted for COVID-19 mitigation measures and programs to support learning disruption. They are not meant to support day-to-day operational expenses. There are also significant inequities in how the federal stimulus dollars are being distributed among districts statewide.”

What is equally concerning is that the JFC’s limited investment in K-12 education may actually jeopardize the federal stimulus dollars provided to Wisconsin schools. The federal government stipulates that states must maintain their investments in education or risk losing the federal funds altogether.

“The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for many years to come,” said Dr. Paul Mielke, Superintendent of the Hamilton School District and Co-Chair Elect of SWSA. “At a time when more resources than ever are needed to support children, this proposed budget will lead to less programming, less individual or small-group support, larger class sizes and overall fewer opportunities for students. This proposed budget ensures that, at a time when they need us the most, our students are being deserted by our state elected officials.”

“Elmbrook remains disappointed in the lack of commitment to children from the Joint Finance Committee,” said Dr. Mark Hansen, Superintendent of the Elmbrook School District. “They had an opportunity to change the lives of kids today, and they passed on it. I am tired of partisan politics getting in the way of what is best for our kids. It is time for them to step up and correct this.”

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The Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA) is a consortium of 31 K-12 school districts educating approximately 25 percent of Wisconsin’s public school children. Membership in SWSA consists of both school district superintendents and school board members, dedicated to advocating for the benefit of all students by driving education policies supporting strong public schools to ensure world-class practices, economic vitality, and community well-being.