



Dear Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature Joint Finance Committee,

The JFC action taken yesterday on K-12 education policy is short-sighted, based on shaky legal assumptions and demonstrates a lack of commitment to Wisconsin's school children. It will deny educational opportunities to over 800,000 school children, not only during the upcoming 2021-23 state budget cycle, but for years to come.

For more than a decade, the Wisconsin legislature has consistently failed to provide an inflationary increase for Wisconsin public schools. As a result, for the first time in generations, Wisconsin school spending has fallen below the national average. In fact, over the past decade, Wisconsin ranks nearly last nationally for new investment in schools.

Now, in the 2021-23 budget proposal, you claim that ESSER III federal stimulus resources provided to Wisconsin schools make a state funding increase unnecessary. This is simply not true. These federal funds are one-time funds intended to be used for limited purposes. What's more, these federal funds will be forfeited if the State of Wisconsin fails to maintain past levels of state support for education.

Federal ESSER III federal funds are intended to be used to reimburse additional costs borne due to the pandemic, to address student learning loss and disruption, and to make investments in our infrastructure so schools are better equipped to serve students in the 21st century. Instead, this budget proposal treats the influx of federal funds as an opportunity for the state to skip out on funding Wisconsin public schools.

With the Wisconsin economy thriving, and state budget reserves at an all-time high, it is unthinkable that the state budget you propose would provide no increase in general school revenues for the next two years. More than enough resources exist to make reasonable state investment in schools, spur the economy through tax cuts, and invest in our future with infrastructure improvements.

You have been elected to represent all Wisconsin citizens. Your budget proposal fails a significant majority of your neighbors, your constituents, and especially our children. With the budget resources available, a commitment is not only warranted, but is the explicit expectation of an overwhelming majority of Wisconsin voters. The past year has clearly established that our schools are vital for our economy. You can do better and we expect you to do better. Here are two specific things that should be taken immediately:

- 1) Provide a \$200 per pupil increase in the 2021-22 revenue limit and \$204 per pupil increase in the 2022-23 revenue limit for all students. The \$350 million you have designated for education as an additional contribution to the State's rainy day fund is sufficient to cover the state's  $\frac{2}{3}$  portion of this cost via equalization aid. This action demonstrates a sustainable commitment to our children and allows the State of Wisconsin to comply with the federal maintenance of effort requirements necessary to secure the federal stimulus funds for K-12.



2) The proposed increase in Special Education Categorical Aid makes incremental progress towards our long term goal of a 50% reimbursement rate. The proposed increase from 28.18% to a 30.00% reimbursement rate should be made on a 'sum sufficient' appropriation basis rather than 'sum certain' basis. This would be consistent with state support provided on a sum sufficient basis for the Wisconsin Special Needs Scholarship Program. This should not increase cost in the current biennium but protects students with disabilities against future erosion of the special education eligible costs reimbursement rate which occurred over the past decades.

Our schools and communities are depending on your leadership. Make the investment in education our children deserve.

Sincerely,

John Stellmacher  
President  
WASBO Board of Directors

Michael Barry  
Executive Director  
WASBO