

Media Release: State Budget 6/21/23

Dear Community Members,

Gov. Evers signed into law both the shared revenue bill and SB330/AB305, a bill that gives a bump to spending authority for low revenue districts while dramatically **expanding state funding to private schools and independent charters**. Combined with a gap-widening budget omnibus proposal that provides woefully inadequate and inequitable resources to public schools, the move is part of a larger deal that fails to meet any of the priority needs of students in Wisconsin's public schools, marking **16 YEARS of preK-12 budgets that fail to keep pace with inflation**.

Chief concerns with this budget deal:

- Public school students have been **defunded relative to inflation for fourteen years** and the per pupil adjustments proposed by the Joint Committee on Finance will extend that defunding streak to 16 years.
- During that period of time, **funding for students with disabilities was frozen** for a decade and the promised, but not guaranteed, **33% reimbursement rate for special education** will continue to keep Wisconsin near the very bottom of all states in that category.
- **Local property tax payers will be forced to cover the costs** of a massive expansion of the unaccountable voucher program.
- **Private schools will be provided more direct aid** from the state than most public schools are even allowed to spend (see fiscal memo here).
- Shared revenue deal usurps the authority of the MPS board by requiring reinstatement of police officers on school property.

We hope you will share it widely, as it details some of the most harmful and gap-widening provisions of the "compromise":

- This deal will provide **private voucher schools more guaranteed state aid** than the average public school is even allowed to spend per student,
- while **public schools will see a less-than-inflationary increase to state aid** and a **less than 2% increase to special education**, cementing funding discrimination for kids with disabilities.
- Raising the low revenue limit ceiling by \$1000 is a nice gesture, but it **doesn't even bring those districts up to the state average in spending authority**.
- Public school students and local property taxpayers will pay the price, while private schools that can legally discriminate and pick and choose their students get a blank check from the state.
- With voucher enrollment caps set to come off entirely in 2 years, this is the most reckless and irresponsible thing Wisconsin could do with its massive surplus, especially when we

consider that the nearly **80% of students participating in the statewide voucher program never attended a public school.**

The three top concerns of the public at all four of the budget hearings (preK-12 public schools, higher ed, and childcare) were all put on the chopping block to reach this “compromise” and nearly \$2 BILLION of Gov. Evers’ original budget proposal for public schools was exchanged for this massive, unconscionable, unconstitutional voucher expansion. The state is already not meeting its obligation to its children, and this budget demonstrates a refusal to use the biggest surplus we’ve ever seen to make a meaningful start toward doing so. It’s time to hold Wisconsin accountable for doing better.

CALL ON LAWMAKERS TO FIX THIS BUDGET SO THAT PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS’ NEEDS ARE MET BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE, AND CALL ON GOV. EVERS TO VETO THE ENTIRE BUDGET BILL IF IT DOESN’T.

(Adapted from Wisconsin Public Education Network)

Sincerely,

Rhonda Elmhorst-Friemoth
Superintendent
Mellen School District