



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

March 1, 2022

The Honorable Gov. Tony Evers
Wisconsin State Capitol, Room 115 East
2 E. Main St.
Madison, WI 53703

We are pleased to see the majority of Wisconsin's schools remaining open for in-person instruction during this school year. To help K-12 students recover academically from a year of lost learning, we must ensure students receive their instruction in person as much as possible. Even the Biden Administration has signaled the importance of in-person learning with their test-to-stay policy.¹ So, we ask that you provide information on your plan to keep the public aware of how Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) money from the American Rescue Plan Act are being spent to keep as many students in the classroom as possible and make up for lost learning due to school closures.

Over nearly two years, Congress has provided billions of dollars to Wisconsin to help students continue learning despite the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, the federal government allocated more than \$1.5 billion to Wisconsin through a third round of ESSER money. Unfortunately, late last year we saw some major Wisconsin school districts close until mid-January which will undoubtedly contribute to more learning loss for Wisconsin's students. However, we have also seen many districts across Wisconsin recognize the importance of in-person instruction and find ways to ensure students receive the education and social development they deserve.

Now that ESSER III money is being distributed to districts it is important that you establish systems and processes to provide transparency to the public. We recognize that districts must publicly post how they plan to use ESSER III funds which we support. However, it is essential to see how this money is truly being spent. We understand the needs of districts may change over the course of a school year so they should certainly have the flexibility to deviate from their budgets as circumstances and needs of students change. However, we ask that you establish a way for districts to easily indicate how they spent their money so Wisconsin's parents and school leaders can be engaged and participate in the process. Parents should be able to see how districts are using their taxpayer dollars to keep their children in school. This is vital to make up for lost learning and hold districts accountable if they are not. Furthermore, school leaders should be able to publicize their innovative solutions and learn from their colleagues.

Nearly two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that shutting down schools was a grave error. Given the unprecedented federal financial support of the ESSER III Fund and experience of the past two years, we ask that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. What plans do you have to ensure district expenditures are made public?

¹ President Joseph R. Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on the COVID-19 Winter Plan" (speech, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, December 2, 2021). See at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/12/02/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-covid-19-winter-plan/>

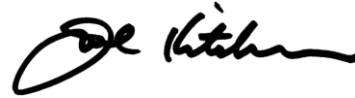
2. How quickly after the end of the school year could the Department of Public Instruction make this information available to the public?
3. What procedures do you have in place to ensure funds are being used to continue in-person instruction and make up for lost learning as intended?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter as we seek to move past the learning losses of the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt



Rep. Joel Kitchens