



### **Chris Danou's Capitol Report**

#### Public School Funding Falls Over Five-Year Period in Wisconsin

It's hard to believe another summer is just about over. In just a few short weeks, we will celebrate Labor Day and children will be heading back to school for another year of learning.

Schools are not only central to the development and life of children across Wisconsin, the schools themselves are the heart of each community. Anyone who lives in a small town or rural place knows just how much the school means to the local community.

For the last five years, Wisconsin State Government has been completely controlled by the Republicans. During that time, we've continued to see fewer and fewer taxpayer dollars go to schools in our area and across Wisconsin. At the same time, more and more taxpayer money has gone to private and unaccountable schools through the voucher program. With even fewer dollars and access to financial resources, hundreds of communities have held some kind of school funding referendum on spring and fall election days to get the money they need.

Referendum is literally the last option for local communities to get the funding they need for school related projects. We've seen communities go to referendum for major projects like a new building or gymnasium, but we've also seen communities decide to raise their operating costs to give the school district the flexibility it needs for day-to-day operations.

Each time a referendum passes, local communities are putting the financial burden directly upon themselves to make sure their school gets the funding they need. Local communities know the money needs to come from somewhere, so they respond in the only way they can through the form of a referendum. This not only shows how important the school is to residents, but it also lets the state off the hook from paying its fair share each time a referendum passes.

We've known the state hasn't been paying its fair share for our schools for years. However, thanks to Sen. Janis Ringhand (D-Evansville), we now have data and hard numbers that show just how much funding has disappeared in the last five years.

Sen. Ringhand requested information from the Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB), a non-partisan agency that provides fiscal and program information to the Legislature, its committees and individual lawmakers. According to the memo released on August 12<sup>th</sup>, the State of Wisconsin contributed \$197,493,457, or 4.3% less toward public school funding in the 2015-2016 school year than it did during the 2010-2011 school year. That number is much higher for certain school districts I represent in the 92<sup>nd</sup> Assembly District.

After closely reviewing financial details for all thirteen schools districts in the 92<sup>nd</sup> Assembly District, it becomes very clear that our rural community schools are getting the short end of the stick when it comes to public school funding in Madison. Eleven of the thirteen school districts received less funding in 2015-2016 than they did five years earlier. Only two of the thirteen school districts received more funding with Arcadia and Melrose-Mindoro at 12.3% and 8.9% respectively.

The eleven districts that saw less funding were Alma, Alma Center, Black River Falls, Blair-Taylor, Eleva-Strum, Galesville-Ettrick-Trempeleau, Gilmanton, Independence, Mondovi, Osseo-Fairchild and Whitehall. These reductions ranged anywhere from 2.7% – 53.6% less, but most were much higher than the 4.3% reduction that made up the statewide average. Out of all the districts who experienced less funding, Alma received the biggest loss with a 53.6% reduction, which is about \$709,360. Any decrease is hard to swallow, but this amount is simply staggering, and it hurts students, the school district and the Alma community.

The job market in today's world is only becoming more competitive each year. The only way the next generation will be able to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is by receiving a quality education at all levels. As a proud parent of two and as your State Representative, I'm very concerned about the state of education today and what that means for the next generation tomorrow.

It's clear we need to improve public education funding across Wisconsin, but it's especially important in rural communities. Our children, just like those in more urban and suburban areas, deserve the best quality education and same opportunities to achieve and succeed. We simply can't afford to keep funding public education by referendum, and legislative leaders in Madison need to start making public education funding a top priority.