

The Effects of Revenue Controls on the Programs and Services Offered by Wisconsin's Public Schools, 2006-07 School Year

Fourteenth Annual Study

A Study by the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators and the Wisconsin Education Association Council

Data Analysis and Written Analysis by Russ Allen, PhD and Jeff Leverich, PhD
Wisconsin Education Association Council

Special thanks Miles Turner, Executive Director of WASDA, and to the 303 district superintendents who participated in this study.

The Current Study

For the past fourteen years, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) and the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) have worked together to monitor the effects of the revenue controls law on the programs and services offered by Wisconsin's public schools. To collect this information, an annual survey has been administered to the state's school superintendents. This year, 303 superintendents (71%) returned questionnaires. Over the fourteen years, about two-thirds of districts, on average, have returned surveys.

The Revenue Controls Law

In 1993, Wisconsin passed legislation to control school costs and reduce property taxes. Under this law, districts are allowed to increase revenues over the previous year by a specified amount. For 2007-08, the figure is \$264 per student. The revenue controls were supposed to last for a period of five years; however, in the 1995-97 budget, the controls were made permanent. That same year the State of Wisconsin committed to fund two-thirds of the total costs of public education statewide.

Critics point to at least two significant problems with the revenue controls:

1. The law mandates the same cost increase for all students, even though many children require significantly more services (and resources) than others.
2. The law establishes a one-to-one relationship between school district costs and enrollment. This makes it difficult for districts with declining enrollment to meet their expenses. For example, when students leave a district, revenue is reduced even though fixed costs (such as heating, transportation, and maintenance) are increasing. Declining revenues in combination with increasing costs produce budget shortfalls.

Declining Enrollments Reported in Most Districts

Under the revenue controls, districts with declining enrollment are especially vulnerable to program and service cuts. Only 19% of districts report increased enrollment over the past two or three years; the same percent say that enrollment will increase over the next 2-3 years. In contrast, more than one-half of superintendents say that their enrollment has declined during this same period, while an equal percent say this trend will continue (Table 1). These figures perhaps explain why more districts than ever are making cuts in programs and services (see the discussion that follows beginning on page 2).

Table 1
Enrollment Patterns in Wisconsin's Public Schools*

	Increase	Decrease	Stayed about the Same	Don't know
Trend over the Past 2-3 years	19%	53%	27%	--
Projected enrollment over the next 2-3 years	19%	52%	27%	3%

*Due to rounding, percent totals do not equal 100%.

Cuts in Twenty-Seven Program and Service Areas

Although the fourteen questionnaires administered since 1994 have not been identical, each has included the same set of core questions (the first twenty-seven in the current study).¹ For each of 27 program and service areas, superintendents have been asked if they took action during the previous school year. Table 2 shows the percent of districts taking action from 1998-99 to 2006-07 in each of the 27 areas. For example, in 2006-07, 69% of districts offered fewer field trips for students.

In 1998-99, the average district made cuts in 12.6 of 27 areas. This compares with cuts in 18.2 of the 27 areas in 2006-07. For every program and service area, there has been a gain in the percent of districts making cuts since 1998-99.²

Table 2
Percent of Districts Taking Action in Twenty-Seven Areas: 1998-1999 to 2006-2007

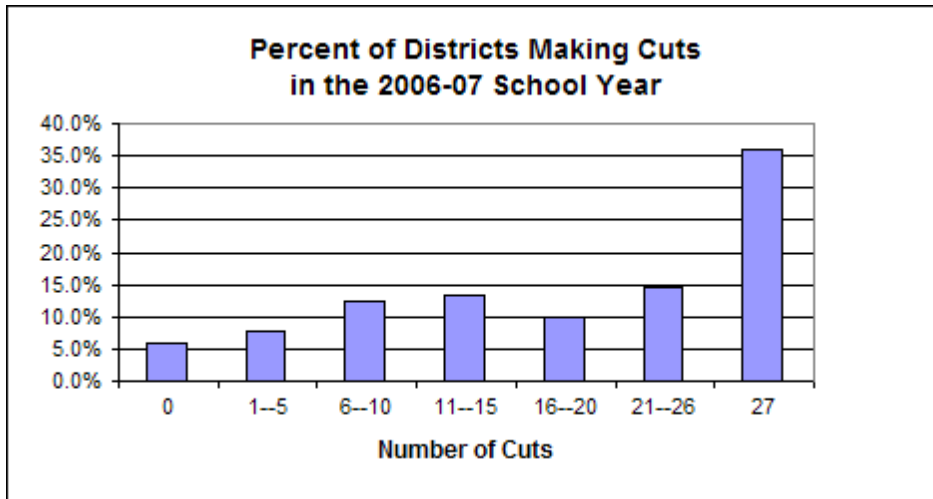
Program or Service Area	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	% Gain
<u>Percent Gain of 25% or Greater</u>										
Offered fewer field trips for students	41	48	60	59	61	64	66	66	69	+28%
Increased teacher workload	46	49	56	61	70	68	70	73	73	+27%
Increased class sizes	48	50	56	64	68	68	70	74	75	+27%
Laid off teachers	36	42	50	67	69	69	70	62	62	+26%
Increased administrator workload	56	63	66	74	78	79	81	78	81	+25%
<u>Percent Gain of 20% - 24%</u>										
Laid off administrators/supervisors	30	37	42	47	56	49	55	51	54	+24%
Laid off teacher aides or other support staff	40	45	54	66	71	69	66	63	63	+23%
Offered fewer courses	39	45	49	55	57	60	62	60	62	+23%
Offered fewer staff development opportunities for teachers	52	60	72	71	74	73	72	74	75	+23%
Delayed/reduced purchase of curricular materials	56	62	66	73	77	74	74	75	79	+23%
Reduced purchase of consumable supplies, such as paper	54	62	66	71	75	73	75	73	76	+22%
Reduced extracurricular programs	34	39	46	48	55	51	53	54	56	+22%
Increased student fees	45	56	59	65	75	73	65	67	67	+22%
Reduced courses in art, music, theater, vocational, etc.	NA*	NA*	38	48	54	53	56	55	58	+20%
Reduced counseling or similar services	35	38	45	49	53	53	56	54	55	+20%
Spent less for maintenance of buildings and grounds	62	69	75	79	83	77	80	81	82	+20%
<u>Percent Gain of 16 – 19%</u>										
Spent less for improvements of buildings and grounds	64	70	73	79	84	81	82	79	82	+18%
Reduced transportation services for students	39	41	48	50	56	52	55	52	57	+18%
Delayed/reduced purchase of computers, other technology	59	67	73	75	80	78	77	76	76	+17%
Reduced programs for students who are at risk	42	45	48	51	51	49	53	59	59	+17%
Delayed building maintenance or improvement projects	60	69	69	73	78	73	76	76	77	+17%
Reduced number of academic courses offered to students	NA*	NA*	41	50	52	52	57	54	57	+16%
Reduced programs for gifted and talented students	47	53	53	55	60	55	61	60	63	+16%
<u>Percent Gain of 15% or Less</u>										
Used fund balance to support budget	51	53	57	64	69	64	65	65	66	+15%
Did not replace departing staff	NA*	NA*	61	61	79	72	74	71	73	+12%
Delayed hiring of new staff	52	57	64	62	65	64	63	64	64	+12%
Reduced summer school programs	41	40	43	44	49	54	52	49	45	+4%

¹ Questions 25-27 were added in 2000-2001.

² The wording of the first 27 questions was changed in 1998-99. As a result, comparisons with earlier years are not valid.

Six of the seven areas that are top-ranked for gains relate directly to working conditions, indicating that one effect of the revenue controls has been to place greater demands on educational employees. The six areas are as follows: increased teacher workload (+27%), increased class sizes (+27%), laid off teachers (+26%), increased administrator workload (+25%), laid off administrators/supervisors (+24%), and laid of teacher aides or other support staff (+23%)

The graph shows the number of cuts made by districts this past school year. Six percent of districts made no cuts, while 36% reported cuts in all 27 program and service areas.



Effects of the Cuts

If the district acted in one of the service or program areas, the superintendent then was instructed to describe the “effects” of that action, using a five-point scale ranging from “very negative” to “very positive.” On average, 1.3% of superintendents (4 respondents) indicated that the action had a “positive” or “very positive” effect. In contrast, an average of 57% (173 respondents) judged the effects as “very negative” or “negative.” (See the responses for each question at the end of this paper for more information about the effects of cuts).

Elimination of Class Sections/Courses

In order to comply with the revenue controls, many districts have eliminated class sections or entire courses. This year’s questionnaire asked superintendents if their district did this in any of eleven content areas. The courses or individual classes least likely to be targeted for elimination were Science, (8% of districts), Social Studies (8%), Mathematics (9%), Physical Education (9%) and English/Language Arts (12%).

In contrast, an average of 22% of districts made cuts in the remaining six content areas. The figures range from 19% in Art to 28% in Family and Consumer Education (Table 5).

Table 5
Percent of Districts Eliminating Class Sections or Entire Courses in Eleven Content Areas
During the Past Few Years

Content Area	Percent
Science	8%
Social Studies	8%
Mathematics	9%
Physical Education	9%
English/Language Arts	12%
Art	19%
Music, Band, Orchestra	19%
Business Education	20%
Foreign Languages	21%
Technology/Vocational Education	25%
Family and Consumer Education	28%

Increasing Class Sizes

A similar action used by districts to control spending has been to increase class sizes. Although it may appear to be less draconian than eliminating sections of classes or entire courses, the effects are not inconsequential. Approximately one-third of districts increased class sizes in these content areas over the past few years.

The greatest percent of districts increased class sizes in Physical Education (40%), while the smallest proportion increased class sizes in Family and Consumer Education (29%). In the case of Family and Consumer Education, districts often eliminated the entire program (see Table 5.)

Table 6
Percent of Districts Increasing Class Sizes in Eleven Content Areas
During the Past Few Years

Content Area	Percent
Physical Education	40%
English/Language Arts	38%
Art	37%
Social Studies	36%
Foreign Languages	34%
Science	34%
Business Education	33%
Technology/Vocational Education	32%
Mathematics	30%
Music, Band, Orchestra	30%
Family and Consumer Education	29%

A Closer Look at Selected Cuts

Superintendents also were asked about the effects of the revenue controls on their district’s capacity to meet three categories of needs: (1) Meeting the needs of specific groups of students, (2) Attracting, supporting, and retaining quality staff, and (3) Meeting students’ health and safety needs.

Meeting the needs of specific groups of students

On average, about two-thirds of respondents said that the revenue controls have had a “very negative” or “negative” effect on their district’s capacity to serve gifted and talented students, to meet the needs of both regular and special education students, to meet the needs of students who are difficult or unmotivated, and to implement programs or strategies to close the achievement gap. When asked a related question, 59% responded that their district had difficulty providing time for teachers to work together to solve problems related to student learning (Table 7).

Table 7
Meeting the Needs of Specific Groups of Students

% Saying Effects Were “Negative” or “Very Negative”	
70%	Meeting the needs of students who are gifted and talented
68%	Meeting the needs of both regular and special education students
66%	Providing programs and services for students who are difficult or unmotivated
61%	Implementing programs or strategies that attempt to close the “achievement gap”
59%	Providing time for teachers to work together to try to solve problems that affect student learning

Attracting and Retaining Quality Staff

There were four questions that asked about attracting and retaining staff. Approximately one-half of respondents indicated that the revenue controls had a “negative” or “very negative” effect on their district’s capacity to attract, retain, and support staff. (Also see the earlier discussion about working conditions.)

Table 8
Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining Quality Staff

% Saying Effects Were “Negative” or “Very Negative”	
56%	Providing administrative support that is essential for high quality instruction services
50%	Training/ preparing staff for implementation of the new licensure rules (e.g., mentoring, released time, training of professional development teams, etc.)
48%	Attracting and retaining teachers
40%	Attracting and retaining administrators

Meeting Students' Health and Safety Needs

The final three questions asked about meeting health and safety needs. Slightly greater than one-half of respondents indicated the effects of the revenue controls were “negative” or “very negative” (Table 9).

Table 9
Meeting Health and Safety Needs

% Saying Effects Were “Negative” or “Very Negative”	
54%	Implementing programs that improve school safety
52%	Providing programs and services related to health and wellness, including nursing
50%	Providing social work and psychological services

Concluding Remarks

This is the fourteenth consecutive study that has been done by WASDA and WEAC to monitor the effects of the revenue controls on the programs and services offered by Wisconsin’s public schools. When the revenue controls first went into effect, most districts cut spending in areas related to maintenance and improvement of buildings and grounds. Over time this pattern changed, and more and more areas were targeted for cuts. For example, this year cuts are occurring across the board, negatively affecting all programs and services offered by our schools.

As we look towards 2007-08 and beyond, there is little reason for optimism. Without a change in Wisconsin’s school funding formula, the effects easily can be predicted. We will continue to see increased class sizes, reduced course offerings, higher student fees, fewer field trips, more layoffs, and more challenging workloads for those who remain. These results may not have been the intention of those who support this law; however, they are the reality.

Questionnaire Results

Directions: Listed below are some actions that school districts have taken to comply with the state revenue controls during the past school year. If your district took no action in 2006-2007, circle "No Action." If your district took action, circle the number which best describes the effects: (1) "Very Negative," (2) "Negative," (3) "No Difference," (4) "Positive," or (5) "Very Positive." If you don't know the effects, circle (6) for "Don't Know."

Program or Service	Action was taken and the effects were:						
	%Taking action	Very Neg.	Neg.	No Diff	Pos	Very Pos	DK
1. Delayed building maintenance or improvement projects	77%	20%	62%	15%	1%	-	1%
2. Spent less for maintenance of buildings and grounds	82	21	60	18	1	-	1
3. Spent less for improvements of buildings and grounds	82	20	63	16	-	-	-
4. Delayed/reduced purchase of curricular materials	79	16	51	31	1	-	1
5. Reduced purchase of consumable supplies, such as paper	76	5	46	46	2	-	1
6. Delayed/reduced purchase of computers, other technology	76	22	54	23	-	-	1
7. Offered fewer staff development opportunities for teachers	75	16	45	38	1	-	1
8. Laid off teachers	62	30	30	38	1	1	1
9. Laid off teacher aides or other support staff	63	25	37	36	1	1	1
10. Laid off administrators/supervisors	54	17	21	58	1	2	1
11. Reduced counseling or similar services	55	19	18	61	-	2	1
12. Delayed hiring of new staff	64	15	48	35	1	1	1
13. Reduced extracurricular programs	56	5	26	64	1	2	2
14. Reduced programs for students who are at risk	59	10	33	53	2	1	2
15. Reduced programs for gifted and talented students	63	16	33	48	1	2	1
16. Offered fewer courses	62	15	36	47	1	1	1
17. Reduced transportation services for students	57	6	24	67	1	2	1
18. Reduced summer school programs	45	4	21	70	1	1	2
19. Offered fewer field trips for students	69	9	49	40	1	1	1
20. Increased class sizes	75	20	47	31	-	1	1
21. Increased teacher workload	73	13	53	32	1	1	1
22. Increased administrator workload	81	25	53	21	-	-	-
23. Increased student fees	67	16	38	45	1	-	1
24. Used fund balance to support budget	66	31	30	38	1	-	1
25. Reduced number of academic courses offered to students	57	14	30	54	-	1	2
26. Reduced courses in art, music, theater, vocational, etc.	58	12	27	59	1	-	1
27. Did not replace departing staff	73	22	46	29	1	1	1

28. Over the past 2-3 years has your district's enrollment increased, decreased or stayed about the same?

19% Increased

53% Decreased

27% Stayed about the same

29. Does your district's census project decreasing, increasing, or about the same enrollment over the next 2-3 years?

19% Increase

52% Decrease

27% Stay about the same

3% Not sure

30. What has been the effect of the revenue controls on the overall quality of education provided by your district?

- 24% Very negative
- 53% Negative
- 21% Neutral
- 1% Positive
- 0% Very Positive
- 1% Don't Know

31. For the list below, write the appropriate number in the blank space. Choose from the following:

1. Very negative 2. Negative 3. Neutral 4. Positive 5. Very Positive 6. Don't know

What have been the effects of the revenue controls, if any, on your district's capacity to:

- _____ A. meet the needs of students who are gifted and talented?
20% Very negative 50% Negative 30% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ B. provide programs and services for students who are difficult or unmotivated?
17% Very negative 49% Negative 33% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 1% Don't know
- _____ C. attract and retain teachers?
15% Very negative 33% Negative 51% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 1% Don't know
- _____ D. attract and retain administrators?
11% Very negative 28% Negative 59% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 1% Don't know
- _____ E. train/ prepare staff for implementation of the new licensure rules (e.g., mentoring, released time, training or professional development teams, etc.)?
11% Very negative 39% Negative 49% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 1% Don't know
- _____ F. provide time for teachers to work together to try to solve problems that affect student learning?
14% Very negative 45% Negative 40% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ G. provide programs and services related to health and wellness, including nursing?
12% Very negative 39% Negative 47% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ H. provide social work and psychological services?
16% Very negative 34% Negative 49% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 1% Don't know
- _____ I. implement programs or strategies that attempt to close the "achievement gap"?
15% Very negative 46% Negative 38% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ J. meet the needs of both regular and special education students?
16% Very negative 52% Negative 32% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ K. provide library/media services?
14% Very negative 34% Negative 50% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ L. implement programs that improve school safety?
12% Very negative 42% Negative 45% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know
- _____ M. regularly communicate with parents and the community about important school matters?

4% Very negative 29% Negative 65% Neutral 1% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know

N. provide administrative support that is essential for high quality instruction and services

14% Very negative 41% Negative 44% Neutral 0% Positive 0% Very Positive 0% Don't know

32. Over the past few years, including the upcoming 2007-08 school year, has your district eliminated classes or entire courses in any of the areas below as a result of budget shortfalls (**not due to a change in student interest**). Mark **“Yes”** or **“No”** for each item.

Yes	No		Yes	No	
19%	81%	Art	9%	91%	Mathematics
20	80	Business Education	19	81	Music, Band, Orchestra
12	88	English/Language Arts	9	91	Physical Education
28	72	Family and Consumer Education	8	92	Science
21	79	Foreign Languages	8	92	Social Studies
			25	75	Technology/Vocational Education

33. Over the past few years, including the upcoming 2007-08 school year, has your district increased class sizes in any of the areas below as a result of budget shortfalls (**not due to a change in student interest**). Mark **“Yes”** or **“No”** for each item.

Yes	No		Yes	No	
37%	63%	Art	39%	61%	Mathematics
33	67	Business Education	30	70	Music, Band, Orchestra
38	62	English/Language Arts	40	60	Physical Education
29	71	Family and Consumer Education	34	66	Science
34	66	Foreign Languages	36	64	Social Studies
			32	68	Technology/Vocational Education