

## Schools working hard and legislators should too

### GUEST OPINION

#### By Deb Andraca

As a teacher and a state representative I am stunned at some of my colleagues' disdain for science, public education, and the principle of local control. ("Money directed to reward in-person school districts," Feb. 18) Under the proposal passed by the Joint Finance Committee last Wednesday, suburban schools — such as those in our communities — stand to be the biggest financial losers. Instead of providing an incentive for more schools to open in the future and offering additional funding to help them to do so, this measure is retroactive and punitive. It reduces available funding for every hour of virtual instruction offered by a school district since the start of the school year, even to the most vulnerable students and families.

Since the summer, every local school board has worked incredibly hard, holding hours-long meetings late into the night and making difficult choices about school reopening. School officials trained to make decisions about curriculum and instruction had to become overnight experts in HVAC and ventilation, risk mitigation, and health metrics. Of course in-person learning is best for students AND teachers alike, but when community transmission rates were sky-high, like they were throughout the fall, the Centers for Disease Control recommended virtual or hybrid learning. School districts and their locally elected boards made hard choices, but acted in the best interest of their local communities. Meanwhile, during this difficult time, the Wisconsin State Legislature did not meet even once.

In the article, Senator Stroebel is quoted saying "If you follow the science, there's no reason for schools not to be open." If legislative leadership would follow the science themselves, they would not be seen maskless at community meetings, in the state Capitol, and on WisconsinEye. Schools can reopen safely, but ONLY when masks are required, students are socially distant, ventilation is upgraded, and sanitation protocols are strictly followed. Once again, school districts are working overtime while in the state Capitol, legislative leaders don't bother to enforce even the most basic safety measures, like masks.

Finally, the statement "Milwaukee schools haven't

even been open," implies that teachers and staff are somehow not working. Every teacher I know is working harder than ever before, whether they are teaching from home, in the classroom with remote learners, in person or hybrid. School officials have been doing their jobs since last spring — while the Legislature managed to pass its first bill since the start of the pandemic last week.

If legislators feel the need to take funding away from schools for offering virtual instruction at the height of the pandemic, it seems only fair that taxpayers should demand that lawmakers return most of their full-time salaries for the months of May through December, when they also refused to meet in person. Schools could use these funds to upgrade old buildings, buy PPE for teachers, and make schools as safe as possible. If legislative leaders won't work as hard as our local school boards and educators to assist schools through the pandemic, they should at least stop punishing our local schools for doing their best.

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