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Investing in Our Students – Column by Rep. Callahan (R-Tomahawk)

As students head back to the classroom for a new school year, I wanted to take a moment to share with folks what we have done this last state budget cycle to support our schools. A child's education is important to families in the Northwoods, which is why I supported a record amount of funding for K-12 education. This helped to increase supports for mental health and special education costs, in addition to general school aid.

Over \$1 billion in new money was provided to support our kids, with the largest increase being general aid. Schools can use general aid to increase teacher wages, make upgrades to their classrooms, support extracurriculars, and more. This school year, districts will have an additional \$325/student – an increase of almost \$1,000/student from two years ago. My Republican colleagues and I also recognized the need for additional funding in the areas of mental health and special education aid; something both parents and school faculty have spoken about the need for greater support.

There are several positive programs that we saw the need to increase funding for: school and public libraries, Reach Out and Read, Special Olympics, transportation and sparsity aid, robotics grants, to name a few. Sparsity aid and high-cost transportation aid are extremely helpful for school districts like those in the Northwoods that may not receive as much general aid funding. I was proud to achieve increases for both of these important programs.

Over 30 years ago, Wisconsin started the nation's first private voucher program with bipartisan support, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Today, we also have a program in Racine and a statewide school choice program. Nearly 60,000 students use one of the three programs. I believe that parents know what is best for their kids, which is why I was proud to support significant increases for our parental choice programs this session. This will help parents continue to have a say in their child's education.

As students, parents, and school faculty begin another school year, I wish the best of luck to you all and your families! Should you ever need assistance, don't hesitate to give my office a call.