FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 11th, 2025

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Education Democrats Blast Republican Abandonment of Wisconsin's Kids

MADISON, WI - Last week, Legislative Republicans left the negotiating table during state budget talks with Governor Tony Evers, refusing to commit to adequately funding Wisconsin's public schools — a move that undermines both educational opportunity and the overall well-being of our kids.

Representatives Francesca Hong (D-Madison), Christian Phelps (D-Eau Claire), Angelina Cruz (D-Racine), and Joe Sheehan (D-Sheboygan), along with Senators Chris Larson (D-Milwaukee) and Sarah Keyeski (D-Lodi) — all Democrats serving on the Assembly and Senate Education Committees — released the following statement:

"For over 15 years, Republicans have abandoned Wisconsin's kids. They have systematically underfunded our public schools, forcing hundreds of referendums across our state each year. They have prioritized funding private schools with public dollars instead of the public schools that are the heart of our communities. And by leaving Governor Tony Evers at the negotiating table last week, they have continued their abandonment of our children. As Democrats serving on the Assembly and Senate Education Committees, we demand that the *Year of the Kid* be the year we meaningfully fund public education.

Public money demands transparency and accountability. But Republican legislative leaders want to siphon more public funds to private schools without oversight from Wisconsin taxpayers. We oppose any effort to expand or hide private voucher programs, including through schemes like so-called "decoupling," which are designed to mask the financial consequences for state and local budgets and make it harder for the public to track how much taxpayer money is being diverted to voucher schools. These backdoor attempts at expansion divert resources away from public schools and weaken public accountability. We appreciate Governor Evers' past statements against decoupling and we call on all of our colleagues – including legislative Republicans and Governor Evers – to reject these schemes during this budget process. Every child deserves fully funded public schools, and every taxpayer deserves accountability for how public funds are used.

One of the biggest financial burdens facing Wisconsin school districts is the reimbursement rate for special education. While private schools participating in special needs voucher programs are entitled to

reimbursement for at least 90% of their special education costs, public schools are currently reimbursed at approximately 30%. We cannot afford to pass another budget at this appalling rate. We call on our colleagues in the legislature, and Governor Evers, to reject any efforts that do not meaningfully close this gap and end Wisconsin's discrimination against students with disabilities attending our public schools.

To address years of Republican-led underfunding – which leaves Wisconsin kids approximately $3,500 in state funding behind the kids of 2009 when adjusted for inflation – this state budget must include meaningful and predictable increases in revenue limits and spendable aid to public schools. Referendums are an unfair and unreliable way to fund our public schools. It's past time for the state to step up.

Finally, the *Year of the Kid* must include funding childcare and higher education as well. Our budget must hold the line on childcare funding and increase funding for our fantastic universities and technical colleges.

Public education is a constitutional promise in Wisconsin. We cannot afford another budget led by Republicans that abandons our kids. We demand a budget that fills the special education funding gap, increases public school funding, and rejects all voucher schemes of any kind. We call on Republicans to rejoin negotiations and to stop negotiating on Wisconsin kids' backs. Let's invest in a system that fulfills Wisconsin's constitutional promise of public education."

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