



Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Thank you so much for sharing your concerns about K-12 education and the 2015-2017 budget process. Please see below for my response to frequently asked questions about the K-12 budget.

Funding

The legislature's Joint Finance Committee (JFC) recently voted to modify the Governor's proposed education budget by investing nearly \$200 million in additional funding over the 2015-2017 biennium. The JFC voted to level fund public schools in 2015-2016 and increase funding by \$100 per pupil in 2016-2017 for all Wisconsin public school students. This is in addition to the increases that were approved in the 2013-15 budget, when school districts received a \$75 per pupil increase in year one and another \$150 per pupil increase in year two. These increases are per pupil "categorical aid" which means that property taxes will not go up.

The claim that Wisconsin will be below the national average in per pupil spending was based on speculation of what might happen if the JFC did not restore funding that the Governor proposed to reduce in year one of the budget. In fact, JFC not only restored the funding (\$150 per pupil), but added another \$100 per pupil in year two. One third of the state general fund is spent on public education, our number one expenditure of state tax dollars. We are budgeted to spend \$5.6 billion in 2017 on school funding in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is ranked 17th in per pupil spending in the country. In 2013, Wisconsin spent an average of \$11,071 per pupil while the national average was \$10,700 per pupil. There is no data available for 2014.

Parental Choice Program

In addition to income qualifications which limit the statewide parental choice program to families at or below 185% of the federal poverty level, the JFC proposal includes many new mechanisms that will serve to responsibly limit the program after removal of the statewide cap. For example, starting with the next round of applications, the program is limited to prior year public school students, with the exception of entry points for kindergarten, first and eighth grade. The program is also limited to 1% of pupils in a school district (with a 1% annual increase in future years). Furthermore, school districts can continue to count resident students for general aid and revenue limit purposes and retain those dollars, just as they are allowed to do under the widely-accepted open enrollment program. As has been proven by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau, the parental choice program allows for more aid per student to flow into our local schools. That's because the cost per pupil in the statewide parental choice program (\$7,210 for K-8 and \$7,856 for high school) is significantly below the state average of \$11,071 per pupil in the public schools.



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Accountability Reports and Testing

Under the JFC budget proposal, all schools receiving public funding (choice, charter, public) will be graded using the same five-star report card system that accounts for students' growth in reading and math skills, school poverty levels, and a school's ability to close gaps in achievement among groups of students. This is a change from the Governor's proposed letter grade report card. Also, the motion requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to request a waiver from the federal Department of Education to allow the state to approve between three and five assessments, with each school district, independent "2r" charter school, and private choice school able to select an assessment to administer in each year from an approved list. If the waiver is obtained, DPI and the state will be required to utilize the services of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Value Added Research Center (VARC) to compile a list of nationally recognized, norm-referenced alternative assessments that are acceptable for statistical comparison with the assessment adopted or approved by the State Superintendent.

Independent "2r" Charter Schools

The budget includes the expansion of independent charter schools in Wisconsin. Under this proposal, the proposed Madison Prep charter school, which is modeled on meeting the needs of low-income minority students, could be authorized by the UW System. Tribal colleges would also be allowed to authorize independent charter schools. Wisconsin's Native American tribes highlighted their desire for charter schools that focus on preserving and revitalizing tribal languages and culture as a priority at the recent State of the Tribes Address. There was language in the Gateway Technical College motion that allowed for authorization of independent charter schools counties adjacent to the Gateway Technical College District (which would include Rock County). Media interviews indicate Gateway has no intention of pursuing this type of arrangement. However, I have asked for the adjacent counties provision to be removed.

Tuition for Students Attending Out-of-State School

This is not a new policy item. Current law allows for a permissive agreement between school districts for out-of-state pupils. The only change proposed is to require the payment to be specified in the agreement. This budget provision fixes a problem related to specific circumstances with the state of Michigan and Wisconsin in which Wisconsin students are attending Michigan public schools under an unfair tuition agreement. In February of 2015 the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) passed Resolution 15-09 which stated that, "WASB supports modifications to the tuition payment statute that currently allows some Wisconsin pupils to attend an out-of-state school with the pupil's resident district making tuition payments to the out-of-state school district."



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Learning Portfolio

The Learning Portfolio provision gives school districts the option of allowing students to earn credit through ‘competency based education’. Students would be able to earn credits for demonstrating competency in coursework outside of the traditional testing for competency methods. The program is completely optional and may be well suited for students seeking credit for demonstrating fluency in a foreign language or performance art (for example) as opposed to awarding credit hours for “seat time”. This program is entirely voluntary.

Alternative Teacher Licensure

Based on feedback received, the Joint Finance Committee is looking at ways to revise this proposal to ensure that it meets the intent of recommendation of the bipartisan “Speakers Task Force on Rural Schools” that was convened during the 2013-2014 legislative session.

http://thewheelerreport.com/wheeler_docs/files/0506taskforcereport.pdf.

The budget proposal does allow for flexibilities for teacher licensure or permits. However, school boards are under no obligation to utilize the provision. The proposal is for grades 6 through 12 and is not intended to replace the full-time professional educator in the classroom. The alternative licensing option was identified as a way to allow local people to offer their skill and industry expertise in the classroom, to provide a learning opportunity that otherwise the student may not get. This is especially important subjects such as career and technical education, business, and other non-core subjects. Under the alternative licensure option, the local school board and superintendent are designated the role of 1) identifying the course need in the classroom and 2) identifying a proficient individual in the community for an alternative license/permit to teach the course. Additionally, the license/permit granted by DPI would be valid only for the district where the individual has been deemed qualified; it is non-transferrable to other districts. It is also limited to the subject or subjects for which a school board determines the individual is proficient and possesses sufficient experience.