

Top-notch Public Education is a Must for Wisconsin

State Senator Brad Pfaff

The great Mark Twain was quoted as saying, “Out of public schools grows the greatness of a nation.” Our state’s founders understood this, specifically mentioning public education in our state’s constitution.

I am a strong supporter of public education. As a proud graduate of Melrose-Mindoro High School, I firmly understand the important role that public schools play in educating our children and supporting our local communities. I believe all children, regardless of their zip code, should receive a quality education that sets them up for future success.

In July, the 2025-2027 biennial budget was signed into law, following weeks of negotiations. As passed, the biennial budget saw a significant increase in funding for special education as well as much-needed mental health services funding. Unfortunately, the budget signed into law did not improve the transparency of voucher programs and did not include a general school aid increase. Public schools are primarily funded by two sources: general aid from the state and local property taxes.

With my Democratic colleagues, I introduced legislation that would increase the general aid received by school districts. General aid is state funding that is directed to individual school districts. It is also one of the best tools our state has to both support public education AND keep property taxes in check.

We cannot continue to force local school districts to make up for funding shortfalls via referendum year after year, expecting local property taxpayers to foot the bill due to the majority party’s continued refusal to fund our schools appropriately. It’s not fair for local community members, it’s not fair to taxpayers, and it’s certainly not fair for our kids.

But let me be clear, funding our schools appropriately is not just about providing local property taxpayers with much-needed relief. It’s about our kids—the future of this state. While they are just children now, in a few short years, they will be business owners, engineers, nurses, caregivers, restaurant managers, law enforcement officers, and, importantly, our neighbors.

To ensure our school kids have the resources they need to achieve high learning outcomes, Wisconsin taxpayers also cannot afford to fund two separate education systems. Funding two competing school systems in Wisconsin, without accountability for both, is unsustainable. Our current property tax bills lack transparency—taxpayers can see the dollars going into local public schools, but not how much is paid out to private voucher schools. I believe in tax transparency, and this proposal would simply provide property taxpayers with the whole picture, outlining both the allocation to local school districts AND the cost of private school vouchers.

I would also be remiss if I did not mention the Healthy School Meals for All proposal. Kids learn better when their stomachs are full. This proposal ensures that every child receives a healthy and nutritious lunch at school, saving parents an average of \$150 per child per month. Healthy School Meals for All puts money back in the pockets of parents while also supporting a better learning environment for all kids.

Public education is too important to be on the chopping block. Continued divestment in our public schools hurts each of us. But first and foremost, it hurts Wisconsin kids. Our children are the future of this great state, and we should be doing all we can to ensure they are receiving the education and resources necessary to grow into productive, successful adults.

I am looking forward to working with my colleagues during the remainder of this legislative session to better our public schools, provide adequate funding and support, and improve learning outcomes.