



SHEBOYGAN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Learning Today. Leading Tomorrow.

Joint Finance Committee's Proposed Budget Will Hurt Public Education

Early Wednesday morning, the Joint Finance Committee passed a 30 page spending motion for K-12 education. As your Superintendent and School Board President it's our responsibility to advocate for our community and for every student in our school district. These changes impact the Sheboygan Area School District and our ability to continue to provide a top-notch educational experience for every child in our school district.

Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), chairman of the Senate Education Committee, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Wednesday that there wasn't enough money to fund property tax cuts Governor Walker promised and also fund the public education system. "Something had to give and that's what gave," Olsen said. The Joint Finance Committee version of the budget is an improvement over Governor Walker's initial proposal, but without inflationary increases, school districts will face ongoing deficits and that is concerning for the future of public education in Wisconsin.

Following is a brief overview of the most concerning items:

K-12 Funding

The Joint Finance Committee restored Governor Walker's proposed \$127 million dollar cut in the first year of the two-year budget. But restoring that cut still only gets public schools back to a freeze in allowable revenues, leaving the Sheboygan Area School District facing a \$1.5 million reduction in the coming year's budget. We need an inflationary increase in per pupil revenues to meet the needs of students.

In the second year of the budget, schools would receive a modest 1% increase in per pupil aid (about \$100 per pupil), which is well below the present inflation rate.

This funding will be further reduced by the expanded statewide voucher program, with more public tax dollars being allocated to private, religious schools.

Private School Vouchers

The cap on the statewide private school voucher program has been lifted to allow for an increase of up to 1% of the student population of each district. This cap would increase annually for 10 years and ultimately there will be no limit.

More than 2,600 students applied to participate in the statewide voucher program for next year. According to a Department of Public Instruction report, 80% of applicants are already attending a private school.

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates the voucher expansion plan could cost public school districts \$48 million in aid reductions over the biennium for new voucher students. The current underfunding of our public schools shows we simply cannot afford two systems of education in Wisconsin.

Special Needs Vouchers

A special needs voucher program was added into the budget by the Joint Finance Committee, which would allow special-needs students to attend private schools with the help of a \$12,000 taxpayer funded voucher. There is limited accountability for special education in private schools and students wouldn't receive the same legal protections they are guaranteed in public schools. This concept is not supported by disability rights advocates and has been previously voted down twice as a standalone bill.

Wisconsin Falling Behind

Last week, we learned that Wisconsin was expected to fall below the national average in terms of per-pupil spending according to Michael Griffith, a senior policy analyst for Education Commission of the States, who recently presented at Marquette University Law School. Griffith noted that in years past, Wisconsin was 10 percent above the national average in per-pupil spending. However, it differs from most states in that Wisconsin's spending for public education has not increased in recent years to keep pace with inflation. In fact, Wisconsin is one of just a handful of states in which lawmakers are expected to freeze or cut school spending in the next couple of years.

As you can see, Wisconsin is moving away from its history of supporting public education and we are concerned. We believe strong public schools are a foundation for strong communities.

If we want our public schools to produce graduates ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow, we need to invest in our schools today. We need your support so we can deliver on the high expectations that our students, parents and taxpayers demand of our public schools.

If you are concerned about the future of public education, please communicate with your local elected officials.

Written by: Dr. Joseph Sheehan, Superintendent of Schools and David Gallianetti, President of the Board of Education

May 22, 2015