

EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

Public school funding has become partisan and divisive in the last few decades. Wisconsin public schools have some of the lowest funding in the nation. Wisconsin has 421 public school districts, over 2,200 schools, and serves 860,000 kids. Let me ask a rhetorical question. Would you continue working for a company that continually loses funding, takes away benefits, gives no pay increases for years, and repeatedly lets people go? We send our children to these schools every day to grow and learn. Why do we accept anything less for our youth than we expect for ourselves? Our schools deserve more. To those standing up for our youth, thank you!

Referendums across the state are still averaging \$300 million every voting cycle. This was the norm when Scott Walker was in office and has not changed with Tony Evers. None of our school districts are unaffected by this referendum pandemic considering 400 of the 421 districts have passed at least one referendum in the last 20 years. Every year our local taxes are rising to cover this increase. We need to fund this at the state level, **without** increasing taxes, so our local taxes stop increasing and the referendums cease.

Numerous grassroots movements have been working on educational funding problems. The Wisconsin Public Education Network (WPEN) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization, which has been operating for over a decade and has around 8,700 followers. There have been countless news articles telling of the deficiencies in the system. The Republicans and Democrats are aware of this issue and created a bi-partisan group called the Blue Ribbon Commission in 2017. The Blue Ribbon Commission traveled Wisconsin talking to industry experts and communities reported their findings back to our legislation. Their report detailed the numerous problems plaguing the system and offered options and solutions on how to fix them. Here we are years later still waiting for progress.

Public School Funding

There are 2 primary ways that schools receive funding, the general fund and the special education fund. Schools, by law, are required to pay special education costs and cannot turn students away. Schools do not have enough funding from the state, so they must transfer funds from the general fund to cover the difference. This takes away from all extracurricular activities, salaries, libraries, staffing, and general operational costs.

Special Education was \$369M when Gov. Walker took office and it was the same when he left, 12 years later. There was little increase the past budget. It went up \$15 million to \$384 million 2019-20 (4% increase) and up \$66 million to \$450 million 2020-21 (17% increase). At this rate, it will take over 10 years to reach the goal of not burdening our local taxes.

The special education fund is financed by federal and state funds, and local taxes. Federal assistance, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is not even close where it should be. Congress, by law, promises to pay 40% of the total costs

EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

and they currently only pay for 14%. Ron Johnson & Tammy Baldwin should work to solve this in Washington. This is their job. Our Governor can meet with other Governors across the nation and demand change as well.

State assistance for special education was signed in 1973 and directed Wisconsin to pay 70%. Currently we only pay 25%. This needs to be reevaluated since 40% Federal + 70% State = 110%. Obviously, nobody is looking at this or else it would be funded 110% between the State and Federal funds and not the current 37% between the two.

Wisconsin needs to inject \$420M on the next budget to get State funding over 50%. Some of this money can come by not giving tax breaks for property owners out of state. I believe that you must live in Wisconsin to get this tax break. The remaining will come from the current funding that is used for private and charter schools under Act 55 which I will mention shortly. This funding increase will fix the special education funding and will also let schools keep the money in the general fund that they keep having to transfer to cover the loss. This will also stop upwards of 75% of the referendums in the state which will help lower property taxes.

For the general funding for our schools, I support the 'Fair Funding for Our Future' proposal. We need to fix the general fund formula that is used to calculate the budgets for our schools. This formula/algorithm was created in the 70's, it is sadly outdated. The current formula is a complicated algorithm with 3 parts: Primary, Secondary, & Tertiary (with Categorical aid). We should be using the census data to calculate what districts should be receiving. Funding should be based off density, square miles of the district, population, enrollment, property value, income per district, and poverty levels. Our state has been funding the categorical aid to try to help, but that is like putting a band aid on a bullet wound.

For years there have been errors and cheats in the current formula. They are now manipulating the 'Cost Ceiling Per Member' in the formula and the data to increase funding for schools based off this multiplier. This was also happening when Tony Evers was in that position as well. We need to remove this factor immediately, so all districts are funded fairly.

We also need to eliminate 'Parental Choice Deduct' (\$54,053,464) and give it back to Milwaukee schools. We need to stop the 'Milwaukee Charter Program Deduct' for all Schools (\$70,543,119). These funds can go directly back into the schools. Charter schools, the few that are left, should be funded just like all the other public schools, and should not be held to a different standard. Up until 2016 under the Act 55, private schools never received any state funds; now they receive over \$350 million in Private School Vouchers. Private schools should not be receiving state funds because of separation of church and state. Also, parents of private school students receive tax vouchers because those students are not using public schools and state funds are not used for their education. I support the parents tax vouchers because they should be receiving incentives for their child's education, but they should go to the families, not the schools.

University Schools

Universities across Wisconsin, including the University of Wisconsin System, have also been losing funding for decades. State support for the UW System has declined from 43% in 1976 to 14% in 2018, currently set at \$250 million. We need to understand what a great investment this is. Every dollar invested into the UW averages a \$23 return to the State revenue. To name a few, Wisconsin benefits from businesses, partnerships, vendor support and relations, business creation, and athletic events. The University of Wisconsin alone has a \$15 billion impact in the state. They employ over 200,000 Wisconsinites and because they are non-profit, they have fostered over 362 startup companies who employ over 25,000 jobs.

I advocate for increased funding through an incentive program at the university level. Systems that help themselves should receive greater funding from the state. Some systems within the UW, and across the state, are outdated and need to be modernized to create efficiency and save time. The paper trail across the state can be digitized and secured saving millions of taxpayer dollars. Universities should have more freedom in project management. A project for research that is needed to fulfill grant obligations can take years just to start and time is money. If the universities can effectively manage their own projects, with minimal change orders that drive the cost of projects up, then they should have less regulation. The Governor should not have to sign purchase orders for equipment that the universities need to purchase. This system can be managed at the university level with audits and oversight from the Secretary of State office.

We need to restore the UW System's reputation as a leader in research in the US. The UW slipped to #6 in the nation in 2015 after 43 years of being in the top 5. This is a direct result of deficient funding. If we fix the funding, we can take our place at the top. The grants and donations that the UW will receive by leading the nation in funding will increase as our research in the nation increases.

We should also work on conserving our resources with less waste throughout all universities and government agencies. Vendors need to supply the same equipment for at least 10-20 years for all organizations, depending on the item (ex. office furniture, office equipment, facility material, ceiling tiles). On numerous occasions, areas are completely renovated, or entire systems are ordered because materials have been discontinued for the current layout. For those materials or equipment that are no longer needed, we need to donate these "new communities" and homeless shelters that we need to setup, or to high schools or community centers, see the social justice issues that I propose for more info. The UW SWAP store needs to be online and opened across the state like the Wisconsin Surplus is becoming. The marketing behind this system needs to improve.

I also support more adequate evaluations for employees. I would like to see upward evaluations, some companies call these 360 evaluations, on the supervisors. These evaluations from the employee would go to the supervisor's supervisor. This will help develop stronger leaders and can assist in workflow. We also need to increase pay for

EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

the staff that deserve it for better retention. If we have good teachers, supervisors, custodians, maintenance, researchers, administration, we need to keep them. On the same token we need to make it easier to let people go when there are issues. It should not take more than a year to let someone go that is underperforming and is detrimental to our children's learning or bad for business in all our state organizations.

Summary

All Wisconsinites deserve the best education possible. By strengthening our education system, we improve life in Wisconsin. People will want to move here to receive quality education for their children. Businesses will benefit by hiring quality workers. This will help all Wisconsinites now and in the future. We need to fix educational funding across the state for Wisconsin so we can put this behind us and move on to the next issue that plagues our system.

If you feel like I do, help me spread this message. I want people to join me because they believe in what I believe in...Wisconsin. Let's create a new culture for Unity to move Forward!

Look Forward...Don't look back, we're not going that way!