

# Rep. Pope: Democrats move to put Wisconsin schools first

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MADISON, WI - Citing the Republicans' broken promises to rural schools in the state budget, Democrats in the last two weeks have moved to restore and improve two vital provisions that were put up against each other and ultimately both eliminated during the lengthy GOP budget debate. Education Committee members Rep. Sondy Pope (D-Mt. Horeb) and Sen. Janet Bewley (D-Delta) have circulated bills to increase sparsity aid to and allow low revenue districts to consider greater support for classrooms.

"Months of missed deadlines and uncertainty were bad enough, but it's even worse that promises made to rural schools were broken," said Bewley. "First our Republican colleagues created a false choice between sparsity aid and low revenue districts, then pulled the rug out from under both."

Legislative Democrats put forward a budget amendment that would have provided more sparsity aid to more districts than a proposed increased in Gov. Walker's budget. Republican majorities in both houses acted to eliminate even the Governor's sparsity increases. Democrats recently reintroduced their stronger proposal as a separate bill in an attempt to correct the GOP elimination of the increases.

"This budget committed the lowest percentage of general funding to school aids in twenty-two years," Rep. Pope said. "Our plan would have been better for every district in Wisconsin and these bills would make good on two egregiously broken promises to small Wisconsin communities."

A second bill will allow districts facing low revenue limits under state law to consider putting more into the classroom. Legislative Republicans included a similar proposal in the budget, without funding, but the option for especially rural and historically frugal districts was vetoed by Gov. Walker. Citing Republican refusal to consider overriding the veto, the Democrats put forward a bill to restore the change at a higher level and increase general aid statewide.

“This budget proved what rural families can expect from Republicans even before the \$3 Billion Foxconn payouts begin – sparsity aid increases eliminated and low revenue adjustments vetoed,” the legislators said. “Instead of making \$3 billion in payoffs to a foreign corporation that may or may not come to one corner of the state the top priority, these bills are the first of many that give us a chance to put Wisconsin first.”