

Walker warns against working off base budget, defends self-insurance plan

Posted on Tuesday, Apr 4, 2017

Gov. Scott Walker, making a stop at Waukesha South High School to tout his education plan, said working off a base budget for schools could mean they'd see substantially less than he's proposed.

Walker wants to give districts an additional \$200 per-pupil in the first year of the budget and another \$204 in the second.

"My argument would be, we need, if anything, to build off of the foundation we put in this budget," Walker told reporters following a tour of an engineering lab at the school.

He said with his Act 10 reforms school districts have been empowered to put more money in the classroom and his proposed K-12 spending increases "will overwhelmingly go to student success."

Walker said it's likely if his K-12 budget is approved, the growing number of school referendums for continuing operations will decrease.

"If this budget's approved as we proposed, that number probably goes down dramatically," Walker said.

Walker said he was open to tweaking his proposed requirement that districts be Act 10 compliant in order to receive the additional per-pupil aid.

"Our original intention was just to say, we're going to put more money into our schools, let's make sure they're actually using the reforms that we've given our school districts over the years," Walker said.

Walker said he want to ensure that schools put the overwhelming amount of the new money into the classroom, rather than into overhead.

“And if there’s better ways to tweak that to make sure that that’s clear, I think we can do that,” Walker said.

Walker also defended his proposal to self-insure state workers, noting that major health systems, large employers and most other states use some form of self-insurance for health benefits.

The proposal was heavily criticized by lawmakers from both sides of the aisle during last week’s JFC agency briefings.

“It’s not like it’s some wild idea,” Walker said. “It’s an idea that’s been tested plenty of times before and some of the very same people who are lobbying the Legislature not to do it come from systems that use it, which I would think is a pretty good test.

“If you’re lobbying me not to do something, but you do it yourself, maybe there’s something wrong with that equation.”

Walker said saving money through self-insurance should be a “slam dunk,” particularly as lawmakers are looking for more money for roads.

“Why would you take \$60 million over the next two years off of the table?” Walker said. “To me that should be a slam dunk.”

Walker said he’s willing to work with Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and other lawmakers if they want to put more money into roads, but there are other areas to look at besides education for the funds.

Walker said it is likely the economy would see further growth as the budget cycle continues, which could provide additional money to put toward transportation.

Walker emphasized that even if nothing is added, he will have put \$24 billion into transportation over eight years, which he said is \$3 billion more than what former Dem Gov. Jim Doyle spent in his eight years in office.

“Anyone who says we’re selling transportation short isn’t looking at the numbers,” Walker said.

Walker said workforce development, education and not raising taxes are priorities in the budget. He said he is open to working with lawmakers on changes in some areas, but on his priorities he will speak out.