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Dept. of Public Instruction: Budget proposal provides support kids deserve

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Wisconsin Public Education Network partners around the state have high praise and appreciation for the 2021-2023 budget proposal submitted by Superintendent of Public Instruction Carolyn Stanford Taylor to Governor Evers this week. From north to south, urban, rural and suburban parents, advocates, board members, and administrators praised the budget for responding directly to the immediate needs Wisconsin's students face at this challenging time.

"This is the leadership students need," said Milwaukee Public Schools board member Megan O'Halloran. "Sadly, too many children across this state have paid the price for years of divestment from urban and rural communities. We are called, as leaders, to directly address their needs to reduce these barriers to academic success and fulfilling careers."

Steve Murley, Superintendent of the Green Bay Area Public Schools, noted that "The Department of Public Instruction's 2020-21 proposed budget provides significant increases in funding in areas of need that would best support Green Bay Area Public School District students. In addition, the budget's proposed $150 per pupil funding for students in poverty is needed to continue the District's efforts to close the "opportunity gap" and provide greater equity. We encourage our legislators to give serious consideration of this budget, as additional resources are needed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19."

"During my ten years as a board member I witnessed firsthand the increasing

special education and mental health needs of our students," said Casey Judd, Board President, Whitewater Unified School District. "The budget proposed by the Department of Public Instruction for 2021-23 honors the state commitment to fund 60% of special education and increases support for mental health services in schools, without increasing local property tax. I welcome increased state support for special education and mental health so we can better address the needs of all our Whitewater students."

Madison Public Schools board member Savion Castro emphasized the budget's commitment to equity and meeting the state's commitment to ⅔ funding of public schools: "With students at the center, State Superintendent Stanford Taylor's proposed budget will allow districts to make the investments and strategies they need to move toward equity for all students in Wisconsin. Compensating districts at two-thirds and fully reimbursing full-day 4K will allow us better serve students at those critical early years of learning."

Advocates for equity in school funding noted the urgency in providing a sound budget that will help districts reach students after the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and widened gaps and created new expenses and challenges for public schools.

"COVID robbed students of learning opportunities and made achievement gaps worse," said recently retired superintendent Jim Shaw. "Our kids with special education needs, with mental health needs, ELL kids, and our youngest and poorest are the most vulnerable, but COVID hurt all kids. There is hope. There will be a vaccine. We will beat COVID. The budget proposed for 2021-23 by State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor is a thoughtful plan of hope and recovery, a plan to fund special education, to increase mental health services, and support economically disadvantaged kids statewide. Let's do it. Let's give our kids the opportunities they need to beat COVID."

"In the School District of Cambridge we face significant budget challenges,especially as they relate to meeting the growing mental health needs of our students and in special education," added Bernie Nikolay, Cambridge Superintendent. "If passed, the DPI Budget would address the shortcomings in

these two areas that we have endured for many years. In addition, the pandemic has led to significant increases in costs in many areas, including staffing and needed technology purchases to build a virtual learning program. If adopted, this budget proposal will help us recover from the costs associated with the pandemic."

"As we navigate during these unprecedented times, the fissures in our public education funding have become even more apparent," said Dr. Christina Kintop, Vice President of the Superior School Board. "This is a chance to recalibrate our system towards equity, we must not simply ask to go back to normal but demand to go back to better. Our kids deserve it."

As school leaders praised the budget specifics, advocates urged Wisconsin leaders to do whatever it takes to make sure the budget they pass meets the needs of Wisconsin communities. "When we talk about community investment and how our collective dollars should be spent – this is the most worthy investment I can think of. A bold and necessary budget that meets the needs of children in our schools right now and sets a stage for predictable funding for all of our students and especially those with the most exceptional needs" adds Jenni Hofschulte, president of Parents for Public Schools-Milwaukee, and Wisconsin Public Education Network organizer.

Marcia Engen, retired Appleton educator, adds "Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education is excited to support the proposed DPI budget because it meets the immediate needs of all kids in our public schools. Let's get it done!"