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Sen. Smith: We must act immediately on pandemic school stability package

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 21, 2020

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MADISON – Today, Senator Jeff Smith (D – Brunswick) renewed calls for the Legislature to pass the Pandemic School Stability Package in light of recent data released by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This data exhibits school year differences in pupil headcounts, impacting school district revenue limits, which implies school districts are at greater risk of school funding cuts.

On October 15th, DPI released the fall student count data and revenue limit information, indicating a 1.35% reduction in student headcounts for Wisconsin public schools between 2019 and 2020. Eighteen of the twenty-two school districts within the 31st Senate District saw a decrease in student counts between school years. This data is critical in understanding school funding in Wisconsin. According to DPI, "School district membership data are used to determine revenue limits, which, in combination with the general school aids certified today, determine school boards' maximum property tax levies."

Senator Jeff Smith, Senator Chris Larson (D – Milwaukee) and their Democratic Assembly colleagues introduced the Pandemic School Stability Package on October 6, 2020 to fix the broken school funding formula in preparation for this data which shows the pandemic's impact on Wisconsin public schools. The two bills within this package would modify the current school funding formula to help schools adapt to the financial ramifications of the pandemic while providing additional statutory

flexibility for teachers and school administrators.

“We all knew schools were going to be facing lower counts this fall, but Republicans continue to stick their heads in the sand hoping the pandemic goes away,” said Senator Jeff Smith. “It’s been six months and we still haven’t seen a plan from legislative Republicans to address school funding, fix the unemployment crisis or take this global pandemic seriously. Schools cannot do their job if Republicans are unwilling to do theirs.

“Rural schools have been the hardest hit during this public health crisis. The flawed funding formula already disproportionately affects rural schools, so it’s no surprise that COVID-19 would magnify the unfair system. We must act immediately by passing the Pandemic School Stability Package to help schools through this crisis and we have to get serious about creating a more sustainable school funding formula.

“Governor Evers attempted to fix this broken school funding system within the budget, but was ultimately rejected by Republicans. This is another chance for Republicans to back a commonsense plan to fix an outdated funding system and support our schools in every corner of the state.”