

Wisconsin Budget Project: A decade after historic cuts, Wisconsin still hasn't fully restored state aid for public school districts

Posted on Thursday, Jan 30, 2020

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Despite recent increases, Wisconsin's public K-12 school districts still receive less in state aid than they did a decade ago, prior to historic cuts to education, a new analysis from the Wisconsin Budget Project shows.

The analysis shows that in 2021, the state will invest less in public school districts than it did in 2011, something that was true of every year in between as well. In 2021, Wisconsin school districts will receive \$75 million less in state aid than in 2011 in inflation-adjusted dollars, or 1.2% less than in 2011. Over time, the budget cuts to public school districts have accumulated. Between 2012 and 2021, the state provided \$3.9 billion less in state aid to school districts than it would have if state aid had been kept at 2011 levels.

The analysis focuses solely on changes in state aid to public school districts, and excludes local property tax revenue as well as state aid that is withheld or deducted from school districts to pay for parental choice programs and charter schools not associated with school districts.

"For Wisconsin to have a well-educated and skilled workforce, we need to invest resources to make sure that every student has access to an excellent public education," said Tamarine Cornelius, an analyst at the Wisconsin Budget Project. "Wisconsin residents understand the value that excellent public schools bring to students, families, and communities."

One reason state aid for school districts has not been restored is that state lawmakers have allocated an increasing amount of resources to tax cuts. State lawmakers have enacted dozens of new tax cuts since 2011, with the revenue loss climbing to more than \$2 billion this year alone. One new tax cut passed during this period – the Manufacturing Credit – which results in manufacturers paying virtually no state income tax, reduced state revenue \$283 million in 2019. To put that amount in context, it is more state money than the school districts of Waukesha, Appleton, and Madison got that year, put together.

“Wisconsin needs to make sure that students from across the state, and particularly those in communities furthest from opportunity, have equitable access to academic and educational resources,” said Cornelius. “To achieve that goal, the state needs to provide additional resources in areas in which costs continue to rise, particularly in special education services and services to students who are learning English.”

Full report: A Decade After Historic Cuts, Wisconsin Still Hasn't Fully Restored State Aid for
Public School Districts