

Gallagher, delegation: Call on Evers to provide transparency on how school districts spend billions in pandemic funds

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Rep. Mike Gallagher (WI-08) this week led members of Wisconsin’s Congressional delegation in calling on Governor Tony Evers to increase transparency for how school districts are using the \$2.4 billion Wisconsin received from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) to minimize the learning gap after the pandemic. While ESSER was intended to provide schools with additional resources to help students catch up academically, overly broad guidelines were put in place regarding how schools should spend this money, which resulted in some school districts using these dollars as a slush fund to fund projects unrelated to student learning.

The letter, which was also signed by Reps. Glenn Grothman (WI-05), Bryan Steil (WI-01), and Tom Tiffany (WI-07), urges the Governor to work with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to create a public database so parents can see how school districts are spending ESSER dollars and whether these funds are being dedicated towards their intended purpose.

In part, the lawmakers write, “In the months ahead, as the scale of the learning loss faced by Wisconsin students becomes clear, Wisconsinites deserve to know how their government and school leaders are utilizing resources available to support their children. While smart investments could help get our students back on track, inefficient use of these resources could further set back hundreds of thousands of students, particularly when it comes to some of our most vulnerable populations.”

You can read the full text of the letter [HERE](#) or find it below:

Dear Governor Evers:

The past year and a half have been challenging for families, teachers, and school district officials. Closed schools have led to spiking student failure and set back students statewide. While we recognize the benefit of steps to provide more instruction to students through additional summer school we also ask that you provide Wisconsin's parents information so they can see how their school districts are spending federal relief dollars to ensure these losses are not permanent. Through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), Wisconsin has received an unprecedented \$2.4 billion in federal funding. While these dollars were intended to provide schools with emergency support in light of the pandemic, some districts are treating these funds like a lottery windfall instead. Milwaukee Public Schools, for example, has proposed spending more on carpet and locker replacement than on direct academic services like tutoring and extended school time. After a year of lost academic opportunities from remote learning, families deserve to know how schools will make up for time lost in the classroom. In order to promote transparency and accountability, we ask that your office and the Department of Public Instruction create a publicly accessible database showing each school district's ESSER budget. Much of this information should already be available to state officials by way of the budgets that districts submit online to WISEgrants. To ease accessibility, the new database should group line items into three categories: academic progress, physical and mental health, and facilities. The database should be intuitive, searchable, and accessible in multiple languages. In the months ahead, as the scale of the learning loss faced by Wisconsin students becomes clear, Wisconsinites deserve to know how their government and school leaders are utilizing resources available to support their children. While smart investments could help get our students back on track, inefficient use of these resources could further set back hundreds of thousands of students, particularly when it comes to some of our most vulnerable populations. We ask that you support full transparency so that families can demand more from their schools.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mike Gallagher

Rep. Glenn Grothman

Rep. Bryan Steil

Rep. Tom Tiffany