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Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance: Joint Finance Committee failed to lead and invest in children

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OCONOMOWOC — Terri Phillips, Executive Director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance, has released the following statement on the state budget action affecting K-12 education that the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee took last Thursday:

“Late last week, the Joint Finance Committee chose property tax relief and tax cuts over investing in opportunities for children whose lives have been upended by a global pandemic. With close to $6 billion in anticipated revenue over the next biennium, the JFC had “A Golden Opportunity for Wisconsin”, according to the non-partisan Wisconsin Policy Forum. Committee members decided not to embrace the opportunity to invest in children and Wisconsin’s future workforce, but rather provide an enormous tax cut.

The final JFC motion does not put one penny into the classroom to meet the needs of our children. It was simply a shell game the committee used after previous action jeopardized one-time federal COVID-19 relief funding for our schools.

Federal relief dollars are specifically targeted for COVID-19 mitigation measures and programs to support learning disruption. It is the responsibility of Wisconsin lawmakers to ensure public schools have appropriate funds to support day-to-day operational expenses. If a hail storm damages your roof, the insurance company does not reimburse you to pay your mortgage—it only provides money to fix your roof.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that all school districts did not receive

the same amount of COVID-19 relief funding. Some districts received significantly less money than others, creating financial hardships for them and limiting support and opportunities for their students.

For the past 15 months, education leaders have had to make difficult decisions time and again to meet the needs of their students and communities. They have fiercely advocated for relief and support from state lawmakers to assist them during these difficult months.

Politicians have been Monday morning quarterbacking throughout the pandemic, leaving school leaders stranded. Now, with a once-in-a-lifetime fiscal opportunity in front of them, the JFC literally has stepped aside, spiked the ball and left the game.

We are extremely disappointed that the JFC has failed to lead and invest in children and the future workforce in Wisconsin at a time when funding is available and children and families are still recovering from a global pandemic.”