

Wisconsin Association of School Boards: State budget committee secures federal education funding, minimizes state dollars going to the classroom

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Wisconsin Association of School Boards Executive Director John Ashley issued the following statement in reaction to the state education budget proposal passed yesterday by the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee:

We commend lawmakers on the budget-writing committee for making the investments necessary for the state to qualify for the latest round of federal COVID relief dollars.

We also commend the committee for retaining the previously approved increases in resources for special education and mental health grants, which will be helpful to school districts across the state, as well as additional assistance for rural schools.

However, we are deeply disappointed that the committee went to extraordinary lengths to minimize the state investment needed to qualify for the federal relief dollars and opted to not increase revenue limits for school districts by even the rate of inflation. This is particularly concerning given that lawmakers have a nearly \$6 billion surplus to invest in our state's priorities. Our children's future should be at the top of the list.

Although lawmakers did increase general aids for school districts, doing so without a corresponding increase in revenue limits means that it is an increase for education in name only. Rather than districts being able to use those dollars for

students, they will merely be changing the source of their funding.

The one-time federal relief funding, while substantial for many districts, is temporary. If this state budget is signed into law as is, schools will once again be denied sustainability and predictability in setting their budgets to fund normal, ongoing school operations.

We call on state lawmakers to prioritize our students' needs. There are sufficient state funds to both provide meaningful tax relief and invest in our children.

School districts are expected to make cuts when the state is facing a deficit. They should not also be expected to make cuts when the state has a significant surplus.

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards is a nonprofit association that provides information and services to Wisconsin school boards in the areas of school law and policymaking, bargaining, legislation and leadership development.