

# WisDems: GOP wants schools to do more with less

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(MADISON) — Democratic Party of Wisconsin Chair Ben Wikler today released the following statement in response to Republicans in the state legislature calling for withholding funding to some of the Wisconsin schools hit hardest by the pandemic:

*“Our schools are facing more and more challenges, yet Republicans want the hardest-hit schools to make do with even less. Safely reopening schools should be a priority for all, but this hypocritical GOP approach would punish the very schools with the greatest safety concerns. Budgets are a reflection of values, and this stunt from Republican legislators makes clear they continue to value political games over our kids and teachers.”*

## **Then and Now: WI Republicans Change Their Tune On Local Decision Making**

*After months of demanding a “regional approach” to managing the COVID-19 pandemic, Wisconsin Republicans now want to punish school districts for making their own decisions about how to return to in-person instruction. The about-face is proof that for them, this has never been about kids or education, it’s all about politics. Here are some highlights of what Republican legislators have said over the last year:*

- **Republicans Insisted For Months That Districts Make Their Own Decisions About In-Person Education.**

**Scott Fitzgerald, May 2020: “There’s A Uniqueness In Certainly A District That Has 1800 Kids Versus Something In Northern Wisconsin Who Has 120 Kids. I Mean, The Difference Is Dramatic. So There’s Not, Again, There’s No**

**One Size Fits All When It Comes To These Decisions.”** MCKENNA: [00:17:48] “Is there any way to force this, that’s the question, and I think the answer’s probably no. I mean what is, what can the Legislature do to force the play? Can you draft legislation, at the very least, dare him to veto legislation that is, you know, a plan to reopen Wisconsin’s schools, which parents would appreciate right about now?” FITZGERALD: [00:18:06] “Well, Wisconsin School Board Association are the ones right now who, that are consulting with the school boards of the state, saying, we need the parameters so that school boards can act. And the school boards are ready to go. I think they are ready to implement some type of plan. And it’s going to — there’s a uniqueness in certainly a district that has 1800 kids versus something in northern Wisconsin who has 120 kids. I mean, the difference is dramatic. So there’s not, again, there’s no one size fits all when it comes to these decisions. And, you know, it’s everything from food service to transportation, to — you know — whether or not they’re going to conduct athletics en masse or not. There’s ton of — there’s a slew of them, I think it would be really difficult for the legislature or anyone else, like I said, to just say, okay, here’s the plan moving forward. I think those decisions are going to be made at the local level.” [Vicki McKenna Show, WIBA, 5/21/20]

**Scott Fitzgerald, August 2020: “There’s A Number Of Districts That I Think Did It Right. They’re Fully Allowing Kids To Come Back In Person Five Days A Week. And Then, If You’re Uncomfortable With That, Then You’re Online. I Think That’s The Way To Handle It.”** SCOTT FITZGERALD: [00:04:54] “Yeah, I think the one other group I’ll just mention real quick is, there’s a number of districts that I think did it right. They’re fully allowing kids to come back in person five days a week. And then, if you’re uncomfortable with that, then you’re online. I think that’s the way to handle it. I think a lot of people were comfortable with that.” [Vicki McKenna Show, WIBA, 8/3/20]

- **Since The Beginning Of The Pandemic, Republicans Have Insisted On A “Regional Approach” To COVID Instead Of “One-Size-Fits-All” Mandates.**

**Sen. Duey Stroebel, April 2020: “One Size Fits All Does Not Work.”** WEBER: [01:00:45] “Another — you know, the one-size-fits-all thing was, was a reaction to unknown. Well now we have a much better grasp, better handle on what we’re really dealing with. We’re going to have very quickly, you know, new advances not only on testing but on treatment. And another simple reality that, to me, hasn’t been addressed, is that most of Wisconsin is rural, it’s smaller towns, it’s wider spaces. It’s less populous. Lotta of Wisconsin is suburban. We could certainly start

reopening regions of the state's economy, couldn't we?" STROEBEL: "No question. That is something I'm focused on. One size fits all does not work. You look at areas of the state, I mean, you can draw a circle within a hundred miles and you're really not going to find anything there. And if I was from that area, boy, I would be incredibly frustrated with what's going on here. You know, yes, we have our spots, hotspots. You know: Dane County, Milwaukee. And we have our demographic groups, you know, who have a greater propensity to be impacted certainly by this bug, this pandemic. And I think that's where we need to start to adjust our lives, to look at that in terms, you know, being more targeted in our approach on this issue here. We certainly don't need crush our economy like we're doing right now. It's just, it's a waste of time right now this process that we're under at this point in time." [Jay Weber Show, WISN, 4/16/20]

**Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, April 2020: "We Do Think That A Regional Approach Makes More Sense, Where A Vast Majority Of The State Doesn't Have Major, Major Issues With This Virus, And They Should Be Allowed To Start To Open Up."** QUESTION: [00:00:55] "Now, Republican leaders we know are suing to block the governor's restrictions. If successful, is there a plan to replace the governor's with?" STEINEKE: [00:01:04] "Yeah, I mean, really what we're doing is trying to force bipartisan compromise on this. The lawsuit specifically asks the Supreme Court, if we are successful, and they rule in our favor, to stay the ruling to give us enough time to work with the administration to implement a different plan than what the governor has. We're not saying that the safer-at-home should go away completely tomorrow and Wisconsin should open wide up. But we are saying we think that there's a different way that the governor can go. We certainly don't think he should exceed his authority and try to continue to act unilaterally. And we do think that a regional approach makes more sense, where a vast majority of the state doesn't have major, major issues with this virus, and they should be allowed to start to open up." [Morning News, WTAQ, 4/24/20]

**Speaker Robin Vos, April 2020: "Sometimes People Who Live Inside A Bubble Of The Capital In Madison, Don't Appreciate The Fact That For An Awful Lot Of Wisconsin, There Is Very Limited COVID cases. [...] I Mean We've Also Got To Have The Potential For Some Sort Of Regional Approach."** VOS: [...] "We actually made it so if you get tested for COVID-19, you don't have a copayment or deductible because we want more people to be tested, so we can show that this virus, especially for most of Wisconsin, Jay - and that's the other thing I think sometimes people who live inside a bubble of the capital in

Madison, don't appreciate the fact that for an awful lot of Wisconsin, there is very limited COVID cases. And that is fantastic. But we are putting the same restrictions on a couple who lives in rural Wisconsin, that goes to, you know, one grocery store and one gas station, as someone who lives in downtown Milwaukee. I mean we've also got to have the potential for some sort of regional approach. Other states have looked at that. [00:42:34] That've been successful. So, again, somebody who gets to act like the king in Madison and issue dictates that nobody really gets input into, and then all of us are just supposed to bow down and salute. We have to have an opportunity for us to have the conversation to say, a one-size-fits-all certainly was not what was envisioned in the statutes when we gave this ability for the Department of Health secretary to contain a pandemic. And it certainly wasn't envisioned by the people who wrote our Constitution." [Jay Weber Show, WISN, 4/17/20]

**Former JFC Co-Chair John Nygren, May 2020: "I Always Was A Believer In That [We] Should've Probably Taken A More Regional Approach Because We Had Parts Of The State That Had Zero Cases."** EARL BROOKER:

[00:07:04] "We're speaking this morning with State Representative John Nygren. The state has opened up back up, certainly not completely, not back up to 100 percent and roaring yet. But your thoughts on that partial opening and the status of where we are with COVID 19?" NYGREN: [00:07:20] "You know, I'm - I always was a believer in that should've probably taken more a regional approach because we had parts of the state that had zero cases. I remember the idea was to flatten the curve. And we did that. We did a good job of flattening the curve. We didn't see those huge spikes. And because of the - the flattening the curve, the health care system, the idea was to have the health care system be able to be prepared for it." [Morning News, WTAQ, 5/26/20]

**Rep. Gundrum On Mask Requirement: "I Have Always, And Will Continue To Support Local Governments And Their Efforts To Doing What Is Best For Their Communities As Opposed To The Evers' One-Size-Fits-All Approach."**

"While we need to take responsible steps to protect the health of Wisconsinites, a statewide mask mandate with a \$200 penalty during these times of economic hardship is not the answer. Local governments across the state have responded appropriately with decisions they feel are in the best interest of their unique populations. I have always, and will continue to support local governments and their efforts to doing what is best for their communities as opposed to the Evers' one-size-fits-all approach. I do not support this mandate." [Press Release, Rep. Rick

Gundrum, 7/30/20]

**Rep. Rob Brooks: “Wisconsin Does Not Need A Statewide, One-Size-Fits All Approach To Combat COVID-19.”** “Wisconsin does not need a statewide, one-size-fits all approach to combat COVID-19. I have full confidence that our local governments and health departments are able to address each community’s individual needs and respond accordingly. The need for local control and discretion has never been more evident than after today’s directive.” [Press Release, Rep. Rob Brooks, 7/30/20]

**Speaker Vos On Mask Requirement: “Local Governments Have Been Responding Appropriately And Increasing Precautionary Measures As Needed. But Wisconsin Shouldn’t Have A One-Size-Fits-All Mandate.”** “I understand the necessity of doing all that we can to control the spread of COVID-19. We all know it’s serious. People have lost loved ones, businesses are struggling to survive and this ‘new normal’ for families is stressful and exhausting. ‘Local governments have been responding appropriately and increasing precautionary measures as needed. But Wisconsin shouldn’t have a one-size-fits-all mandate. It doesn’t build public support when there are questions surrounding the metrics and the constitutionality of this mandate.” [Speaker Vos, Press Release, 7/30/20]

**Sen. Van Wanggaard: “You Can’t Legislate Common Sense. For That Reason, I Continue To Strongly Oppose The One-Size Fits All Approach Of Governor Evers’ Response To Coronavirus In This State, Including The Statewide Mask Mandate.”** “You can’t legislate common sense. For that reason, I continue to strongly oppose the one-size fits all approach of Governor Evers’ response to coronavirus in this state, including the statewide mask mandate. It’s transparent and blatantly political that his order doesn’t take effect until his handpicked Supreme Court justice take office” [Press Release, Sen. Van Wanggaard, 7/30/20]

**Sen. Chris Kapenga: “[...] We Keep Saying, A Regional Approach Is Absolutely The Way To Go So We Can Focus In On An Area But Not Impact The Lives [...]”**FANNON: [00:07:02] “You kind of talked about having a Republican – you know, a seat at the table. Wanting to talk to the governor about this. And Republicans often criticize how the governor and the DHS secretary are responding to this pandemic. I heard early on in this pandemic, from GOP leadership, that they have a plan. So do you know what that plan is? Do you have a plan to address this pandemic?” KAPENGA: [00:07:21] “Well, we actually had a plan put in place. I

helped designed the WMC plan, if you go look at that, where we said, hey, let's look on a regional basis, let's look at where the risks are, and make sure we have a plan in - very clear plan, it was defined by percentages and what course of action was going to be taken on if we have to restrict things in society, as far as the number of people. It was a very clear plan and the governor would not have that discussion at all. The governor wants to do a broad-based, you know, everybody in the state has to be locked down and we keep saying, a regional approach is absolutely the way to go so we can focus in on an area but not impact the lives, because everybody knows, this has significant negative impacts on people when you lock a state down." [Capital City Sunday, WKOW, 10/11/20]