

School Administrators Alliance: Statement on State Superintendent Underly's 2023-25 budget request

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MADISON — The School Administrators Alliance issued the following statement in response to State Superintendent Underly's 2023-25 budget request:

The School Administrators Alliance joins education advocates from across the state in applauding State Superintendent Underly's commitment to robust investments in Wisconsin public education. This 2023-25 budget request makes critical increases in spendable resources, promotes the financial stability necessary for Wisconsin schools to meet all children's needs, and puts our state on the right path to strengthening our economic future.

Quality PK-12 education helps students prepare for an increasingly competitive labor market and powers the development of our state's future workforce. Indeed, properly funding PK-12 education is an investment in our state's most important economic driver.

School districts are facing enormous challenges related to attracting and retaining staff, as well as rising inflation in costs involving utilities, transportation, insurance and other operational areas. Of particular concern has been the lack of general state spending authority to address critical shortages of teachers, substitute teachers, bus drivers and support staff.

As part of the current state budget, districts were forced to rely on one-time federal funding to pay for ongoing operations to support students. We all know that using one-time funds for ongoing fiscal obligations is simply not sound practice.

In many respects, Dr Underly's budget request is a "recovery plan" for the needs of Wisconsin's 825,000 public school children. Consider the following:

- According to the US Census Bureau, in 2002, Wisconsin per-pupil spending ranked 11th highest in the nation—11 percent above the national average. By 2020, Wisconsin per-pupil spending had fallen to 25th in the nation. That's 5.6 percent below the national average.
- An April 2022 memo from the nonpartisan Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau revealed that, on a cumulative basis, state per-pupil funding for public schools has lagged the rate of inflation by a total of \$3.16 billion over the last 15 years.
- Policymakers have highlighted the \$685 million "investment" in K-12 education made in the 2021-23 biennial budget. However, only a fraction (\$128 million) of that investment could be spent to meet the needs of all public school children in the state. The remainder of the funding simply flowed to taxpayers as property tax relief.

Lawmakers in other states have advanced education funding increases to help their schools manage the impact of inflation and staff shortages. Years of underfunding education in Wisconsin has left our children at a disadvantage compared to those in other states. With a projected budget surplus in excess of \$5 billion, Wisconsin lawmakers clearly have the fiscal wherewithal to support our communities and help schools meet these challenges.

We anticipate that some policymakers, political candidates and others will find fault with Dr. Underly's budget request. If so, only one question remains: What is your recovery plan and how can we work together to meet the needs of Wisconsin's school children?