

Sen. Hesselbein: Gov. Evers Shows there is a way to support schools, taxpayers

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Governor Evers this week proposed \$2.6 Billion for public schools that are the foundations of our communities. Unfortunately, many of my legislative Republican colleagues were quick to call that number “too large.”

As the Governor noted, and independent revenue estimates show, we do have to be prudent and save where we can, but we have to bear in mind our responsibilities. In the weeks ahead when you hear some of my Republican colleagues say that Governor Evers’ proposals to have the state live up to our obligations are too large, remember that what they are saying is they expect YOU to pick up the tab.

Since deep and lasting cuts to public schools enacted in 2011, local taxpayers – our friends and neighbors in school districts large and small across Wisconsin – have had to raise our own property taxes by more than \$3.4 Billion in non-debt referenda.

That’s 31% more than what Governor Evers’ proposed. And with \$441 million more pending in referenda this year alone, that trend is likely to continue unless my Republican colleagues work with the Governor to truly invest in middle-class tax savings and support for our public schools.

What does the Governor propose for our schools? Let’s break it down.

Over \$1 Billion of the Governor Evers’ proposal would reimburse our public schools for the cost of special education. These are absolutely vital – and state & federally-mandated – services that our schools have to provide. In return for those mandated

services, the state currently reimburses just over 30% of the cost. The rest falls on property taxpayers and cuts to the rest of school budgets. Governor Evers' plan would bring that reimbursement rate to 60%.

Too large? Tell that to the educators providing the services and the property taxpayers picking up the bill.

Another \$1 billion of Governor Evers' proposal would go into general school aid. Under the state's revenue cap system, general aid is designed to equalize the cost to property taxpayers – who already bear too much of the burden to pay for public education. In short, general aid reduces property taxes.

That's why Governor Evers' proposal, which includes long-awaited and much-needed relief from state-imposed revenue caps, would result in less than 1% in property taxes. (And it's worth noting when discussing local revenue caps that the state has no cap on its revenue – which is why we can have a record surplus – a surplus that the Governor would largely return to support our schools, our public safety professionals, our roads and economic development.)

Meanwhile, recent data from the Department of Public Instruction shows where the cuts have hit – in the classroom. Our hard-working educators have seen their compensation fall 15.4% over the last decade. Sadly, it's the 800,000+ schoolchildren that have borne the brunt – with significant drops in teacher experience, especially when measured in current school districts.

Governor Evers' proposal has important proposals to reverse this trend by encouraging more of our best and brightest to seek education as a career, and providing much needed tools for our districts to retain teachers. Additional data from DPI shows a significant drop in teacher retention, with less than 50% of new teachers still in their district after 5 years and less than 40% in the same school.

Importantly, this budget is an opportunity to stop shirking the responsibilities of the Legislature to use revenues we are allowed to amass to relieve the burden on our educators and the property taxpayers who are asked to bear too much of the cost.

The Governor has shown the way to support our public schools. The question going forward, do my Republican colleagues have the will?