

WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK RK

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“Profoundly Disappointed” in K-12 Budget

Wisconsin Public Education Network executive director Heather DuBois Bourenane and members of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools board released the following statement today after Governor Tony Evers signed the 2019-2021 state budget into law:

Governor Evers’ refusal to use our kids as pawns in a prolonged budget battle is a refreshing departure from the willingness of state legislators to hold them hostage during budget negotiations. We are nonetheless disappointed by the partisanship and rancor of this moment and we are embarrassed for a legislature that refuses to adequately support students with disabilities.

The misleading characterization of this budget as a “historic investment” is a dangerous falsehood. After a decade of funding below 2009 levels of state aid (inflation adjusted), this budget does not even get us back to “the old broken.” We agree with the Governor that we are “nowhere near where we need to be” and must continue to advocate for the schools our children deserve.

We are profoundly disappointed that the state has once again locked our children into two more years of a status quo that does not meet their needs and will force more districts into making hard decisions that will hurt children and adults alike. This budget leaves Wisconsin last in the nation in its support for English Language Learners, it shortchanges funding for the mental health needs of students in our schools and it does nothing to support students challenged by poverty in every part of the state.

Governor Evers put forward a budget that responded directly to the most immediate and pressing needs put forward by thousands of concerned parents, educators, administrators, board members, and community members who have spoken loudly and clearly over many years, and particularly throughout the public hearings of the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding and the state budget hearings of the Joint Committee on Finance.

That committee chose to disregard that testimony and the best interests of our children and whittled the education budget down to a skeleton that will barely support our schools for the next two years. It does not keep pace with inflation. It does not meet the much-touted $\frac{2}{3}$ funding commitment. It does not keep the promise Wisconsin owes to its children. It simply preserves a status quo that sells kids short.

We applaud the advocacy of countless grassroots teams, organizations, districts and individuals whose persistence and vigilance made possible the small gains we see in exposing the inequities in funding for students with disabilities, English language learners, rural students, and in addressing mental health needs. Without their strong voices, we likely would have seen little to no attention to these pressing concerns.

But it’s not enough. The Governor’s \$1.4 billion preK-12 proposal would have been a solid step toward funding fairness, but the whittled-down version of that proposal put forward by the legislature only pays lip service to meeting our most pressing needs. The state does not meet its obligation to its children with this budget, and the burden will once again be passed onto local taxpayers, some of whom may not be able to sustain the cost, as funding by referenda has proved a costly and inequitable “solution” to a state-imposed crisis.

Just last night, the district of Palmyra-Eagle voted to dissolve due to financial insolvency. Our concern is with the fate of these children, and the willingness of the state to play fast and loose with the fate of all our public schools. It’s time to hold our lawmakers accountable for their education votes. We intend to do so.

Signed:

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Julie Underwood, President, Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools

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