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JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Members, Joint Finance Committee, Wisconsin State Legislature
FROM: Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB)
Dan Rossmiller & Chris Kulow, WASB Government Relations
DATE: May 2021
RE: WASB Budget Positions

On behalf of Wisconsin's 421 locally elected public school boards, the WASB appreciates this opportunity to share our perspective and positions regarding the proposed 2021-23 State Budget. The WASB's positions are determined by resolutions voted on and approved by school board members statewide.

The WASB has four main budget priorities:

1. Secure an increase in spendable resources for school districts that, at a minimum, equals or is greater than the rate of inflation in each year of the two-year state budget;
2. Secure a significant increase in special education categorical aid;
3. Secure a significant increase in resources for school-based mental health services to students (and staff); and
4. Secure an adjustment to the rolling three-year membership average to mitigate the effects of the drop in student membership counts caused by the pandemic. That enrollment drop negatively impacts both school districts' revenue limit calculations and per pupil aid allocations.

The WASB holds the following positions on specific items listed in the order they appear in the LFB Summary of Governor's Budget Recommendations ([by Agency – Public Instruction](#)):

General School Aids and Revenue Limits

GENERAL SCHOOL AID BASE FUNDING INCREASE (Item #2, Page 460) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports an increase in spendable resources for school districts that at least matches inflation and supports a return to two-thirds state funding. (WASB Resolutions 2.19, 2.20 (s))*

BUYBACK OF CURRENT LAW GENERAL SCHOOL AID PAYMENT DELAY (Item #3, Page 460) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports all school aid payments being made in the same fiscal year to which they apply. (2.20 (l))*

SPECIAL ADJUSTMENT AID (Item #4, Page 460) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports adjusting the aid formula so that school districts whose property values are rising well above the state average will not lose state aid as a result of property value increases. (2.20 (m))*

This change would not require any additional state expenditures but reflects a redistribution of aid within the formula. The change would primarily benefit school districts that are falling out of the general equalization aid formula because their per pupil property values are much higher than average. It will more gradually phase these districts out of the formula by reducing the annual percentage reduction in state aid to those districts. The phenomenon of falling out of the aid formula can be caused by rising property values, declining enrollment, or both.

TWO-THIRDS FUNDING OF PARTIAL SCHOOL REVENUES (Item #5, Page 461)

SUPPORT. *The WASB supports restoring a statutory commitment to fund two-thirds of school costs each year. (2.20 (s))*

REVENUE LIMIT PER PUPIL ADJUSTMENT (Item #6, Page 462) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports providing predictable increases in available, spendable school district revenues to at least match inflationary increases in school costs. (2.19)*

LOW REVENUE ADJUSTMENT (Item #7, Page 462) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB recommends that the low-revenue ceiling be increased to be equal to the prior year statewide average shared cost per member and be adjusted annually. (2.43)*

REVENUE LIMIT ENROLLMENT FOR THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR (Item #8, Page 463)

SUPPORT. *The WASB supports legislation to create a hold harmless exemption in district membership calculations used for revenue limits and per pupil categorical aid to mitigate the effects of enrollment fluctuations caused by extraordinary public health emergencies that disrupt large portions of the state. (2021-03) The WASB also supports allowing a school district to apply to the Department of Public Instruction for emergency aid or revenue flexibility. (2.41 (i))*

Categorical Aids

SPECIAL EDUCATION (Item #1, Page 464) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports increasing special education categorical aid with a goal to eventually reimburse 60% of prior year eligible costs. (2.31)*

HIGH COST SPECIAL EDUCATION AID (Item #2, Page 464) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports full state funding for children with high cost/low incidence disabilities, with the additional resources from increasing the current special education appropriation. (2.31(g))*

PER PUPIL AID (Item #5, Page 465) *The WASB supports providing predictable increases in available, spendable school district revenues to at least match inflationary increases in school district operating costs. (2.19) [See also REVENUE LIMIT PER PUPIL ADJUSTMENT (Item #6, Page 462), above.]*

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH AID (Item #8, Page 467) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports creating a categorical aid for school-based mental health services. Smaller districts complain that they lack the personnel and resources to effectively compete for competitive grants. (6.065)*

SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES COLLABORATION GRANT (Item #9, Page 468) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports the provision of state funding adequate to permit schools to enter into effective partnerships with agencies that are involved with mental health to provide for school-based mental health programs. (6.06)*

BILINGUAL BICULTURAL AID (Item #10, Page 469) **SUPPORT.** *The current aid system is inadequate and should be reworked. WASB supports providing categorical aid to support services for all EL pupils in grades 4K through 12. (2.06(a))*

ENERGY EFFICIENCY GRANTS (Item #13, Page 470) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports authorizing school districts to use all grants, loans and other financing methods allowed by law for energy conservation and renewable energy projects. (5.63) Eligibility requirements for state and federal grants and loans for energy conservation practices should not exclude or limit public school districts in favor of other public agencies, profit-making organizations, or individuals. Schools which have initiated energy conservation practices in the past should not be penalized in terms of eligibility for energy conservation programs. (5.61)*

SPARSITY AID (Item #14, Page 470) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports providing sparsity aid based on enrollment size and population density (students per square mile). If sparsity aid eligibility is expanded, we believe additional funding should be provided to maintain/fully fund sparsity aid payments to districts that are currently eligible. (2.16(a))*

SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS (Item #16, Page 471) **SUPPORT.** *The Legislature should meet its prior commitment and fully reimburse school districts for the statutory amount. WASB opposes legislative mandates affecting the delivery, content or conduct of education, programming, or support services unless they come with a legislative commitment to permanently fund 100 percent of the actual cost or can be implemented at no cost. (3.20)*

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION AID (Item #17, Page 471) **SUPPORT.** *This proposal addresses so-called “meal shaming” by providing funding to cover the cost of meals served to reduced-price-meal eligible children. The WASB opposes singling out or embarrassing school children who have unpaid school meal debts and also opposes state legislation mandating that schools provide a school meal to any student who requests one, unless the state provides funding to meet this mandate. (6.17)*

HIGH COST TRANSPORTATION AID (Item #18, Page 472) *The WASB supports providing funding mechanisms to assist school districts with per pupil transportation costs that exceed the statewide average. (2.40 (r)) We support a plan currently being developed by a number of GOP lawmakers who represent rural school districts.*

PUPIL TRANSPORTATION AID (Item #19, Page 472) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB supports periodic adjustments in pupil transportation aid amounts to maintain the relationship between the level of aids and the statewide average cost of providing transportation. (2.33)*

GRANTS TO REPLACE CERTAIN RACE-BASED NICKNAMES, LOGOS, MASCOTS, AND TEAM NAMES (Item #26, Page 475) **SUPPORT.** *The WASB encourages school boards and districts to identify imagery that may create a school environment that is not safe and welcoming to all students, regardless of their race, ancestry, or ethnicity, and to initiate discussions at the district level that would lead to the retirement of mascots, logos, imagery, practices or processes that may create a hostile, divisive or unwelcoming school environment. (Resolution 2021-10)*

Thank you for your consideration of this information. Please feel free to contact us at drossmiller@wasb.org or ckulow@wasb.org if you have any questions or need more information.