



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **June 18, 2021**

JFC Ignores Needs of Children, Adopts ‘School Funding in Name Only’

MADISON — John Forester, executive director of the School Administrators Alliance, has released the following statement on the state budget action affecting K-12 education that the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee took last night.

“Last night, the Joint Finance Committee had the opportunity to accomplish three things critically important for Wisconsin school children: 1) Satisfy the federal maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements and ensure that Wisconsin receives \$2.3 billion in one-time federal funding for schools, 2) reconsider its earlier budget action and allow schools to use these one-time federal funds for the intended purpose of addressing the significant post-pandemic needs of children and 3) provide schools with spendable state funding to support continuing school operations.

In baseball, getting one hit out of every three at bats is considered exemplary. But, in this case, the action or inaction of the committee’s Republican majority will adversely impact the educational opportunities afforded to Wisconsin school children in the 2021-23 biennium—and for years to come.

It does appear the JFC met its responsibility and technically satisfied the federal MOE requirements. However, its members violated the intent of the federal legislation by forcing school leaders to use the one-time federal funding (instead of state funds) to operate schools for the next two years. School leaders have developed detailed plans to address the impact of the COVID-19 learning disruptions. However, as they did on May 27, majority-party JFC members essentially said to school leaders: “Drop those plans in the circular file, reverse the intent of those federal COVID relief funds and use the federal money for school operations for the next two years.” It’s a total disregard for the post-pandemic needs of Wisconsin school children.

Republican committee members were able to satisfy the MOE requirements because the property tax cuts included in their tax cut plan also technically count as school spending. Yet, while they were congratulating themselves over their commitment of more than \$400 million to general state school aids and other measures to meet MOE, they knew full well that not one dollar of their “investment” could be used to purchase instructional materials for students, to heat and light school buildings or to transport students to and from school. By committing these dollars to general state school aids with no corresponding increase in revenue limits, it becomes “school funding in name only.” The funding simply flows to taxpayers as property tax relief. Schools cannot spend one dime of it on the educational needs of their students.

Lost in the GOP’s tax cut media show last night was the fact that the JFC approved just \$112.2 million in spendable funding increases for schools in its budget plan, far less than 10 percent of what Governor Tony Evers proposed in his executive budget. In essence, GOP members doubled down on their purposeful defunding of Wisconsin public schools. In addition to disregarding the need for increased general and spendable revenues for schools, majority JFC members supported a special education aid increase that is inadequate to support our most vulnerable learners. They also completely ignored the plight of the 78 percent of school districts facing the multi-year fiscal consequences of declining enrollment related to COVID-19 this school year.

From the beginning of this 2021-23 state budget process, we have attempted to raise awareness of two major policy challenges affecting Wisconsin school children. First, as the Wisconsin Policy Forum has pointed out, our state has fallen below the national average in per-pupil spending and has lagged behind the nation when it comes to K-12 spending increases for more than a

decade. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare long-festering inequities in our school finance system—inequities that disadvantage many of our students because of their zip codes and their significant educational needs.

Sadly, if the JFC budget action stands, Wisconsin’s per-pupil spending will likely continue its descent in the national rankings and our troubling school finance inequities will only get worse.

In the days and weeks to come, we will work with pro-education lawmakers of both parties, parents and community leaders in the fight to restore Wisconsin’s tradition of sound investments in and support for its public schools and students. We have always maintained that budgets are about choices. They are about priorities. Clearly, the 850,000 public school students in Wisconsin are not a priority in this budget.”

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The SAA is an alliance of the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA), Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO), Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA), Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators (WASPA) and Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS). It advocates on behalf of school leaders in their efforts to strengthen Wisconsin’s national leadership in education to ensure that the state’s children receive the highest-quality education possible.