For Immediate Release:

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WI ASSOCIATION FOR EQUITY IN FUNDING HIGHLIGHTS SHARED PRIORITIES FOR EDUCATION FUNDING REFORM

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We offer congratulations to Governor-Elect Crowley and all the newly elected and re-elected members of our state government. With their new majorities in state government, the first since Governor Doyle's last term, Democrats have a clear opportunity to realize equity in all aspects of our education system.

John Gaier, AEF's Board Chair said, "For over 30 years, hundreds of Wisconsin school districts have been held to a much lower level of funding than others. This unfair system harms students and stifles growth. It's well past time for change in our system of school funding."

The Thompson-era "Revenue Limit" law established a baseline for the amount school districts could raise from local property taxes combined with state aid. It was not based on student need or demographics, but rather on what districts happened to spend in 1993. No one knew it was coming and there was nothing they could do. It was promised to be a short-term fix, and yet this year, 128 school districts are limited to under $12,000/student while 33 districts get more than $15,000/student. One lucky district gets $25,599/student! We have documented the harm caused by these gross funding inequities for students who live in low-revenue rural, suburban, and urban districts across the state. Wisconsin needs to consider this problem the #1 priority for education funding reform.

Funding systems change should be based on three key elements:

1. AEF's "Raise the Floor" proposal would **increase the low revenue amount to $13,175 so that 90% of districts are funded within 10% of the base.** We have not advocated for taking money away from those lucky districts at the top. However, until the low revenue system is resolved, *it makes no sense to add more funding to other priorities*. Districts getting $15,000/student are much better positioned to cover underfunded mandates like special education. Funding based on a pupil count also perpetuates inequity. We must fix the revenue limit system first.

2. **Next, we encourage legislators to change the equalization aid system while providing adequate state aid to offset local property tax increases.** Referendums are made necessary when revenue limits don't keep up with inflation or other costs due to state and federal mandates. However, as districts pass referendums, it takes money from the pool of state aid that remains for districts that can't pass a referendum. Tens of thousands of students are left in schools with declining funding. Four years ago, the state made excellent progress when the low revenue amount was increased by $1000 and the budget provided enough state aid to largely offset the increases. One new source of funding for increases would be to stop sending hundreds of millions of dollars to nonresidents through the School Levy Tax Credit. An important element of stability for school districts would be for the state to commit to revenue limit increases that track inflation, as was the case for decades in the past.
3. **After the revenue limit and equalization aid systems are repaired, we advocate for weighted student funding.** Special education funding was a highlight issue in campaigns across the political spectrum in Wisconsin. Weighted student funding can better reflect the additional cost of educating students with disabilities, those from low-income homes, and those who are learning English.

The Wisconsin Association for Equity in Funding (WAEF) is a group of more than 70 Wisconsin school districts that seeks financial equity in the state system of school financing. Members include urban, suburban and rural schools, educating about 83,000 students across Wisconsin. The two issues that brought this group together have been the wide differences in the amount school districts have been able to invest in the education of their children (Revenue Limits) and the even wider differences in the property tax burden to pay for that investment.

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