



Appleton
Fox Cities
Wisconsin

July 6, 2010

Editorial: School funding reform gets needed push

Wisconsin's school funding formula is rife with disparities and holes. In essence, it doesn't work.

For instance, it inadvertently penalizes poor students in property-rich districts where people from other places have pricey vacation homes, while full-time residents are either just getting by or living below the poverty line. Districts like this — and there are about 20 of them — receive no state aid.

Tony Evers, the state superintendent of public instruction, isn't waiting for the Legislature or some state committee or task force to come up with a solution.

He's devised one himself. His plan, which he calls Fair Funding for our Future, aims to even out funding and provide districts with financial stability.

It's a long-overdue move for a state superintendent to take the lead on school funding. And it speaks both to our financial woes and the get-to-it attitude of the man who stepped into his role only last year.

In part, Evers is attempting to rearrange how the money in the school funding pot gets distributed. His plan would shift the focus away from a district's property values and allow for a set amount of aid per student, weighted for other factors, such as poverty.

It would take the \$900 million school levy tax credit from being a credit on property tax bill and give it directly to schools. However, with the extra money, schools would presumably need to levy less in property taxes.

Evers would mandate a minimum percentage increase in state funding for schools each year and would rework the categorical aids program to streamline them and connect them more to performance.

Evers and his staff plan to meet this summer with school districts and the business community regarding the reform measures. He will need to get their buy-in to move the program forward.

But he at least deserves credit for getting a conversation started that should have begun long ago. Let's hope it's the first step of many in reforming our broken system.
