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"Fair Funding" could provide millions in school funding

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LA CROSSE, Wisconsin (WXOW) -- State budget cuts are putting tremendous pressure on Wisconsin school districts.

A new proposal would change the way schools are funded, but its initial price tag may make it unrealistic in the current political climate.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction calls its plan "Fair Funding For Our Future."

It calls for spending increases of \$420 million at a time when the state is facing a \$2.7 billion budget deficit.

It's well known among educators that a change needs to be made to the current school funding formula.

The DPI introduces the "Fair Funding" plan, a proposal for funding schools.

"It is absolutely critical that the state provide those resources, because if it does not, we would estimate that taxes on a state-wide basis would probably go up in the eight or nine percent range each in the next two years," says Brian Pahnke, Asst. State Superintendent of Finance Management.

The La Crosse School District could see a nearly 9 percent jump in state aid with this plan.

That's \$3.8 million.

Equally as important to schools and taxpayers is that property taxes won't increase, and in fact, could go down overtime.

"When you can come up with a proposal that takes some of the pain away and yet supports the local schools, I think it's really a proposal that has some merit and deserves closer observation by our state legislature," says Superintendent Jerry Kember, La Crosse School District.

But the question for some legislators becomes, "Where do we get the money?"--as the state faces a multi-billion dollar deficit.

"Any plan is going to look good if you're throwing more money into the system. Almost any plan will look good. What we need to do is determine whether this would be a plan we would want to put in place if there was no new money. That's the first step we should be looking at," says Rep. Mike Huebsch, (R) West Salem.

"This is really the smallest budget request the department has made in nearly a decade," Pahnke says.

Kember has heard ideas before but says this one is different.

"We aren't able to move on because we have winners and losers. With this particular proposal, there are only winners and people at the status quo, so they are not losers," Kember says.

The fate of this plan rests in the hands of Governor-elect Scott Walker, who will decide whether it should be a part of his budget proposal to the legislature.

The plan offers districts a level of certainty when budgeting for future years.

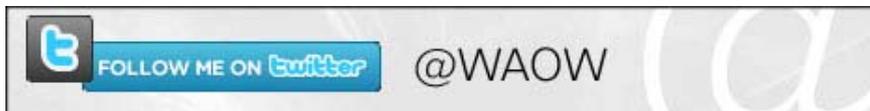
"Fair Funding" proposes a predictable increase of two percent in state aid, so schools can budget

for future years knowing that growth will be there.

Read more about the plan: <http://fairfundingforourfuture.org/>

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