

stevenspointjournal.com

Point school officials praise funding proposal

By Nicole Strittmater • Journal staff • November 19, 2010

All local school districts would receive an increase in state aid under a school funding formula unveiled this week.

State Superintendent Tony Evers' "Fair Funding for Our Future" plan, which must be approved as part of the 2011-13 state budget, would provide some relief to property tax payers by more evenly distributing state aid among districts and considering the local poverty rates.

The plan would ultimately increase the state's educational spending by \$420 million. While local school leaders are praising this idea, they know it's a tough sell to state officials working on the next biennial budget given the state's \$2.7 billion deficit.

"How long have we been trying to fix funding for schools? Politics is going to get in the way. So I'm not saying it's impossible, but yeah, it'll be a battle," Stevens Point Area Senior High Principal Mike Devine said.

But the plan has been well-received by Republican leaders.

"I am open to the ideas they are presenting, and I think many of the proposals they've brought forward have merit," said incoming budget committee co-chair Rep. Robin Vos, R-Caledonia. "Knowing how bad the budget situation is, I don't want to make any promises."

Republican Gov.-elect Scott Walker's spokesman Cullen Werwie applauded Evers for the idea, but said true funding reform means spending the money Wisconsin already has more wisely.

Tri-County Area School District administrator Anthony Marinack is happy with the plan. He says he especially likes the fact that, for the first time, the aid formula would consider poverty rates, not just local property wealth. Currently, 61 percent of students in the district are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Ultimately, the majority of the plan would be paid by redirecting \$900 million of the School Levy Tax

Credit that currently shows up on homeowners' bills as a property tax credit. It would be moved into the general state aid for schools.

None of the state's 424 districts would receive less aid under this plan, and 93 percent would see an increase. Districts that receive more state aid would lower their levies accordingly to stay within revenue limits, which remain in place.

That's where the catch is, Marinack said.

"Certainly it would help our property tax payers in the district, and that would be wonderful if this funding formula would go through. But without any changes in the revenue limit, (there are) no new dollars," he said.

Marinack said even with this plan, the district still would be looking at expenses over revenues and cutting programs to balance the budget.

Evers is requesting that public school districts receive a minimum of \$3,000 in general school aid for each student. School state aid is the largest expense in the state budget, accounting for more than 37 percent of the total. Aid automatically would increase at least 2 percent a year.

The plan also focuses \$20 million on competitive grants for districts to increase graduation and retention rates.

"I think it's an outstanding plan," Rosholt School District Administrator Marc Christianson said. "It's very difficult to ever come up with a totally perfect

Advertisement

GROUPON

55% OFF

The Daily Deal - Madison \$5 for a Half-Dozen Cupcakes at Sweet Impressions (\$11 Value)

GET DEAL AT:
www.PrintGroupon.com/501

Time Sensitive Offer

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

stevenspointjournal.com

plan. There's been a lot of attempts, a lot of different ideas. I think he's taken the best of a lot of them."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Fair Funding for Our Future

Total 2010-11 state support under current law and Tony Evers' Fair Funding proposal; percent increase in state aid

- Almond-Bancroft -- \$3.7 million; \$3.8 million; +4.8%
- Iola-Scandinavia -- \$4.7 million; \$5.2 million; +10.5%
- Rosholt -- \$4.2 million; \$4.5 million; +7.5%
- Stevens Point Area -- \$46.2 million; \$50.8 million; +9.9%
- Tomorrow River -- \$6.7 million; \$6.97 million; +3.9%
- Tri-County Area -- \$4.4 million; \$4.8 million; +8.5%

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot ✈️
 The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®
 Presented by: *Hampton*
SEE HOW IT WORKS >>

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™