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## Letter from Rep. Danou: Uncertainty surrounds Western Wisconsin schools

Schools are at the heart and center of our communities in Western Wisconsin.

By: **Rep. Chris Danou**, Pierce County Herald



Schools are at the heart and center of our communities in Western Wisconsin. This has been said many times by others before me and will continue to be said by many after as well. This past June, schools across Wisconsin witnessed historic and nation-leading cuts to school funding. As your state representative, I have made it a top priority to be your voice and to stand up for our schools. Recently, school superintendents from our community and across Wisconsin had an opportunity to make their voices heard.

This past June, schools across Wisconsin took a \$1.6 billion funding cut in the 2011-2013 budget. According to reports, Wisconsin took the single largest cut to school funding, even when compared to much larger states like New York and California. Under the current budget, Wisconsin is spending \$635 less per student whereas New York is spending \$585 less and California is spending \$484 less per student. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently sent out a survey and gave school superintendents a chance to weigh in on the deep budget cuts in their districts. Unfortunately, schools in Western Wisconsin took even bigger hits when compared to other schools districts across our state.

Aside from losing teachers and aides, schools are losing counselors, support staff, bus routes and extra-curricular activities such as sports. Almost nine in ten students attend a school that suffered a net staff reduction. One in five students attends a school where five or more programs experienced staff cuts. The program most likely to experience staff cuts was special education; followed by library/media centers. The cuts are drastic and greater than advertised when the state budget was passed by the legislative Majority Republicans last summer.

Schools provide our children with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Schools also serve as a gathering place for community activities; athletic events, dances, socials, public meetings, driver's education, hunter safety courses, etc. Schools touch everyone in our community, and most importantly, provide all of us with the opportunity to take pride in all that takes place in our community. I know we are trying to tighten our belts and live on fewer dollars at home in Western Wisconsin. However, making draconian cuts and taking away necessary funding for our schools threatens our identity as a rural community.

In her recent column, our State Senator Kathleen Vinehout mentioned that State Superintendent Tony Evers introduced a plan to revamp the school funding formula and developed task forces on teacher evaluation and accountability. It is my view that these are admirable goals and we must take action to improve the quality of our education system. With a bipartisan approach we can reverse this disturbing trend of draconian cuts to education. I am impressed with Evers's suggestions and believe the time for action is now.

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