

# School funding bump less than what it appears, memo says

## Democratic legislator sought Legislative Fiscal Bureau review of budget

By [Erin Richards](#) of the Journal Sentinel  
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If the biennial state budget plan approved by the Joint Finance Committee is adopted, public school districts would receive only a \$100 bump in per-pupil funding in the first year, instead of the \$150 offered in the plan approved by Republican leaders.

A [Legislative Fiscal Bureau memo](#) released last week clarifies the fine-print school finance issue, which occurs because public schools received a one-time \$50 per-pupil aid bump in the last year of the current state budget, which means they start \$50 in the hole in the first year of the 2013-'15 state budget.

Republicans said Friday this was known all along by party members drafting the school funding proposal, and school district business managers would have understood it, too.

But Rep. Cory Mason, a Democrat from Racine who requested that the fiscal bureau clarify the issue, said that meant public schools would receive \$42.5 million less in the first year of the budget than what the proposal suggests.

As written, the [proposal approved this month](#) by the budget panel would provide public schools with \$150 more per student in general aid this fall and another \$150 increase in 2014-'15, for a total of \$289 million over two years.

The fiscal bureau memo released Thursday clarified that because of the \$50 one-time per-pupil bump to districts that met the qualifications in 2012-'13, the proposed \$150 per pupil funding increase in 2013-'14 would really represent a \$100 per-pupil increase this fall.

"There were a lot of things in this budget that I thought were malicious, but on this one, I'm not sure if it's something (the Republicans) knew about, or if it was an oversight," Mason said.

"I'm hoping there's a bipartisan opportunity to correct this before we go to vote on the budget next week," Mason added.

But an aide for Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), the chair of the Senate Education Committee who pushed for the per-pupil funding increase, said Friday that everybody knew about the first year funding-detail specifics.

Woody Wiedenhoef, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, said Friday that most business managers would be aware of the sunset on the \$50 per-pupil bump from last year.

But many of Wisconsin's 424 districts don't have a business manager, he said.

"And for the general public, it's a transparency issue," he said. "The general public is being told they're getting an additional \$150 each year for (each child in) schools."

The issue merges with other funding concerns from Democrats and public-school advocates. Many have been unimpressed by the proposed \$150 per pupil increase in revenue limits and state aid because it does not keep up with the rate of inflation.

"Wisconsin's children deserve that their public schools be funded at a rate that at the very least keeps up with inflation, to say nothing about making up for the devastating cuts in the last two-year budget," Bob Peterson, president of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association union, said Friday.

In Menomonee Falls, the School Board laid out its concerns in a [letter to legislators](#), saying that even with the \$150 increase, the school funding formula results in a net increase of only \$56,000.

The district and board urged lawmakers who represent the district to provide funding that matches the rate of inflation and invests tax dollars in schools that are accountable to the public for their performance.

Meanwhile, some other district leaders said privately that they were grateful for any proposed increase in per-pupil funding, considering that Gov. Scott Walker's initial proposal offered no additional cash-flow to classroom operations.

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