

Guest Editorial

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Wisconsinites vote to support their local schools

A guest editorial by State Superintendent Tony Evers

This past Tuesday, 53 public school districts asked their local citizens for additional financial support through 71 referenda questions. Of those ballot issues, voters approved 55, or more than 77 percent.

Funding from those referenda questions will be used in places like Spring Valley to maintain their facilities. The district’s elementary school is between 40 and 88 years old, depending on where you stand. It will be used in districts like Brodhead to continue providing the level of service the community is accustomed to by supporting staffing needs and technology upgrades.

Over the past handful of years, the passage rate of referenda questions has steadily increased. Ten years ago, in 2006, the passage rate for referenda was over 59 percent. And 15 years ago, questions prevailed roughly 43 percent of the time. Year-by-year snapshots cannot tell the whole story of what is happening with a school district, state, or nation, but the overall trend in successful referenda itself conveys an important message.

Year	# of Questions	Passage Rate
2001	165	43.03%
2006	137	59.85%
2016*	85	77.65%

* Year to date.

Referenda questions are being prompted by budgetary shortfalls as state support for PK-12 education stagnates. That is forcing school boards to ask local taxpayers to shoulder more of the cost to educate their children. It troubles me to see the difference between “have” districts that can pass referenda, and “have-not”

districts that are unsuccessful. As a state, we have a constitutional obligation to provide an equal opportunity to access a free public education system. I fear our current pathway puts us at odds with that guarantee.

The upcoming budget for the state of Wisconsin presents a perfect vehicle to engage on two important issues: the need for increased state support of public education and the need to update our funding formula to reflect our current educational climate. I will be incorporating these topics into the budget request for education that I’ll propose for 2017-19.

(more)

Our state has undergone a great deal of change in the past two decades. Our public school students overall are more diverse, increasingly come from low-income families, and more are learning English. With technology all around us, methods of learning and teaching have changed as well. But despite all this change, as Wisconsinites we remain steadfast in our shared value of maintaining a strong system of public education. Our public school funding system must reflect the fairness and equity we want for all of our children.

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NOTES: A high resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/news/contacts-resources>. This editorial is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016_49.pdf.