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## [How Act 32 Impacted Public Education in Wisconsin](#)

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Tomorrow, [the Wisconsin Senate Committee on Hearing and Corrections is conducting an informational hearing](#) in which it “will hear invited testimony relating to how Act 32 impacted public education in Wisconsin.” I am, sadly, not an invited guest. But I do have keys to a blog, so here is what I would say if I were invited.

First, [the 2011-2013 budget](#) was painful for Wisconsin teachers. In year one, revenue limits (the amount of funding districts can raise through a combination of state aid and property taxes) were reduced by 5.5% per-pupil. [This was the first reduction in revenue limits since they were imposed in the 1993-1994 school year](#). In other words, school districts across the state had less money to spend on education.

Act 10 did give districts the power to offset reductions in revenue by increasing employee benefit contributions. Most districts were able to do this, and [Wisconsin citizens did not perceive a decline in the quality of their local schools](#). However, teachers across the state received reductions in take-home pay for reasons totally unrelated to job performance. Their frustration is understandable. In year two the state budget provides a \$50 dollar per-pupil increase in revenue limits. Hopefully districts will be able to use this revenue to reverse the cuts absorbed by teachers.

Second, Act 32 held the line on property taxes. While general school aids were reduced by almost 7% in year one, the corresponding decrease in revenue limits prevented school districts from offsetting aid cuts with property tax increases. In the next budget, needed increases in revenue limits will require increases in school aids if property taxes are to be held in check.

Third, changes to school choice increased educational opportunity in Wisconsin. Raising the income eligibility for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program created new schooling opportunities for Milwaukee families that formerly could neither afford tuition, nor quality for school choice. The creation of a choice program in Racine, [as demonstrated by the comparably lower test-scores of program users in year one](#), gave struggling Racine students new hope for success.

Fourth, the failure to create additional charter school authorizers was a missed opportunity. The governor’s original budget expanded charter authorizing to all University of Wisconsin institutions. Had the provision remained in the budget promising charter schools like Madison Prep could be in operation today.

The 2011-2013 state budget was difficult for many in education, and those expressing that difficulty tomorrow have every right to do so. Still, policy makers cannot lose sight of the positives, including enhanced school choice. Moving forward I hope legislators take a serious look at the positives in the Department of Public Instruction's [Fair Funding plan](#), provide reasonable revenue limit and state aid increases to school districts, improve data systems for tracking student achievement, and more fully embrace an outcomes based K-12 education system.