



Editorial: Wisconsin lawmakers should look closely at school funding plan

November 15, 2010

A plan to reform the state's school **funding** formula contains ideas worth considering, but the entire package will be a tough sell to fiscally conservative Wisconsin legislators.

The "Fair Funding for Our Future" proposal to be unveiled today by Tony Evers, state superintendent of public instruction, would shift aid from the school levy tax **credit** — nearly \$900 million in tax relief awarded annually to taxpayers — directly to school districts and would require a statute-imposed minimum 2 percent budget increase each year.

Under current revenue limits, the amount districts collect in property **taxes** is based mainly on student enrollment and aid from the state. Evers' plan would focus less on property values, place more weight on school district poverty levels and establish a minimum level of \$3,000 in aid per student.

Homeowners would see the school levy tax credit disappear from their **tax bills**, but school taxes would decrease an average 18 percent of the gross property tax levy statewide, Evers said, resulting in net property taxes holding steady. That's because the shift in direct aid to schools would lessen a district's need to levy in property taxes, he said.

Under the plan, aid to the Green Bay School District would get a boost of about \$1.7 million, or 1.2 percent, state Department of Public Instruction officials said. Most area school districts would see increases between 0 percent and 5 percent, with most Door County schools receiving 10 to 20 percent in additional aid. Ashwaubenon and Howard-Suamico school districts would have no change under the formula.

The biggest hurdle for DPI will be in convincing state legislators to pass a proposed 2 percent increase in **fiscal year** 2011-12 followed by a 4 percent increase in fiscal year 2012-13. The increases translate to \$93.1 million in the first year and \$319.5 million in the second year of the biennium.

In addition to mandating the 2 percent minimum increase, Evers also is proposing to streamline the categorical aids program by making those aids competitive and tying them to performance. All the changes in the plan would take place in the second year of the biennium.

Evers said he is mindful of the slow-growth economy and that the new Republican-controlled Legislature will be looking for places to cut spending in the next budget. But, he said he is **confident** about it passing because people understand the need for educational investment and have concerns about increasing property taxes.

He added that funding to schools has decreased by about 3 percent in the past four years and caused local taxpayers to pick up the costs.

It's clear the current formula is broken and reform is badly needed. Whether this is the plan to resolve the current inequities is for our new state Legislature and governor to decide.

We urge lawmakers to carefully weigh all portions of the plan and engage in a thoughtful, open debate in tackling this complex issue.

Our View:

School funding proposal

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