

State school superintendent promotes new funding plan at Wisconsin schools

By Brian Bull, Wisconsin Public Radio
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(PRAIRIE DU SAC) Wisconsin's top educator officially unveiled his plan to change the state's school funding formula Monday (11/15) at a school in Prairie du Sac. He was joined by a Republican lawmaker, whose party will determine the course of the plan in the legislature.



Tony Evers, superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction, says most school districts will see more state aid under his plan. It would set a minimum level of state aid for every student at \$3,000. Evers adds the current funding formula has not been particularly fair to districts that are "property wealthy but income poor," so he says for the first time, the Fair Funding Plan would incorporate a 20-percent poverty weight based on the number of children eligible for free and reduced lunch in a district.

"This provision shifts our system from one that recognizes only property value as a measure of wealth to one that also takes into account family income and taxpayer's ability to pay."

Evers is asking for an additional \$420-million in school aid funding in the next biennium. But any new spending during a massive budget deficit will be contentious, warns Republican State Senator Dale Schultz, who joined Evers at the presentation.

"But it is my hope, my fervent hope, that my colleagues in the legislature on both sides of the aisle will recognize -- as I believe I have rightly so recognized -- that children are our top priority," says Schultz.



Republicans will take over both chambers of the legislature and the governor's office in January. Schultz says his colleagues will likely favor a provision that would shift \$900-million out of what's called the School Levy Tax Credit and the First Dollar Credit -- which are actually property tax relief programs -- and make that money directly available to schools. The DPI says this can be done without driving up property taxes.

Tony Evers (Top-Left), state superintendent of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and State Senator Dale Schultz (Right), at a news conference Monday at Grand Avenue Elementary School in Prairie du Sac. The two were promoting Evers' new school funding formula proposal. Photos by: Brian Bull, WPR