



Officials: Evers' school plan might help some districts

By Ashley A. Smith • Marshfield News-Herald • November 17, 2010

Reforming the state's school aid formula could provide fair and sustainable funding for districts, according to State Superintendent Tony Evers.

Evers' "Fair Funding for Our Future" plan, which was presented Monday as part of the Department of Public Instruction's 2011-13 budget proposal, would increase state's share of education spending by \$420 million.

"There's a lot of things in here that both sides probably agree on to some extent," said Dale Knapp, research analyst for the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. "So I do think it's likely a fair part of this gets passed (in the Legislature)."

The plan would work on repairing the school aid formula by redirecting funds that show up on homeowners' bills as a property tax credit, which amounts to nearly \$900 million.

"This doesn't mean any more money for schools," Knapp said. "Because schools are under revenue limits, and this doesn't affect revenue limits. It doesn't mean that schools will be awash in money. It's simply a shifting of dollars from the property tax credit into the aid formula. When you shift money, because of caps, you reduce what districts can levy for property taxes. It doesn't really provide any more money in the bottom line."

Patrick Saucerman, business director for Marshfield School District, said the plan does maintain current growth revenue limits, which is \$200 per student, but "the actual tax credit change would have direct impact on local property taxpayers to their advantage, but wouldn't have an impact on increased revenue for school systems."

"I think it's a great place to begin," said Saucerman. "The real obstacle is if they're able to redirect that property tax credit, which is used by municipalities."

Although shifting the levy credit into the aid formula stands a 50-50 chance of passing the Legislature, Knapp said, it begins the process of simplifying school finance.

"It does some things for some of the high value, low income districts," Knapp said. "It helps them with their higher than average property taxes, but it doesn't solve the problem that some districts are facing, especially declining enrollment and low revenue districts."

For the first time, the formula would also take into account how many students are in poverty, and not just local property wealth, to determine how much aid a district receives.

In general, districts that receive more aid from the state would lower their levies accordingly to stay within revenue caps.

"If you're going to do something about revenue limits, it probably means more property taxes and more taxes in general," Knapp said. "Unfortunately in an economy we're in right now and political environment we're in, it's going to be tough to really revamp school finance."

School aid funding accounts for more than 37 percent of the state's total budget.

-- The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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