

Proposed budget fails Wisconsin's schools

Gov. Scott Walker's proposed budget falls short of extraordinary in showing support for public education in Wisconsin. Kenosha Unified School District has a long tradition of providing high-quality public education, and securing its value is an investment for our students' success, economic community development and the future of Wisconsin.

Prior to the release of the governor's proposed biennial budget, his administration was touting relatively flat funding for public schools. While this appeared promising to some, it was enough to rattle administrators across the state as the initial realization began to materialize for what this would mean for the coming school year. With increasing costs and decreasing enrollments, mainly caused by a decrease in birthrates as reported by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, a relatively flat promise fell short for public schools.

With the additional unmentioned cut to student aid at the rate of \$150 per student, districts across the state, like Kenosha Unified, are facing operational deficits, even before budget reviews begin. This proposal immediately causes KUSD to start the year with a \$3.2 million deficit.

As an entity that relies primarily on funding from state aid and tax dollars, our options for increasing revenue are limited. The effective way to offset increasing expenses and revenue shortfalls such as this is to review all programs and decrease existing budgets.

Given Gov. Walker's significant cut to education in 2012, the Kenosha Unified School District was forced to reduce hundreds of employees. The funding cut during that time has never been fully restored, causing the district to continue to reduce and be thrifty in any way possible without having a tremendous impact on student learning. This is an extremely difficult task.

Should the governor's proposed budget pass with the cuts to school funding, the district will be making some very difficult decisions. Whether it is in the form of changes to programs or reductions in force, the district will have to eliminate something to make up the \$3.2 million cuts being passed down by Gov. Walker. It is important to note that Gov. Walker's proposed 2015-2017 state budget allows for no per-pupil increase to revenue limits in either the 2015-16 or 2016-2017 school years; and with no increase to revenue limits, none of the additional dollars proposed for K-12 education general aid (i.e. \$108 million in 2016-2017) will go to classrooms, rather, it will be directed to reducing property taxes.

The attack on our public schools needs to end. Parents, businesses and taxpayers need to speak out against this blatant attack on our schools and our community.

As a community, we value every child, we value student success and we value the dedicated staff members who have built their lives around student learning. We need your voices, and we need your support. We need you to help us push back at this potential reduction.

I ask that you reach out to Gov. Walker and your local legislators to ask them to support public schools. Share that Kenosha Unified needs funding sustained so we may continue to offer first-rate academic opportunities; safe, welcoming learning environments; award-winning fine arts programs; industry-leading career and technical education programs; highly-qualified, dedicated educators; superior athletics and access to state-of-the art technology.

We want nothing but the best for every child. For the students of Kenosha, make your voice heard.

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