



TO: Members of the Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Darienne B. Driver, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

DATE: March 20, 2015

SUBJECT: Proposed 2015-17 Biennial Budget

By this time you have already heard from concerned school leaders, parents and other community members about the negative impacts of the Governor's proposals that would disinvest in public schools.

Milwaukee Public Schools joins with education leaders in other communities in opposition to the proposed budget and we ask that you find a way to return to the bi-partisan tradition of providing a sustainable and predictable funding structure for all public schools.

We also join with districts across the state in embracing accountability but asking that schools be allowed to operate in a more stable policy environment, one where teachers and administrators can return their focus to the complex and rewarding work of educating students without the uncertainty and fluctuations that have been occurring more frequently at the state level.

As we work to prepare the next generation of Wisconsin's leaders and citizens, schools across the state need your support and they need your help.

After the \$550 per-student cut and damaging funding reductions of four years ago, MPS, like other districts utilized the decision making authority Under Act 10 to reduce costs. Believing that students deserve a basic standard of care, to the greatest extent possible MPS used the opportunities that Act 10 helped create to invest in and restore art, music and physical education teachers to our schools.

On top of restoring those opportunities for children, MPS used funding along with improved policy efforts to support many of our lower performing, Commitment Schools. We are pleased to report that recently released data indicates that those efforts are paying off and students are improving academically.

Now, inflation-related pressures are creating a challenging budgetary environment. And an expected cut in per-student funding only compounds that. In order to keep art, music, physical education in all of our schools -- and in order to continue the improvement work that is succeeding in our schools -- we need you to join with us in investing in our schools.

We understand the desire for property tax relief. But we believe that given the choice between an average \$5 property tax cut provided by the levy credit increase and restoring the \$150 cut from each and every one of the more than 870,000 students educated in public schools across Wisconsin, the people of this state would recognize the value of investing in education. The \$150 per-student cut in the Governor's budget would mean a \$12.1-million cut to MPS. When you add the direct cut to the combination of a frozen revenue limit and inevitable inflationary increases in costs, further cuts to district and school programs would be unavoidable.

That's why we are asking that you recognize the value of investing in Wisconsin's public schools. If we fail to find a way to work together to provide adequate funding for Wisconsin's public schools, we ultimately fail our children and our communities. Thank you for your leadership and consideration as you do this difficult work.

In addition to the recommendations made above, Milwaukee Public Schools supports the following provisions.

1. Return to the policy established under Governor Thompson of increasing the revenue limit equal to the increase in the rate of inflation
2. Increase the reimbursement rate or costs associated with students with disabilities to 33%
  - a. Far from there being a financial incentive, school districts incur costs when taking on the responsibility of supporting a student with an Individualized Education Plan
  - b. The current reimbursement rate stands at 27%, MPS supports increasing that rate by 3% in each year of the biennium.
3. Maintain support for the Chapter 220 program: A longstanding and successful option for many students in the Milwaukee area, the elimination of this program would diminish the educational choices available to parents
4. Remove school accountability policy, letter grades for schools and multiple tests from the budget bill
5. Remove the requirement that demands that public school districts promote other educational options on school district websites
6. Remove the provision creating a statewide charter school authoring board. Protect the tradition and principles of local control

**Teach. Learn. Lead.**  
*Enseña. Aprende. Lidera.*