

News Release

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Evers calls for reinvestment in public education

MADISON — In his testimony before the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance Thursday, State Superintendent Tony Evers called for a state budget that truly reinvests in public education.

He explained that the proposed 2013-15 state budget freezes revenue limits for public schools, meaning all new funding goes to property tax relief. The budget’s proposed \$129 million increase to general school aid really is only \$39 million because the majority of that funding will be used to expand independent charter and voucher schools and institute a new special education voucher program. According to a Legislative Fiscal Bureau analysis, public schools would experience a cut in state aid in the first year of the budget. “I call on you and your colleagues in the Legislature to stop the continued defunding of public education,” Evers said.

Evers noted that proposed voucher funding over the two year budget will increase 32 percent at a time when revenue limits hold public school funding flat. Overall student achievement in voucher schools is no better and sometimes worse than in Milwaukee Public Schools. “There are too many ongoing issues to address in the Milwaukee and Racine voucher programs, and the academic data just does not justify expansion,” he said. The expansion of vouchers to nine school districts would “impose Madison’s will on local communities that are happy with their public schools,” he said. According to the recent Marquette Law School Poll, 81 percent of voters are either very satisfied or satisfied with the public schools in their community.

Evers called special education vouchers an unproven proposal that results in parents of students with disabilities surrendering their rights and legal protections under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. “If you truly want to do something that will help children with disabilities, increase revenue limits so public schools have adequate resources to serve them and increase special education categorical aid which has been frozen for the past four years,” he said.

Evers questioned the erosion of Wisconsin’s prized local control of schools through a statewide charter school authorizing board. The proposal would allow unelected officials to open an independent charter school anywhere in the state and enroll students from any district. “I oppose this provision outright,” he said. Wisconsin is a

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charter school success story, he explained. It currently ranks in the top 10 states in the nation with 238 charter schools in 97 school districts serving more than 43,000 students. These new educational options for children and parents have come “without the problems witnessed in other states that wasted taxpayers’ money,” Evers added.

Wisconsin has \$1.4 billion in new revenue to spend in the 2013-15 budget, most of which came from cuts to education in the previous budget. Evers said he objects to priorities for road building, unsustainable income tax cuts, and a questionable incentive grant program for schools. “You could make different choices on how to allocate the state’s resources,” Evers said. “With \$1.4 billion in new revenues, there’s enough to raise the public school revenue limit, increase school aids, and hold the line on property taxes.”

Evers commended the governor’s proposals to fund new student assessments and early reading screening as well as educator effectiveness, student academic and career plans, and data systems. These initiatives were developed by parents, educators, school administrators, and legislators working together. He cautioned that without an increase to the revenue limit and new funding for public schools, those initiatives along with college- and career-ready standards won’t have much of a chance to be implemented in a way that will transform education.

“The scope and pace of change in our public schools is unprecedented. And it needs to be,” Evers said. “We have some of the highest graduation rates, ACT scores, and Advanced Placement results in the country. But too many of our kids are falling behind and too many of our kids are dropping out. Strong public education is necessary for a strong economy, a strong middle class.

“The 2013-15 budget as proposed creates too many winners and losers with the 870,000 children in our public education system drawing the short straw,” Evers said. “We need a state budget that invests in public education. I offer the technical expertise of the department to help you shape the priorities of this state budget to meet our constitutional obligation to invest in our public school students.”

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NOTE: Additional information about State Superintendent Tony Evers’ education budget can be found at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/news_2013-15-state-budget-information. Graphics that show the impact of the 2013-15 budget proposal on [state school aid](#) and [per-pupil revenue](#) can be found on the Department of Public Instruction newsroom website at <http://news.dpi.wi.gov/newsroom>. This news release is available electronically at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/files/eis/pdf/dpinr2013_41.pdf.