

News Release

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Evers introduces 2015-17 state education budget

MADISON — “Across the state in school districts large and small, urban and rural, we’ve heard that Wisconsin’s school funding system is broken. It’s not serving our state well,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers as he introduced his 2015-17 state education budget. “By reinvesting in our schools, we can create a path to prosperity for our children, our citizens, and our future,” he added.

The budget centerpiece, “Fair Funding for Our Future,” contains a number of provisions to fix the funding formula by investing in all students, protecting rural and declining enrollment districts, making adjustments in the aid formula to account for poverty, providing property tax relief, and increasing general school aid.

The Fair Funding plan is woven into the state superintendent’s larger budget, which increases funding for students with disabilities, invests in rural schools, supports English language learners, bolsters transitions to postsecondary opportunities and other targeted learning offerings, and supports public libraries. The budget also includes responsible revenue limit growth, tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The revenue limit adjustment would be \$200 per pupil in the first year of the budget and \$204 per pupil in 2016-17.

“Wisconsin has a long and proud tradition of strong public schools and libraries,” Evers said. “My budget supports those priorities.”

Overall, the budget makes important investments in vital categorical aid programs, which includes special education and high-cost special education aid; bilingual-bicultural aid; Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) funding; and grants for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), gifted and talented education, and tribal language revitalization. New aid programs in the second year of the budget would provide \$100 per student to all districts with English language learners, award \$2 million in grants for district safety programs, and provide \$1 million for matching grants for digital content and software.

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Additionally, the budget focuses on career readiness for all students with \$4 million for career pathways to boost students' occupational skills. "Agenda 2017 is our goal to ensure all students graduate college and career ready," Evers said. The budget proposes \$5.8 million for transition and incentive grants and \$1.5 million for job development grants to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

"Increasing support for students with disabilities and students learning English is frankly, the right thing to do," Evers stressed. His budget represents the first increase in special education funding since 2008 and would address school district costs that have increased each year while state funding for students with disabilities has been frozen. Bilingual-bicultural aid has been cut repeatedly and is lower now than in 2005, even though this student population is growing rapidly.

While implementing Fair Funding is a critical first step to restoring stability to rural schools, the education budget would also improve transportation, sparsity, and high-cost transportation aid programs, to address the disproportionate impact these issues have on rural schools. Rural districts educate more than 40 percent of the state's students and are the lifeblood of their communities. "If our rural schools close up shop, we are so much the poorer for it," Evers said.

Aid re-estimates required in statute for the three voucher programs and independent charter schools in Milwaukee and Racine will call for increases in funding in both years of the biennium.

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NOTES: A 2015-17 Biennial Budget Highlights document and the Department of Public Instruction's full 2015-17 budget request can be found online at <http://pb.dpi.wi.gov/>. This news release is available electronically at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/eis/pdf/dpinr2014_122.pdf.