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## Legislature has second chance to support our schools and our kids

*A guest editorial by State Superintendent Jill Underly*

MADISON – Wisconsin’s public school system is dependent upon tax dollars. Schools use state and local taxes to pay for services, salaries, transportation, supplies, utilities, and more. Schools also don’t solely control how much tax money they receive, or how much they are able to spend. The legislature sets spending limits for schools and determines how much state assistance they get to offset that spending. This authority requires a level of foresight and planning. And when things don’t go quite right...for example, when a global pandemic hits, needs change.

When Gov. Tony Evers originally crafted his budget, it included \$1.6 billion for public education. That decision was supported by Wisconsin citizens throughout the state. Investment in our state and communities was the common refrain at the public hearings held to gather input about the state’s budget. A majority of public testimony spoke directly to the critical needs in our public schools: mental health supports, supplies, human resources, personal protective equipment, technology, broadband, food services, and resources to combat potential learning loss. People also spoke to the need for an infusion of money to accomplish this. Citizens praised our educators, calling them the first responders for our children.

Gov. Evers’ plan addressed many of those needs through targeted investments in special education, the state’s share of local spending, technology costs, and more. The legislature, however, answered this call differently, claiming one-time money provided by the federal government was sufficient to address all the needs of our schools. With no new spending authority, and one-time federal monies targeted at pandemic-related costs, cuts will need to be made, or local taxpayers will be forced to referendum to raise their own taxes.

Unfortunately, this is a familiar challenge for our schools and our children. This is not how our funding system should work and it’s definitely not what is best for our teachers, their schools, and our kids. The endless cycles of referendums widens the gaps between our have and have-not school districts, our students who face unique challenges and their peers, and our communities as a whole. Those who can

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shoulder the cost of tax increases pass referendums, while those who cannot...don't. That does not bode well for our state's future.

When our state was formed, our founders built a system of public education that set us up for the collective success we've enjoyed for a long time. Their investment, foresight, and thoughtfulness should be commended and built upon. Through his budget vetoes, Gov. Evers gave the legislature an opportunity to make good on a common and popular promise legislators across the state made to support their local public schools. There are plenty of needs right now, and now we have a second chance to fund those needs.

Foresight and investment is the theme when you have an unexpected windfall, whether you are a homeowner or a business owner. Some frequently remark that we should operate our schools like we manage our homes or our business. If you are a homeowner with a leaky roof, you would undoubtedly use any extra cash you receive to fix your roof. And if you are a business owner, you would reinvest it in your business, your employees, or in research and development to shore up your future.

So, let's do the same for our schools. Please contact your legislators and encourage them to use this opportunity to benefit every kid, every day. The governor provided this legislature a second chance to make good on their own election promises to invest in our public schools, our communities, our children, and our families. We cannot afford to let this moment pass.

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**NOTE:** A headshot for publication of State Superintendent Jill Underly is available at [https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/news/Jill\\_Underly.jpg](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/news/Jill_Underly.jpg). This guest editorial is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2021/legislature-has-second-chance-support-our-schools-and-our-kids>.