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## Investing in staff retention

*Testimony as prepared for delivery by Deputy State Superintendent Dr. John Johnson*

MADISON – *The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction today released the following testimony, as prepared for delivery, to be provided at an upcoming Joint Committee on Finance listening session on the 2023-25 biennial budget. Gov. Tony Evers' budget proposal, released in February, [provides historic support of the state's public schools and libraries during a time of critical need.](#)*

Hello. I am Dr. John Johnson, deputy state superintendent at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and I am here today to address the need for an increase in the general school aid and local school district revenue limit authority as detailed in the governor's budget. For the past two school years, our school districts and charter schools have been forced to use federal COVID-19 pandemic relief funding for daily operations, while schools in the other 49 states were able to invest these funds in students' instructional needs and mental health supports caused by the global pandemic. After years of minimal investments in K-12 education, Wisconsin ranks 48th - third lowest nationally in increasing school funding, and higher inflation piles onto this funding crisis.

We all know high quality teachers and school support staff make a difference in the lives of students, in the cohesion of a school community, and in the strength of our state's future. And yet, here in Wisconsin, we are struggling to retain teachers, especially those early in their careers. According to our most recent data, by year five, a third of the teachers who started their careers in Wisconsin are no longer teaching here; they have either left the state or have left the profession entirely. Also, gone is the money, time, and effort hiring and training those new teachers.

The data can't tell us exactly why this is happening, but when you add in another piece of information, namely the fact that teacher salaries and benefits have drastically decreased in the last decade, I think we can make an educated guess. When we look at median salary and benefits held steady at 2021 dollars, Wisconsin teachers have lost on average over \$14,000 between 2011 and 2021. The reality is that

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teachers could make a lot more money working less stressful jobs in other sectors of the economy. And yet, our state's future depends on great teachers in the classroom.

We must make it possible for districts to pay staff commensurate with their education, training and skills, their experience, and the value we know they bring to our classrooms and our state. To do that, we must invest in our districts with \$1 billion of funding funneled into the state's general equalization formula, and we must raise the revenue limits to make sure that funding truly has a meaningful impact on classrooms. With this increased and ongoing funding, districts will be able to make decisions that will meet the unique needs of their students and staff, including but not limited to recruiting and retaining staff.

Thank you.

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