

Dear Legislator,

We ask you to support Wisconsin's children by voting to amend the biennial budget submitted by the JFC to provide additional real, spendable dollars for K-12 public schools. Frankly, we are astonished that in a year when the state will collect an estimated \$5.8 billion in revenue, legislators not only would not increase spendable dollars for our students, but also would go to great lengths to ensure virtually no additional spending to cover increasing operating costs.

While we appreciate the \$128 million in categorical aid allocated over the next two years, this amount is roughly one quarter of the investment in public schools in the previous state budget and is less than one tenth of the amount proposed by Gov. Evers. **No additional funds for general equalized aid and no increase in the revenue limit are not acceptable.** We've already seen headlines reporting inflation. Past state budgets have included at least minimal increases both in state aid and in revenue limits to help keep up with inflation. This budget will force cuts at the time when the state has a significant surplus.

We also appreciate that the JFC found a way to allow the state access to the federal ESSER (COVID relief) dollars, but we are deeply disappointed that the committee did so in a work-around that only technically meets the maintenance of effort requirement and provides no additional state funds for our children. It really feels like trickery. The ESSER funds are emergency funds, intended to help with increased costs due to the pandemic. They are temporary, one-time funds and not intended to fulfill the state's obligation to fund its schools. While these one-time funds can be spent over the next few years, they are intended to respond to pandemic-related needs over and above regular, ongoing operating costs.

To fund property tax relief rather than increasing spendable funds for schools makes little sense, given that between 2008 and 2018, voters in 189 school districts passed 387 referenda to exceed revenue limits. Eighty-four percent of referenda to exceed revenue limits passed in November of 2020, despite concern for pandemic-related economic woes. Funding only property tax relief only ensures more referenda.

Members of the JFC heard in their budget hearings from many speakers on K-12 education, requesting at least a \$200 increase in school district revenue limits; an increase in general aid; support for Gov. Evers' proposed 50% reimbursement for special education costs; increased funds for mental health categorical aid; and mitigation of COVID-related enrollment decreases. No one who spoke about K-12 school funding requested property tax relief.

The first recommendation of your own Blue Ribbon Commission in 2019 was to "provide future increases in resources for school districts through increases in the per pupil adjustment under revenue limits." It's disappointing to see most of the Commission's recommendations ignored once again, but especially this one.

Minimally, we ask that you amend the state budget proposed by the JFC to increase the K-12 revenue limit by \$200 so that school districts can address increasing costs. You can afford to do much more. Wisconsin's children are counting on you to do what's right.

Sincerely,
Monona Grove School Board