FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Sauk County School Districts Release Unified Statement on the Urgent Need for a Bipartisan Compromise on School Funding and Property Tax Relief

Statement approved by all six school boards expressing the need for action by the State of Wisconsin to support school districts and taxpayers in communities of all sizes

Sauk County, Wisconsin – The school boards of Baraboo, Reedsburg, River Valley, Sauk Prairie, Weston, and Wisconsin Dells approved a unified statement on the urgent need for a bipartisan compromise on school funding and property tax relief.

The five largest school districts in Wisconsin released a shared statement in late January asking for action by the State Legislature and Governor. The school districts of Sauk County stand with these larger districts recognizing that the need for action is real in the state's largest cities and its most rural communities.

"The legislature is planning to adjourn for the year very soon. Before our legislators head home, they need to stabilize school funding and provide relief to property taxpayers," shared Jeff Wright, Superintendent of the Sauk Prairie School District. "The elected school boards of Sauk County stand together in asking our state leaders to utilize the larger-than-anticipated state surplus to address both of these concerns now."

Here is the language adopted by the elected school boards representing the six school districts of Sauk County:

The five largest school districts in Wisconsin recently released a shared statement about the urgent need for a bipartisan compromise on school funding that provides property tax relief to Wisconsin taxpayers and helps stabilize school district budgets. The school districts of Sauk County stand with these larger districts recognizing that the need for action is real in the state's largest cities and its most rural communities.

The elected school boards of our six districts voted to highlight the following text from the statement released by the school districts of Green Bay, Kenosha, Madison, Milwaukee, and Racine:

Wisconsin families are struggling. Families are paying more for groceries, utilities, and health insurance. School districts face those same pressures. We are paying more to feed students, heat and power our schools, and cover rising employee healthcare costs. Like families, school districts are impacted by increasing expenses due to inflation.

That is why the most recent state budget was such a profound disappointment. When the state had a $4 billion surplus, we expected lawmakers to recognize the shared financial strain facing families and public schools. Instead, Wisconsin's K–12 public school students received a $0 increase in general state aid. At the same time, a promised increase in critical funding for students with disabilities came up short.

Governor Tony Evers has proposed $1.3 billion in state funding to provide property tax relief and stabilize school funding. However, legislative leaders have indicated they will not support this proposal unless the Governor's "400 years" veto is overturned. That veto, which guaranteed long-term per-pupil increases, demonstrated support for public education, but is now being used as a political obstacle rather than a path forward.

Wisconsin urgently needs a bipartisan compromise on school funding. The current stalemate leaves public school districts unable to plan responsibly and pushes local communities to shoulder costs that the state should be sharing. A proven solution already exists. Under former Governor Tommy Thompson, Wisconsin provided annual per-pupil funding increases tied to the cost of living, providing schools with predictable, sustainable support. Those adjustments were eliminated in 2009 during the recession, and despite years of economic recovery, they have never been restored.

The consequences have been severe and long-lasting. Without cost-of-living adjustments, districts across the state have been forced to rely on operational referendums, reduce staff, consolidate schools, delay building maintenance, and cut programs. These measures are not sustainable and, over time, directly harm students. Had cost-of-living increases remained in place, many districts would be receiving thousands of dollars more per student each year and would likely not need to ask voters for additional support through referendums.

The school funding formula may be complex, but one truth is simple: when state support goes down or stagnates, property taxes go up. This is not a school district spending problem. It is a legislative funding choice.

Compounding this issue is the Legislature's failure to fully fund its commitment to students with disabilities. We have now learned that funding promised in the state budget is unlikely to be upheld. With the state now reporting approximately $1.5 billion more in revenue than expected, the

Legislature should uphold its promise to school districts and meet its commitment to funding special education at a 42% reimbursement rate.

As a state, we risk shortchanging not only our students but Wisconsin's future economic prosperity. Past generations benefitted from full-time art, music, physical education, and library teachers, as well as school nurses. Every one of us wants better for our kids today, and yet without funding that keeps up with growing costs, we will give them less. They deserve better.

Lawmakers can do what is right by their constituents, Wisconsin families, and our public schools by investing this historic surplus in our children. Students are receiving less while taxpayers are paying more—and it does not have to be this way. The future of Wisconsin's public schools depends on responsible, consistent state funding. The time is now.

The school districts of Sauk County call on our legislators and Governor Evers to act now. Do not adjourn the 2026 legislative session until you take meaningful action to reduce property taxes and stabilize the district budgets of Wisconsin's public schools.

LINK TO PDF OF SHARED STATEMENT:

Sauk County School Districts - Shared Message on School Funding - February 2026.pdf

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