



Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance

Fall 2026

Advocacy Guide

Build Relationships → Be a Resource → Tell Your Story → Make an Ask → Follow-Up

When advocating for public education you will be challenged with narratives, questions and commentary that are often partisan nor entirely accurate. It is important to use these opportunities to set the record straight and provide accurate information.

Prior to any meeting with legislators be prepared with:

- ☐ Review biography of elected official(s) - Know your audience
- ☐ Business cards
- ☐ Revenue limit for your district
- ☐ Enrollment trends
- ☐ Staffing trends
- ☐ [SWSA Special Ed](#) Chart and district-specific FAQ
- ☐ School district budget overview, assumptions (examples of increased costs)
- ☐ Impact of vouchers to local property taxpayers (eg, transportation, SPED support, [revenue limit](#))
- ☐ Challenges balanced with positive stories: CTE / business partnership examples

Below are several examples of what you might expect when advocating for public education in the current political environment. By using some of the prompts, you can more easily pivot back to the task at hand - telling your story and making an ask - rather than debating partisan narratives. Leave that to the politicians!

- [Historic Funding Claim](#)
- [400 Year Veto](#)
- [Workforce Preparedness](#)
- [School Staffing and Declining Enrollment](#)
- [Special Education](#)
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- [Per Pupil Funding](#)
- [Other potential discussion points for legislators](#)

Historic Funding Claim

“In the last budget the state invested \$1.37 Billion in spendable revenue for schools.”

Your Goal: Share your district-specific financial picture. Remind legislators that [55% or \\$760 million of this will come from local taxpayers](#). Public schools need predictable, spendable resources from the State. An over-reliance on local taxpayers is not sustainable.

Response: The state invested some resources, but local property taxpayers funded \$760 million. (Describe local property tax impact). In my district the property tax impact was XYZ and I still had a budget shortfall of XYZ.

400 Year Veto

“Governor’s 400-year veto is to blame for higher property taxes “

Your Goal: Avoid a debate over the power of a Governor’s veto pen. Focus on how to work together to move forward.

Response: I am frustrated by the line-item veto because it seemed to stall any effort toward finding long-term financial solutions for public schools, like implementing recommendations from the Bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding. That said, the veto, which was reaffirmed by the legislature in the most recent state budget, does provide some financial predictability, which public schools need, providing for a \$325 per student increase - but my district will need to go to **local property taxpayers** for those resources, meanwhile voucher schools received increases of \$640 and \$428 per student, funded by **state aid**, representing a 9% increase, and will continue to see increases because their funding is tied to the revenue limit regardless of where the dollars come from.

Response: If you oppose the \$325 per student increase for public school students, what is your plan for K-12 public education funding solutions to ensure **predictable, sustainable**, and spendable money in the classroom for students?

Response: I understand there is frustration with the Governor’s veto. I certainly don’t like relying on my local taxpayers time and time again to close the gap between state and local funding of public education. However, with state-imposed revenue limits and the state’s share of K-12 public education funding being a major driver of local property tax increases, what do you recommend as a path forward so we can avoid these unpredictable patterns of how we pay for K-12 public education?

Workforce Preparedness

“Students aren’t prepared for the workforce. They lack basic skills”

Your Goal: Highlight student success stories & student performance in your district. Avoid debating outcomes in school districts you don’t represent. Example: I can’t speak to the needs of XYZ district but here is what we’re doing in my district.

Response: *Can you share what that means to you?*

Share your district report card. Cite an example of an employer partnership. If employers, our community, parents and elected officials expect public schools to develop the future workforce, we need predictable, sustainable funding.

School Staffing and Declining Enrollment

“Wisconsin public schools now employ one adult for every seven students, breaking the all-time ratio record.”

Response: *If this is about a shift in demographics the entire eco-system should be considered. Public schools are being told to consolidate, while voucher schools are given resources to expand, often despite low student enrollments and poor student outcomes. Why is one system encouraged to grow and another asked to shrink?*

Response: *Enrollment doesn’t impact grade levels equally. If I lose four students in a third grade classroom, five students in a seventh grade classroom and three students in a kindergarten classroom my costs do not change - even though I lost 11 students I still need the same teachers, the same building, the same support staff, the same building maintenance, the same health insurance, etc.. A cost to run a classroom does not decrease unless the entire classroom is eliminated.*

Expectations for public schools have increased. Mental health needs, special education, school safety, technology, career and technical education are all areas where we are expected to meet student needs (and community expectations). Staff increases have matched where students have the most need, such as paraprofessionals supporting special education students.

GIVE LOCAL EXAMPLES, some ideas:

- We had to add xx positions in order to comply with Act 20.
- We have reduced FTE and hired part time positions without benefits to reduce costs. [*The number of classroom teachers has grown by less than 1% since 2011.*](#))
- We are seeing an increase in students who need IEP’s, English language learners, economically disadvantaged, more behavior concerns at younger ages, students arriving less prepared in 4K

- We needed to hire another school psychologist to help evaluate students for special education services at a nearby choice school.
 - A medically fragile student requires a full time nurse.
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Special Education

“We invested \$500 million in special education. Further, the surplus deal would have added \$200 million to special education for 50% reimbursement. Democrats killed the deal.”

Your Goal: Acknowledge investment has been made and **thank** legislators for their work to improve reimbursement. Share your special education transfer number. Educate on the disparity in funding between public school students and private voucher school students. Refer to the [special education document](#).

Response: *I agree the budget surplus proposal was a frustrating process, but I’m so glad we’re all on the same page working to address this need. What will be the starting point for the next budget? 50%? 50% reimbursement would mean XYZ to my district, but I would still have a shortfall of XYZ. 50% is good progress. What is the timeline to achieve parity with Choice Schools?*

Decoupling

“One thing we might be able to do is simplify the school funding formula by removing Choice and Charter funding from the formula.”

Your Goal: Listen and don’t commit. Voucher funding has increased to \$1.8 Billion in the 2025 - 2027 Budget.

Response: *That’s interesting. Tell me more.*

Response: *I don’t disagree the formula is complex, there have been a lot of bandaids over many years. How much would it cost to “decouple” Choice and Charter from the school funding formula? (It is estimated to cost over \$700 million dollars in state general purpose revenue). I understand decoupling may reduce property taxes for some districts, especially those with high voucher enrollment (like Racine) but how would it address funding needs for public schools across Wisconsin?*

Response: *While there could be some benefits, the cost and potential benefits to decouple as a standalone item should be weighed with the needs we discussed today (investment in special education reimbursement, per pupil funding, etc). If foundational elements of the state-controlled school finance formula are not addressed and investment is not made at the state level I’m*

afraid we will continue to be over-reliant on operating referendums so decoupling doesn't really address these concerns.

Per Pupil Funding

“ Public schools receive an average \$18,000 per pupil”¹

Your Goal: Share your state-imposed revenue limit. Share student assessment and other student data points. Highlight positive stories. Show student progress and advancement.

Response: *May I ask where you got this number? In my district of XXX students my state-imposed revenue limit is XXX.*

Response: *The state controlled funding formula is the foundation of all local public school district finances. Categorical aids reflect state and federal mandates and student demographics. These funds vary district-to-district and cannot be used as an apples-to-apples comparison of school district finances. **What do you think an appropriate number per pupil should be?***

Other potential discussion points for legislators:

- **We don't over-identify for special education:** Districts must pay 100% of special education costs upfront and are reimbursed around 30% by the state. This creates a local gap that must be filled from the district's general fund.
- Fund the school finance formula as it was designed for students, not local property tax relief. I can't buy crayons with tax credits.

RESOURCES

 [Advocacy Actions by Month 2026-2027](#)

 [SWSA Budget Reaction, Talking Points for members](#)

 [2025-2027 Budget Impact 101](#)

¹ **\$18,310** is the Statewide average comparative cost per pupil for public schools for 2023-24 that includes instruction, pupil services, admin, transportation, facilities, food service and community services. **\$12,506**, the average revenue authority per pupil public schools (2023-24) is a better figure for comparison because it excludes federal, state categorical aids. Does not include \$742 per pupil aid.