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Joint Finance Committee Action on K-12 Education Budget Disappointing, Cuts Are Devastating for Schools

In response to the legislative Joint Finance Committee’s vote to support almost all of Governor Walker’s drastic cuts to public education of historic proportions, the School Finance Network is calling on the full legislature to restore funding to Wisconsin’s public schools, something that will help all of our children and the economy.

“The simple fact of the matter is that the budget cuts being advanced by the governor and the Joint Finance Committee are unnecessary,” said Julie Underwood, Dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Education. “We must make every effort to protect the investment Wisconsin communities have made in our public schools and our economic future. It is foolhardy to be cutting those investments with the highest returns. Unlike many provisions in the budget bill, school funding is about creating jobs in Wisconsin. The question is whether those jobs will be good paying jobs.”

In March, Governor Walker proposed cutting state school aids by \$834 million—cuts that will have a devastating, long-term impact on Wisconsin public schools. At the time the budget was announced, the governor claimed that the cuts were necessary to balance the budget. However, earlier this month the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau said that the revenue estimates for the coming years will be approximately \$636 million higher than originally expected.

"Frankly, the \$636 million in additional revenue took all of the excuses away," said Mary Bell, a Wisconsin Rapids teacher and president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council. "Politicians who claim that they support education yet vote for this budget either have their priorities confused or are simply refusing to stand up and do what's right for our students."

As a result of these new revenue estimates, the cuts proposed by the governor and passed by the Joint Finance Committee are simply unnecessary. A memo distributed earlier this month by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction shows that the increased revenue estimates and a modest transfer of dollars away from new highway construction would more than cover the costs of the fair funding reform plan offered earlier this year by State Superintendent Tony Evers. This plan is a first step toward improving the antiquated school funding system that currently threatens our schools.

“For more than two decades, Wisconsin schools have been subject to a school funding system that hurts taxpayers, hurts students and, most importantly, hurts our long-held tradition of fine schools,” said Tom Beebe, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools. “The education budget passed by the Joint Finance Committee takes a bad situation and does little to improve it. Worse yet, at the same time that the budget cuts funding for public schools, it funnels millions of additional dollars into private schools that have not demonstrated improved student learning.”

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Fair Aid Coalition

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Southeastern Wisconsin
Schools Alliance
www.schoolsalliance.com

Wisconsin Alliance for
Excellent Schools
www.excellentschools.org

Wisconsin Association
of School Boards
www.wasb.org

Wisconsin Association
of School District
Administrators
www.wasda.org

Wisconsin Education
Association Council
www.weac.org

Wisconsin Parent Teacher
Association (PTA)
www.wisconsinpta.org

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