

To: Members, Joint Committee on Finance
From: Terri Phillips, Executive Director for the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA)
Date: April 10, 2019
Re: Prepared testimony for the Joint Finance Committee Hearing

My name is Terri Phillips and I am the Executive Director for the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance, also known as the SWSA. I represent 32 public school districts in Southeastern Wisconsin who educate roughly 25% of the public school students in Wisconsin.

The SWSA would like to highlight two areas of the budget that we ask you to consider. Both of these issues are not only part of Governor Evers' budget, but also key recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding.

- With each biennial budget, SWSA has come before you with a request for a comprehensive, predictable and sustainable funding system for public school districts.
 - The SWSA supports Governor Evers' budget proposal that increases revenue limits for all school districts and indexes future increases to the Consumer Price index. This would provide a level of predictability to the revenue streams for public schools and would go a long way in helping our districts serve student's needs.

- SWSA also supports increasing the reimbursement rate for students with disabilities to 60%. This increase will make a significant positive impact for **all public school children**.
 - School districts only receive 24.5 cents on the dollar for the cost to educate students with disabilities. Because of the higher needs of these students, our special education population typically costs a school districts much more than a general education student. Most of the other 75% of the cost of the special education student is transferred from the school district's general funds.
 - In the state of Wisconsin, public school districts had to transfer over \$1B from their general funds to support students with disabilities during the 2015-16 calendar year. These are actual dollars that were diverted **from the classroom** to cover these costs.
 - I've heard some of the Joint Finance Committee members and other legislators say that the state can't possibly afford to increase the reimbursement rate to 60%. Nor could the state maintain that effort. My question to you today is, who do you think is paying for the costs to educate these students with disabilities right now? Who do you think is having to maintain that level of effort?
 - The fact remains; local school districts are currently paying these costs with their general education funds and having to make enormous programming changes for the rest of the children in order to do so.

You may ask which one of these two priorities we would rather have? My answer is that we would like both. Wisconsin should support students with disabilities as well as all general education students. Quite frankly, our children, who are the future Wisconsin workforce, deserve it.

Thank you for spending the day with us here in the Milwaukee area. The members of the SWSA are always happy to discuss policy decisions and how they impact our kids.



Terri Phillips, SWSA Executive Director