

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF WHITEFISH BAY

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The Whitefish Bay School District



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## The School Board of the School District of Whitefish Bay

### Areas of Concern in Public Education & the 2019-21 State Biennial Budget – April 30, 2019

As proposed in the Governor's budget, our District supports a \$200/\$204 per pupil increase, an increase to the reimbursement rate for special education, and elimination of the current WRS Annuitant work restrictions. We believe these key shifts in the next biennial budget will provide needed funding and restore local control to school districts, thus further enhancing education for all students.

**Co-existing Priorities** - The biennial budget lays out the State's priorities and we are aware that, at present, lawmakers may see education and transportation infrastructure as competing priorities. However, education and transportation are both investments in future growth: one in human capital and the other in physical infrastructure. We believe these priorities should not be pitted against each other, and that both must be accommodated for the State of Wisconsin to create a better future for all. In particular, investment in education will give schools the resources needed to support learning for all students and provide innovative programming to better prepare students for college, career, workforce, and life.

**Predictable and Sustainable Revenues** – In order to deal with yearly increases in costs that local school districts incur but cannot control, public schools need a comprehensive, predictable, and sustainable funding system with annual increases tied to inflation. This needs to be given priority.

The Governor's \$200/\$204 increase over the biennium is approximately a 2% cost of living increase. This is reasonable and certainly not excessive. Since Act 10, our District has used the "tools" provided by the legislation to freeze salaries and to freeze or eliminate fringe benefits, including the implementation of significant changes to health insurance and post-retirement benefits. But there are limits to the benefits these tools can provide. We would like to see a predictable increase to the allowable per-member change on the revenue limit, one that is aligned to an inflationary measure, allowing us to plan and implement a sustainable budget that will meet the needs of our students. Indeed, an inflation-adjusted increase would provide predictable revenue growth to all districts.

#### ***Why are Predictable and Sustainable Revenues important?***

Districts need annual revenue growth in order to maintain facilities, retain staff, and provide quality educational programs. Without a predictable cost of living increase from the State, our district cannot count on revenue with which to budget future staffing and programming. Many districts have been forced to significantly reduce expenditures or to go to referendum to comply with the revenue limit (the Wisconsin legislature has not increased the revenue limit in 5 years). We believe this is not a sustainable model to provide quality public education for all.

**Increased Reimbursement Rate for Special Education** – We support an increase in the Special Education Categorical Aid Allocation/Reimbursement to 60% of aidable cost. The cost of providing students who have disabilities with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), as required by Federal law, continues to rise in

Whitefish Bay. At the same time, the reimbursement rate has continually decreased. The current estimate for the 2018-19 reimbursement rate for special education in the State of Wisconsin is slightly less than 25%. We are required by Federal Law to provide FAPE to students with disabilities. These costs do not decrease, and they affect the resources available to all students. .

***Why is Increased Reimbursement Rate for Special Education important?***

An increase in the reimbursement rate for Special Education Categorical Aid is crucial for our District to continue to serve special education students in an inclusive way that provides educational opportunities and programming for them and all other students as well.

**Elimination of the Restrictions on Hiring Retired Educators (WRS Annuitants)** - We vigorously support the elimination of current restrictions on hiring retired educators to fill key positions.

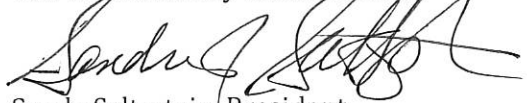
***Why is the Elimination of the Restrictions on Hiring WRS Annuitants important?***

Given the shortage of qualified teachers and the significant decline in college and university education program enrollment, we believe that retired teachers should be permitted to fill the void being created. It is our desire to employ the most qualified and skilled educators in our classrooms, and we believe retired teachers represent a valuable pool from which to draw such educators.

**Summary** - Funding challenges have mounted in recent years for Wisconsin schools. The long-standing tradition of local control has eroded, shifting away from decisions made in partnership with local communities toward more legislatively-imposed mandates. This approach simply cannot continue. Our District remains committed to the idea that local control should be a foundational principle of education policy in the State. We take the position that initiatives that do not embrace this principle are not in students' best interests. The State of Wisconsin will thrive when we recognize that investment in our schools secures a strong future with a vibrant workforce and educated citizenry.

For all of these reasons, the School Board for the School District of Whitefish Bay supports predictable and sustainable increases to revenues, an increase to the special education reimbursement rate to 60%, and the opportunity to hire the very best educator candidates, including candidates who are WRS annuitants. These three outcomes will foster increased local control, allowing Wisconsin school districts to make fiscal and employment decisions that best serve their local communities.

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