

Last week, the SAA Legislative Committee met with essentially a one-item agenda: to discuss what guidance and discussion points the SAA could provide for members as they craft testimony and other communications to the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding. The discussion was wide-ranging, enthusiastic and thoughtful. What appears below is a listing of the priority issues discussed by the Committee.

The SAA encourages members to use the information below, as well as examples from your district and your own expertise, in developing your communications to the Commission.

1. **Tell Your District's Story.** First and foremost, tell your district's story, highlighting the fiscal challenges you face in balancing your budget and meeting the educational needs of the children you serve.
2. **Predictable and Sustainable Increase in Revenues.** The SAA supports a CPI-based annual increase in revenues to align allowable revenue growth with school cost increases and the investments necessary to meet student needs. Indexing revenue growth to inflation will provide much needed fiscal predictability and sustainability in our school finance system. SAA members are encouraged to explain the importance of predictable increases in allowable revenues in both fiscal and human terms. In particular, emphasize the impact on educational opportunities for the kids you serve.
3. **Low Revenue Ceiling.** The SAA strongly supports the low revenue ceiling increases adopted in Assembly Bill 835. Going forward, the SAA supports a sustained effort to enhance revenue limit equity in Wisconsin by raising up low revenue districts over time.
4. **Declining Enrollment Relief.** The SAA supports additional relief for districts in declining enrollment through expanded hold harmless provisions, more flexible rolling averages for enrollment counts, and other possible relief measures. SAA members are encouraged to explain the challenge of balancing budgets and meeting student needs when the district is losing revenue faster than you can prudently cut expenditures.
5. **Increase the Secondary Cost Ceiling.** The SAA has long supported increasing the secondary cost ceiling from its current 90% of statewide average shared cost per pupil to at least 100% of the state average. It makes no sense from a policy standpoint that Wisconsin begins penalizing school districts under the equalization aid formula for spending at 90% of the state average.
6. **Special Education Categorical Appropriation.** The current special education categorical aid appropriation of about \$369 million has been flat since 2008-09 and will remain at this level through at least 2019. The state reimbursement rate for special education costs has now fallen below 26 percent. Maintaining flat categorical aid funding while special education costs continue to rise effectively forces Wisconsin school districts to take more money annually from general aids and property taxes to pay for special education programming. The cost increases for providing students with disabilities a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) are mandated and rise much faster than the general cost increases for other district programming. The SAA supports increasing state categorical aid funding for special education to reimburse at least 30% of aidable costs.
7. **Transportation Aid.** Geographically large, sparsely populated rural school districts that transport students significant distances have been hardest hit by increasing transportation costs. Transportation costs may vary widely among school districts, from less than \$100 per pupil in some districts to more than \$1,800 per pupil in others. This variability in cost for this state mandated service speaks to the need for greater state financial support. Between the state pupil transportation aid appropriation and the high-cost transportation categorical aid program, the state reimburses school districts about \$36.5 million annually, or roughly 10% of total school district transportation costs.

The SAA supports gradually increasing pupil transportation aid until state reimbursement reaches 33% of prior year aidable costs. We also support creation of a second tier of support under the high-cost transportation aid program for districts with per pupil transportation costs between 125% and 150% of the state average.

8. **Voucher Transparency.** The SAA recommends that Wisconsin revise its property tax bills to clearly identify for taxpayers the portion of the school tax levied to replace school aid deducted by the state to finance tuition for private school students through vouchers.
9. **Special Needs Scholarship Program (SNSP).** The SAA supports changing provisions of the 2017-19 State Budget that allows, beginning in 2018-19, the parent of a pupil participating in the SNSP and the private school to agree to provide the pupil with services in excess of those prescribed in the pupil's most recent IEP. These expenditures must then be reimbursed by the resident school district and by the state. This "blank check" provision, completely lacking in any accountability to the resident school district or to the state, should be revised to reflect that expenditures for services provided outside of the IEP are not the responsibility of the resident district.
10. **School Mental Health.** Share with the Commission the difficulties of meeting the needs of your students with mental health challenges. While we greatly appreciate the school mental health investments made in the 2017-19 State Budget, we believe a stronger, long-term commitment from the state is required to meet this challenge.
11. **Educator Recruitment, Development and Retention.** Share with the Commission the difficulties you face in recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators in your district and the impact that school funding has on your challenge.
12. **No Time To Lose.** The SAA has highlighted the No Time To Lose report, released in 2016 by the National Conference of State Legislators, at several SAA member conferences. As an overarching recommendation, the authors encouraged every state to begin the messy process of creating a shared vision for public education. We encourage Wisconsin to follow that call and bring together a broad stakeholder vision team to begin that vitally important work.

We hope you find this information useful. If you should have any questions, please contact the SAA office. Thanks for listening, and for all your efforts on behalf of Wisconsin school children.