



2019–21 Legislative Agenda

The SAA believes that comprehensive education reforms in Wisconsin should emulate the evidence-based best practices of the states and nations that have significantly raised academic performance and closed achievement gaps. In pursuit of this objective, the SAA offers the following legislative priorities:

No Time to Lose

The SAA recommends the state convene a Wisconsin Advisory Commission on Excellence in Education to oversee the design, implementation and evaluation of a whole-system education reform in Wisconsin as recommended by the National Conference of State Legislatures in its *No Time to Lose* report. To support the work of the Commission, the SAA also recommends the state contract with nationally-recognized school finance experts to conduct an adequacy study designed to determine the funding necessary for all Wisconsin school children to meet Wisconsin's education performance objectives and expectations.

Predictable, Sustainable School Funding

The SAA supports indexing general school revenue growth to inflation to align allowable revenue growth with school cost increases and the investments necessary to meet student needs.

High Needs Students

In *Vincent v. Voight (2000)*, the State Supreme Court specifically identified three classes of students to which the state has a special obligation for ensuring equitable opportunities: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and English learners. Today, maintaining flat high-needs funding while costs are rising to serve each of these students challenges the abilities of local school districts to meet the court's standard. The SAA supports:

- ***Students with Disabilities.*** Increasing the current level of state categorical aid funding for special education to reimburse 60 percent of aidable costs.
- ***English Learners (EL).*** The SAA supports increasing the current bilingual-bicultural (BLBC) program appropriation to reimburse 30 percent of aidable costs; creation of a new categorical aid program to provide \$100 per EL student currently not covered by BLBC categorical aid; and an effort to restructure Wisconsin's program requirements, funding and overall approach to educating EL students.
- ***Students in Poverty.*** Wisconsin currently has no comprehensive program that targets additional resources to raise achievement among economically disadvantaged students. The SAA supports providing either additional categorical aid or "weighting" under revenue limits and the equalization aid formula for economically disadvantaged students.

Early Learning Opportunities

Numerous studies have shown that improving early learning opportunities, especially for those in poverty, will help prepare children for their PK-12 experience and help reduce achievement gaps. The SAA supports:

- Counting full-day 4K students as 1.0 FTE for general aid and revenue limit purposes.
- Increasing funding for Wisconsin Shares to boost the number of families accessing high quality child care for their children.
- Creating a refundable Early Education Workforce Tax Credit to help reduce high rates of turnover in the early education workforce.

Children's Mental Health

In Wisconsin, too many children have unmet mental health needs, with these unmet needs resulting in serious negative consequences for the individual, their families, our communities and the learning environment in our schools. 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. As a next step, the SAA supports:

- Expanding the School-Based Mental Health Services Collaboration Grant Program to support more school districts in connecting students to needed mental health services.
- Increasing Medicaid payment rates for individual and group therapy.
- Increasing financial support for staff training in mental health.
- Expanding the School Mental Health Categorical Aid Program to provide incentives for school districts to expand services provided by school psychologists, nurses, counselors and social workers.

Educator Preparation, Development, Recruitment & Retention

The SAA supports the ongoing work of the State Superintendent's Working Group on School Staffing Issues to focus on recruitment/retention of quality teacher and administrator candidates and to conduct a review of educator preparation programs and make recommendations for how best to prepare and support educators. The SAA also supports the following recommendations to tackle troubling educator shortages in the short-term:

- Eliminating current restrictions on hiring retired educators to fill key positions.
- Developing pilot loan forgiveness and "grow your own" efforts.
- Streamlining the license reciprocity process.

Private School Vouchers

The SAA supports the following proposals regarding private school vouchers:

- A moratorium on further expansion of private school voucher programs.
- Revising Wisconsin property tax bills to clearly identify the portion of the school tax levied to finance private school tuition.
- Changing state law to remove the resident school district's responsibility for any per pupil Special Needs Scholarship Program costs above that of the statutory payment amount.

- Authorizing a study of the Wisconsin private school voucher programs, with a focus on the fiscal impact these programs have on Wisconsin school districts and Wisconsin taxpayers.
- Requiring greater public accountability for voucher schools in areas such as the use of licensed teachers, state instructional requirements, student due process protections, uniform high school graduation requirements, and IDEA protections for students with disabilities.

Revenue Limit Equity

The SAA supports setting the low revenue ceiling at 95 percent of the statewide average revenue limit per student. A steadily improving low revenue ceiling policy is an important part of ensuring equitable resources for all children no matter where they live.

Declining Enrollment Relief

The SAA supports a relief measure developed by the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding: Delete the prior year base hold harmless adjustment and modify the main declining enrollment adjustment to compare each year's three-year rolling average to a base year. If the current year average is less than the base year, a district would receive 90 percent of what the decline would have generated.

Secondary Cost Ceiling

The SAA supports increasing the secondary cost ceiling from 90% to 100% of the prior year's average statewide shared cost. In order to manage this change and mitigate the effects of aid redistribution, the state will need to increase equalization aid and probably phase the change in over several years.