



## **School Administrators Alliance**

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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# **2021–23 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:*

### **Students with Disabilities**

While we greatly appreciate the increase in special education categorical aid made in the 2019-21 State Budget, the SAA supports increasing the current level of special education aid to reimburse 40 percent of aidable costs by the end of the 2021-23 biennium.

### **Predictable, Sustainable School Funding**

Index general school revenue growth to the consumer price index (CPI) to align allowable revenue growth with school cost increases and the investments necessary to meet student needs. The SAA recommends distributing general revenue increases in a balanced fashion using both revenue limit/general aid and per pupil categorical aid to better meet the needs of all school districts.

### **Pupil Count Mitigation**

Actual student counts on the third Friday in September, the second Friday in January, and summer school have a significant impact in determining a school district's general aid distribution, revenue limit and per pupil categorical aid. Because of COVID-19, the actual September 2020 student counts for nearly 80 percent of Wisconsin school districts have declined, leaving these districts (because of the three-year rolling average of student enrollment) to face the fiscal consequences for 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23. School districts, and the students they serve, should not suffer financially because of the uncertainties of a public health crisis. For the 2020-21 student count, the SAA supports:

- Allowing school districts to use the greater of the districts 2019-20 or 2020-21 pupil count for revenue limit calculations.
- Treating the non-recurring declining enrollment exemption and base revenue hold harmless as recurring adjustments for one year only.
- Reducing a district's maximum general aid decrease from 15 percent to 10 percent in FY22 and FY23.

### **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 last two state budgets, we believe a stronger, long-term commitment from the state is required to meet this challenge. SAA members increasingly express support for moving future investments toward a broad-based, flexible categorical aid to better meet the needs of more students in more school districts. As a next step, the SAA supports:

- Expand the School Mental Health Categorical Aid Program to provide financial support for services provided by school psychologists, nurses, counselors and social workers.
- The SAA supports increasing School Mental Health Services Collaboration Grant Program funding by \$3.5 million annually to support more school districts in connecting students to needed mental health services.

### **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.
- Greater investments in high quality birth-to-three programming for those children who have a high probability of not being ready for school.

### **English Learners**

The SAA supports dramatically increasing the current level of categorical aid support for English Learners (EL) and directing that support to all school districts with EL students.

### **Economically Disadvantaged Students**

Wisconsin currently has no comprehensive program that targets additional resources to raise achievement among economically disadvantaged students. The SAA supports providing an additional \$150 in per pupil aid for each economically disadvantaged student.

### **Educator Recruitment & Retention**

School districts will need continued flexibility in the hiring and licensure of teachers and administrators to manage anticipated high levels of turnover. The SAA supports the following recommendations to tackle troubling educator shortages in the short-term:

- Ease restrictions on hiring retired educators to fill key positions.
- Maximize district flexibility in utilizing the current pool of licensed educators.
- Expand and streamline licensing reciprocity to increase the pool of out-of-state educators available under PI 34.
- Maximize opportunities for pre-service teachers to serve in direct student instruction.
- Provide incentives for teachers to meet dual enrollment accreditation standards.

### **Private School Vouchers**

The SAA supports the following proposals regarding private school vouchers:

- Moratorium on further expansion of private school voucher programs.

- Revise Wisconsin property tax bills to clearly identify the portion of the school tax levied to finance private school tuition.
- Change 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.
- Authorize 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.
- Require 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 (LRC) at 90 percent of the statewide average maximum revenue limit per student. The current LRC amount of \$10,000 is 87.3 percent of the current state average revenue limit of \$11,450. A steadily improving LRC policy is an important part of ensuring equitable resources for all children no matter where they live.

### **Declining Enrollment Relief**

Whatever the mechanism, the SAA supports additional, effective relief for those school districts in declining enrollment.

### **Broadband Access**

The SAA supports expanding affordable, reliable, quality broadband access throughout Wisconsin, and supports state funding to ensure broadband access and electronic devices for all students in their schools and communities.

### **Equalize School Transportation Cost Impact**

The SAA supports increasing the current level of state categorical aid funding for high cost transportation toward the goal of 100 percent state support for eligible pupil transportation costs in excess of the statewide per-pupil average. Geographically large, sparsely populated rural school districts that transport students significant distances spend a decidedly greater share of their educational resources on transportation, which adversely impacts educational opportunities for district students.