



**WISCONSIN
BUDGET
PROJECT**

An Initiative of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

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Class Sizes Rise as Wisconsin Slips Toward Average in School Spending

As Wisconsin children strap on their backpacks to begin a new school year, the quality of the schools they are returning to may not be as high as those attended by their older siblings a decade ago. A new analysis by the Wisconsin Budget Project finds that state aid for our schools has declined since 2000 and student-to-teacher ratios have increased.

Once a national leader in educational investment and performance, state support has eroded to the point where Wisconsin now ranks close to the national average in key measures of support for education. The steep cuts in support for K-12 education in the 2011-13 biennial budget continue, and probably accelerate, that decade-long trend.

According to the Budget Project's analysis of the most current national spending data covering the period 2000 through 2009, Wisconsin's per-student state aid decreased by 10 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars. On the other hand, support from local sources – primarily property taxes – has climbed by 21 percent since 2000, in inflation adjusted dollars.

“In 2009, for the first time since the mid-1990s, Wisconsin's schools relied nearly as much on local sources of revenue as they did on state support,” said Tamarine Cornelius, author of the report.

Wisconsin continued in 2009 to spend more than the national average for instructional expenses, but was gradually becoming more average. Between 2000 and 2009, Wisconsin's rank in instructional spending per pupil fell from 11th nationally to 16th.

“The combination of revenue caps and the gradual erosion of support from state sources has put a squeeze on school districts, resulting in significant cuts in schools across the state,” Cornelius said.

Wisconsin's decline relative to the nation as a whole can also be seen in teacher-student ratios. Between the 1999-2000 and 2009-10 school years, the number of students per teacher *increased* by 0.5 students in Wisconsin, while the national average *decreased* by 0.7 students. Wisconsin's rank on this important measure of educational quality has dropped steadily in recent years, from 21st in 2006 to 30th in 2010.

“For Wisconsin to thrive economically, we must continue to strive to have a world class education system,” said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “As we look at the trends in public school finance, Wisconsin's citizens and

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policymakers have to ask whether we should be content to become an average state in school spending and class size,” Taylor added.

The report is available online at:

http://www.wisconsinbudgetproject.org/schools_spending_staffing_wisconsin.pdf