



Competing Proposals for Wisconsin Schools

A Comparison of Three Different Education Budgets

Governor Walker, Wisconsin Assembly Republicans, and Senate Republicans have each released their own version of an education budget. All three versions include a major increase in per-pupil funding for K-12 schools, although the Assembly proposal allocates a smaller amount than the Governor’s or Senate’s proposal. This table highlights the major areas of difference in their budget proposals, as well as the general reaction of education advocates, a diverse group with varied positions.

The budget under consideration will determine state spending over a period that starts when the budget is passed and ends in June 2019.

Comparison of Major K-12 Education Budget Proposals for 2017-19

MEASURE	GOVERNOR’S PROPOSAL	ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL	SENATE PROPOSAL	REACTION OF EDUCATION ADVOCATES
Per-pupil aid from the state to public schools	Increase of \$200 per student in 2018 and \$404 in 2019 over current levels, for a total of \$509 million in new money over two years. A portion of that increase would be contingent on the state achieving savings in the program that provides health insurance for state employees.	Increase of \$150 per student in 2018 and \$350 in 2019 over current levels, for a total of \$418 million in new money over two years. That is \$91 million less than the amount included in the Governor’s proposal.	Same funding increase as the Governor’s proposal, but does not make part of the increase contingent on the state achieving savings in other areas.	Favor higher funding levels. Some would prefer to see the additional resources distributed through the main funding formula that takes into account differences among school districts in their capacity to raise revenue from the property tax.
Conditions on receiving increase in per-pupil aid	Require district employees to pay at least 12% of health care costs.	Set no conditions on health care costs.	Set no conditions on health care costs, but require districts to report cost figures to the state.	Oppose setting conditions on receiving aid.

MEASURE	GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL	ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL	SENATE PROPOSAL	REACTION OF EDUCATION ADVOCATES
Change to revenue limits	Freeze the ceiling on each district's spending from the combination of property taxes and general school aids. The increase in per-pupil aid falls outside this ceiling.	No across-the-board increase in revenue limits. Allow districts with low revenue limits to increase them without going to referendum, leading to an estimated \$92 million property tax increase statewide.	Same as the Assembly's proposal, but phase in the allowed increase over six years. Property taxes would increase by \$23 million over the two-year budget period.	Favor raising revenue limits both for low-spending districts and across the board, but have concerns about pushing districts to raise property taxes by failing to provide sufficient state aid.
General school aids	Increase by \$73 million in the second year of the budget, but because there is no increase in revenue limits, districts would be forced to cut property taxes by the same amount of new aid they received.	Increase by \$103 million over two years, compared to current levels. Most of the additional state aid would go to decreasing property taxes.	Same as Governor's proposal.	Favor allowing increases in state resources to be used to provide more resources to educate students rather than lowering property taxes compared to what they would otherwise be.
School levy tax credit	Increase by \$87 million over the two-year budget period, compared to current levels. This credit is applied directly to the tax bills of all property owners, including non-resident owners of vacation homes. There is no upper income limit to be eligible for the credit.	Increase by \$52 million over the two-year budget period, compared to current levels.	Increase by \$27 million over the two-year budget period, compared to current levels.	Favor providing districts with resources that can be used in the classrooms, rather than used for broad tax cuts.
Aid to rural districts	Provide \$20 million in new resources over two years outside the revenue limits for sparsely populated districts, compared to current levels.	Provide \$2 million in new resources compared to current levels for sparsely populated districts.	Same as Assembly proposal.	Favor Governor's proposal, which provides \$18 million more than the Assembly or Senate.

MEASURE	GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL	ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL	SENATE PROPOSAL	REACTION OF EDUCATION ADVOCATES
Limits on school referendums	No new limits on referendums, but eliminate a provision that allows districts to exceed their revenue limits for improvements that reduce energy costs.	Limit when referendums can be held to the spring election or November general election, i.e. three times in a given two-year period. It's unclear whether the proposal includes a prohibition on revenue limit exemptions for energy efficiency projects.	Similar to Assembly proposal, but prohibit districts from exceeding their revenue limits to implement energy efficiency measures only until July 2019.	Oppose adding new limits.
Prohibition on additional state aid as result of referendum	No change included.	No change included.	Prohibit the state from taking into account any increase in district spending resulting from a referendum, when calculating the biggest portion of state aid. Under the current system, districts that pass a referendum receive some additional state aid if voters approve raising additional resources from the local property tax.	Oppose, as this measure would permanently bar many districts that pass referendums, especially lower-property wealth districts, from receiving the increase in state aid that they would receive under the current system.
Mental health	Provide \$7 million a year above current levels for school-based mental health initiatives.	Provide \$8 million a year in new funding.	Provide \$7 million a year in new funding.	In general, education advocates favor providing additional resources to help districts address the mental health needs of their students, as long as providing mental health services isn't a mandate for schools.
Resources for districts that consolidate, share grades, or share positions	Expand ability of districts to share services, but provide no additional resources for this purpose.	Provide \$6 million starting in the second year of the budget for districts that consolidate, share grades, or share administrative positions.	Similar to the Assembly proposal, but provide \$4 million.	Mixed. Advocates favor providing additional tools and resources to districts facing declining enrollment, but some would prefer the aid be provided in a way that allows districts to avoid combining functions or services.

MEASURE	GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL	ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL	SENATE PROPOSAL	REACTION OF EDUCATION ADVOCATES
Funding targeted at Milwaukee schools	Provide an additional \$8 million for performance funding for public and private schools in Milwaukee and to expand summer school at Milwaukee public schools.	Same as Governor's proposal.	Provide an additional \$5 million for performance funding and summer school, compared to current levels.	Favor higher funding levels, as in the Governor's and Assembly's proposals.
Mobile computers for students	Not included in budget proposal.	Provide public and private schools with grants to buy mobile devices or associated services for students, at a total cost of \$9 million a year. Schools must match the dollar amount provided by the state.	Same as Assembly proposal.	Mixed. Some advocates believe that additional resources for devices will promote achievement and address technology access issues. Others oppose providing public resources to private schools or believe resources would be better spent in other ways.
Expand eligibility for school voucher program	No major changes.	Budget proposal does not include major changes. After the proposal was released, the leader of the Assembly endorsed an increase in the family income ceiling for participating students outside of Racine and Milwaukee, to a level higher than the one included in the Senate proposal.	Increase the family income ceiling for participating students outside of Racine and Milwaukee, water down limits on students already attending private schools receiving publicly-funded tuition vouchers, and allow private schools to receive public money to offer virtual education programs, among other changes. The expansion of the school voucher program would reduce state funding to public schools by \$21 million in the second year of the budget.	Oppose providing additional public resources to private schools that do not have to provide the same services as public schools, and do not have the same level of accountability.

MEASURE	GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL	ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL	SENATE PROPOSAL	REACTION OF EDUCATION ADVOCATES
Voucher amounts for students with disabilities who attend private schools	Keep current system in which private schools that accept children with disabilities under the special needs scholarship program receive a fixed payment from the state for each student. Increase the payment amount from \$12,000 to \$12,217 in the first year of the budget and then to \$12,434 in the second year.	Change the voucher amount that private schools receive to a new variable amount based on an estimate of the cost to implement the student's IEP, prepared by the student's school district of residence. Private schools are not required to provide special education or related services, even though the amount they would be paid would be based on the cost of providing those services.	Same as Governor's proposal.	Oppose providing additional public resources to private schools, as the Governor's and Senate's proposal would do. Advocates also oppose the administrative burden for school districts that developing cost estimates would entail, as required by the Assembly proposal.
Open enrollment payment amounts	Keep current system for determining the amount of aid that is transferred between districts when a student who lives in one school district enrolls in a different district. The transfer amount increases at the same rate as state aid to schools.	Significantly increase the open enrollment transfer amount, by about \$1,400 to about \$8,200. The transfer amount for students with special needs would change from \$12,000 to an amount that reflects an estimate of actual costs incurred by the non-resident school district.	Increase the open enrollment transfer amount for students who are not disabled by \$100 a year on top of the amount it would increase under the current system.	Oppose significant increases. Advocates note that increasing the transfer amounts could create winners and losers among school districts, with the biggest beneficiaries being suburban school districts, many of which have higher than average revenue limit authority.