



Wisconsin's Legislators Fail to Invest in Higher Education

The Final 2021-23 Budget for Higher Education

During a time of unprecedented revenue growth, the Legislature approved a higher education budget that does not include any significant new resources, and does not take steps to undo the steep budget cuts of past years or expand access to higher education.

The legislature eliminated nearly all the additional higher education funding that the Governor recommended and had a plan to pay for. This includes the Governor's proposal to fund a tuition freeze, stop charging tuition to students from families with low incomes, improve mental health services, and address high-demand areas of study that would ease workforce shortages. Instead, the legislature chose to use the technical college system as a mechanism for delivering a \$72 million property tax cut.

Wisconsin students deserve access to high-quality, affordable higher education. With this budget, the legislature squandered an opportunity to make sure that all workers can develop the skills they need to move Wisconsin's economy into the future.

The Governor signed the budget passed by the legislature, and it is now law.

No Help for Students Struggling to Afford College

This budget does not help families who are having difficulty affording college. In fact, the budget lifts the eight-year long tuition freeze and allows the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents to increase tuition rates, although the Board has not done so.

The Governor had proposed several ways to hold down costs for students, all of which were eliminated by the legislature:

- Freezing undergraduate tuition for the next two years, and providing \$50 million to the University of Wisconsin System to make up for the loss of tuition revenue;
- Waiving four years' worth of tuition and fees at all UW System institutions for incoming students if the students come from households earning \$60,000 or less
- Providing an additional \$34 million in grants to Wisconsin college students; and
- Allowing all students who grow up in Wisconsin to pay in-state tuition rates, regardless of whether they are documented.

Very Limited Increase in General Support

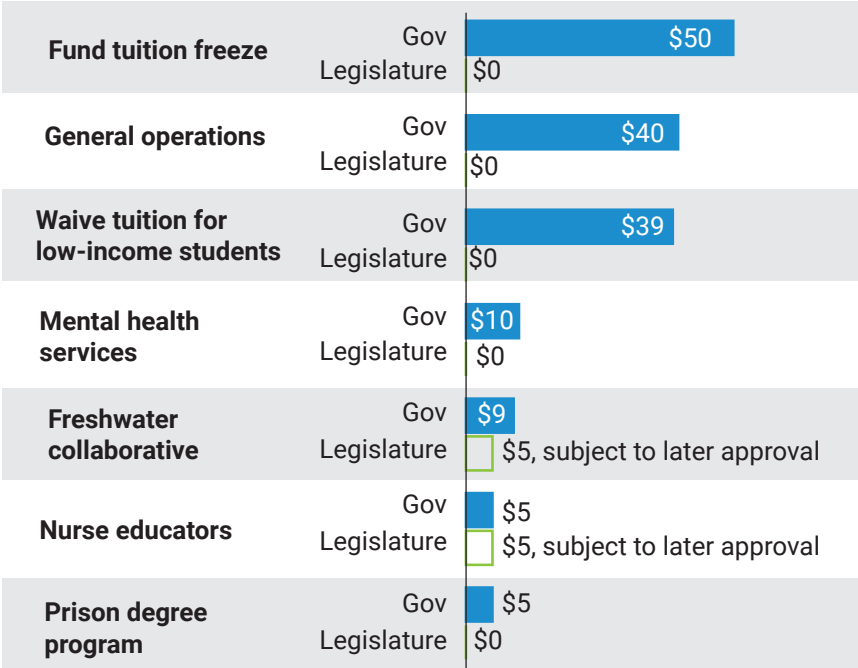
The Governor proposed a \$40 million increase in general support for the UW System and another \$36 million for the technical college system. In contrast, the legislature allocated no dollars for

general support for the UW System, and only \$5 million for the technical college system. The legislature’s budget bars technical college districts from increasing their property tax revenue except to account for new construction in the district.

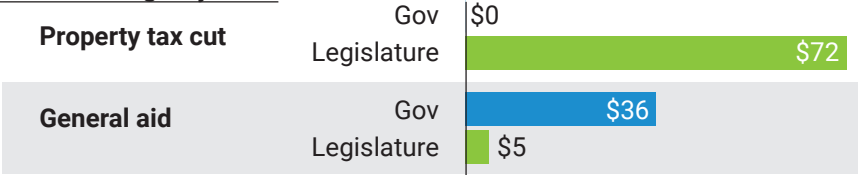
Wisconsin Lawmakers Cut Nearly All of Proposed Increase for Higher Education

The Wisconsin legislature sharply reduced the spending increase for higher education that Governor Evers proposed in the 2021-23 budget. This chart shows changes to the largest higher education funding proposals, with dollar amounts in millions.

UW System



Technical College System



Higher education assistance



Source: Analysis of Legislative Fiscal Bureau publications

Legislature Removes New Initiatives

The Governor proposed several new significant initiatives, most of which the legislature did not fund. New initiatives proposed by the Governor include:

- \$10 million in new resources across the UW System to improve and expand services related to student mental health and behavioral health. The legislature removed this item from the budget.
- \$9 million for a freshwater collaborative across UW campuses that would highlight Wisconsin's role in freshwater science. The legislature set aside \$5 million for this effort in a supplemental appropriation controlled by a legislative committee. The money may be released by the committee at a later date.
- \$5 million to increase the UW's capacity to teach nursing. The legislature set aside \$5 million for this purpose in a supplemental appropriation that could be released later.
- \$5 million to help prisoners get college degrees to improve their post-release employment prospects. The Legislature removed this item from the budget.

Biggest Category of Funding is for a Property Tax Cut

The legislature provided next to no new funding for higher education in the 2021-23 budget. Instead, it used the technical college system to deliver a \$72 million property tax cut. Technical colleges are funded from a combination of property taxes, state aid, and tuition. In this budget, the legislature provided additional funding for technical college districts but then did not allow them to increase their budget by an equivalent amount, forcing the districts to pass the money through to residents in the form of a property tax cut.

A Smaller Capital Budget

Governor Evers' capital budget proposal included just over \$1 billion in large building and maintenance projects across the UW System. The legislature approved \$628 million in projects, declining to fund projects like a science center at UW-La Crosse and the replacement of the engineering building at UW-Madison.