



Education

2017-2018 Legislative Summary

Wisconsin state lawmakers have wrapped up the 2017-18 legislative session after passing several bills that affect K-12 education.

The legislature is scheduled to be out of session for the rest of the year. Unless lawmakers call for a special session of the legislature that is not on the regular schedule, they will not meet again until January 2019. Bills that did not pass during this session can be brought up again at that time, but will have to start the process over.

Additional Resources for K-12 Education

- State lawmakers approved additional money for low-spending school districts and rural districts.
- State law limits the amount of money school districts may spend on each student on average, unless voters in the district approve an increase. The budget cap is tied to how much individual school districts spent per student in 1993 when the spending limits were implemented. Districts that had low spending levels at the time this limitation was put into place have not been allowed to spend as much as other districts in the intervening years.
- Lawmakers passed legislation to allow school districts with low budget caps to increase their spending to a maximum of \$9,400 per student — up from the current level of \$9,100 — without needing voter approval. That budget cap will gradually increase to \$9,800 in 2023. The higher budget cap will result in an additional \$21.8 million in property tax revenue in 2019 for school districts. This provision was included in [2017 Wisconsin Act 141](#).
- Lawmakers also approved an additional \$6.5 million a year in state aid to small rural school districts, starting in 2019. These school districts must shoulder the costs of transporting students across a large geographic area and deal with high fixed costs. This aid was included in [2017 Wisconsin Act 141](#) along with the loosening of spending restrictions for school districts with low revenue limits.

School Safety

- The Wisconsin legislature approved \$100 million in one-time money to give safety improvement grants to schools. Both public and private schools are eligible to receive the money.
- Grant-eligible activities include improving school safety policies, training school staff in safety procedures, and making upgrades to school buildings. Governor Walker has said he does not favor arming teachers as a method for improving school safety, but the legislation does not specifically bar arming teachers as an expense that could be considered for a grant.
- The legislation creates a new state office to administer the school safety grants, collect blueprints of school buildings for law enforcement to access in case of emergency, and train school district staff. In addition, the legislation requires public and private schools to conduct on-site safety assessments and school violence drills, and requires school staff and medical professionals to report threats of school violence to a law enforcement agency. The school safety grant money and other provisions are included in [2017 Wisconsin Act 143](#).
- Critics say that one-time funding to improve school safety does not sufficiently address school districts' ongoing safety needs, and point out that the law does not include new limitations on who may obtain a gun.

Proposals That Did Not Pass

Lawmakers did not approve several high-profile proposals, including:

- A bill that would have made it easier to suspend students and would require police departments to notify school administrators when students were taken into custody for certain offenses even if they were not school-related. Critics of the bill said it would add barriers to academic success and bar practices shown to be effective in helping students thrive. ([2017 Assembly Bill 693](#))
- A package of bills that would have made it more difficult for voters to approve raising their own property taxes so as to generate new resources for their K-12 schools. (Bills in this package include [2017 Assembly Bill 268/Senate Bill 195](#), [AB 269/SB 194](#), [AB 274/SB 187](#), [AB 279/SB 192](#), and [AB 285/SB 193](#)). Most of those limitations did not pass, although the bill that limited when during the year referendums can be held was included in the state budget.

Other Provisions Related to Education

Wisconsin's budget, passed in the fall of 2017, also includes several provisions related to education. To find out more, read [A Summary of the Final 2017-19 Budget for K-12 Education](#), Wisconsin Budget Project, September 2017.

Proposals Affecting Education in 2017-2018 Legislative Session

Passed	Allow low-spending school districts to modestly increase their budgets by increasing property taxes in their districts by an estimated \$22 million in 2019 and additional amounts in subsequent years.
Passed	Provide \$6.5 million more a year in aid to small, rural school districts, starting in 2019.
Passed	Provide \$100 million in one-time grant money to school districts to make safety-related building upgrades and train staff. Create a new state office to promote school safety, and add school safety-related requirements for schools.
Did Not Pass	Make it easier for a student to be suspended, and require police departments to notify school districts of student offenses.
Did Not Pass	Make it more difficult for voters to approve raising their own property taxes to fund school districts.