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Kids Forward Urges Lawmakers to Improve the Budget for Public Schools

The following is a response by Ken Taylor, Kids Forward's Executive Director, to the changes made by the Joint Finance Committee to the proposed budget for K-12 education:

Wisconsin students all across the state deserve access to an excellent public education, and Wisconsin residents deserve to enjoy the economic benefits generated by a first-class public school system. That's why Kids Forward urges legislators and the governor to work together to significantly improve the K-12 education budget approved on May 23 by the Joint Finance Committee. The sharp cuts made to the budget introduced by the governor will hurt school children in all districts across Wisconsin.

As a result of these cuts, Wisconsin will continue to severely underfund special education, and schools will not have adequate resources to combat the racial disparities in education that harm our students and hold back our state.

The deep cuts to the governor's recommendations for general school aid, special education aid, and school mental health services will make it harder for students to get the services they need in order to thrive. The partisan plan approved by the Joint Finance Committee totally eliminated funding increases in many areas, including programs that:

- *make sure that students start the school day fed and ready to learn;*
- *support students as they move towards English-language proficiency; and*
- *expand after-school programs.*

Wisconsin voters have demonstrated quite clearly in recent years that they place a very high priority on providing financing that will help our schools and our communities thrive. But the Joint Finance Committee has taken a different approach, prioritizing the preservation of tax loopholes that benefit the wealthy and well-connected over the needs of students attending public schools. The Joint Finance Committee also rejected the Governor's proposal to expand Medicaid, which would ease state budget pressure by creating hundreds of millions in state savings.

Before the budget process is completed, state legislators should stop subverting the interest of Wisconsin residents and instead provide our public schools with the resources they need to provide a world-class education to Wisconsin students.

The table on the next page compares the Joint Finance Committee's budget for public schools with the Governor's budget.

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Wisconsin Public Schools Would Get Far Less Resources Under Budget Committee’s Plan, Compared to Governor’s Proposal

Major aid categories for public school districts. Dollar amounts are two-year figures unless otherwise noted. Amounts may not total due to rounding.

<u>Category of Aid</u>		<u>Governor compared to base</u>	<u>Joint Finance Committee compared to base</u>	<u>Joint Finance Committee compared to Governor</u>
General school aid		+\$619 million	+\$330 million	-\$281 million
Limits on the amount districts are allowed to spend from property tax revenue and general school aid, combined	In 2020	+\$200/student	+\$175/student	-\$25 per student
	In 2021	+ an add'l \$204/student on top of 2020 increase	+ an add'l \$179/student on top of 2020 increase	-\$25 per student, on top of loss in 2020
Special education aid	Dollar amount	+\$611 million	+\$95 million	-\$516 million
	Share of school costs reimbursed	60%	30%	Reimburses costs at half the rate
Mental health services		+\$58 million	+\$13 million	-\$46 million
Resources for English-language learners		+\$44 million	\$0	-\$44 million
New aid category that sets a floor on the amount of general school aid and flat per-student aid that a district receives, combined		N/A	+\$5 million	+\$5 million
Resources targeted at urban districts		+\$25 million	\$0	-\$25 million
After-school programs		+\$10 million	\$0	-\$10 million
Resources targeted at rural school districts*		+\$12 million	+\$4 million	-\$9 million
Personal computing devices for students		-\$9 million	\$0	+\$9 million
Fixed per-student aid*		No change	+\$54 million	+\$54 million

* Does not include changes in funding that stem from re-estimates of program costs