



A Summary of Recent Legislative Action on Education

Wisconsin state lawmakers wrapped up their legislative session this month, after passing several bills affecting education. Several proposals that received a significant amount of media coverage did not pass.

The legislature is scheduled to be out of session for the rest of the year. Occasionally lawmakers call for a special session of the legislature that is not on the regular schedule, but assuming they do not do that, they will not meet again until January 2017. Bills that did not pass during this session can be brought up again at that time, but will have to start the process over.

BUDGET CUTS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE VOUCHER PROGRAM

Wisconsin lawmakers made a change that would require some school districts to cut their budgets. The budget cuts will affect school districts in which some students receive publicly-funded vouchers to attend private schools. The cuts will be small for most districts at first, but could grow as caps on the number of students participating in the voucher program are lifted. This bill continues the recent trend of limiting the resources available for public education.







Lawmakers required districts with voucher students to reduce their budgets by reducing the amount of money districts are allowed to raise through the property tax. If this change had been in effect for the 2015-16 school year, school districts would have had their ability to levy property taxes reduced by \$5.3 million.

By far the biggest effect of this change will be felt in the Racine school district, which will be required to cut its budget by \$1.4 million. Other school districts with the largest budget cuts include:

- Green Bay, with an estimated cut of \$315,000;
- Kenosha, with a cut of \$263,000; and
- Appleton, with a cut of \$219,000.

This change will not affect the Milwaukee school district or districts that do not have

Proposals Affecting K-12 Schools in the 2015-16 Wisconsin Legislative Session

OUTCOME	PROPOSAL
Passed 	Budget cuts for schools districts with students in the voucher program
	Overhaul of a program that kept class sizes small
Did not pass 	Limits on the ability of voters to approve new resources for schools
	Elimination of a tool that allows districts to improve energy efficiency
	A ban on school bathrooms that serve students of more than one gender
	Allowing holders of concealed carry permits to carry guns on school grounds

any students receiving vouchers to attend private schools. The actual size of the budget cuts would depend on the number of students in each district who receive vouchers. (Assembly Bill 751/Senate Bill 615)

OVERHAULING A PROGRAM THAT KEPT CLASS SIZES SMALL

Lawmakers significantly revised a program (SAGE) that gives participating schools additional funding to keep class sizes small for low-income, elementary-age students. The new version of the program loosens the requirements for keeping class sizes small, and allows districts to use other methods to meet requirements for improving student achievement, including tutoring and instructional coaching. (2015 Wisconsin Act 53)

PROPOSALS THAT DID NOT PASS

Lawmakers did not hold votes on several high-profile proposals, including several that would have limited the ability of local school officials to make decisions affecting students in their districts. The proposals that did not receive floor votes include:

- Banning school districts from sending a referendum to voters for a set period after an earlier referendum, if the first referendum was rejected by voters. This bill would have made it harder for voters to approve additional resources for children in public schools. (Assembly Bill 481/Senate Bill 355)
- Eliminating a provision that allows school districts to exceed budget limits set by the state in order to make changes that improve energy efficiency. (AB 49/SB 337)
- Requiring school districts to designate restrooms and locker rooms for use by students of one gender only. Currently, decisions about how to designate school facilities are made at the local level. If passed, the proposal would have potentially put Wisconsin schools in conflict with federal requirements for accommodating transgender students. (AB 469/SB 582)
- Allowing holders of concealed carry permits to carry guns on school grounds. Currently, it is a felony to do so in most cases. (AB 846/SB 589)