

The State Legislative Report for the 102nd PTA Convention:

On the state level, the Legislative work has been very busy this spring. Many of the bills that have been introduced would be extremely damaging to Wisconsin public schools.

For the first time in history, the proposed schools general aid budget is being cut by 870 million dollars. This results from an annual aid **increase** of \$275/pupil to a **decrease** of \$500/pupil. When that is combined with a lowered revenue limit, it amounts to more than \$1.7 billion dollars in cuts to public schools. But we are not done yet!

AB51/ SB22 removes the cap on private choice schools. These currently are only in Milwaukee, but this bill allows CESAs, UW colleges and the “Charter School Authorizing Board” to start one or more charter schools anywhere in the state. These are not charter schools that come under the district’s school board authority.

Here are a couple of interesting points about these private or 2r charter schools—

1. The WI constitution appoints the state school superintendent, currently Tony Evers, as the sole overseer of public schools. The Charter School Authorizing Board takes that authority away from him. The constitutionality of this should be questioned.
2. The bill sets up an alternative license for teachers at private charters allowing them to teach multiple topics that are not within their college degree. DPI is supposed to “allow multiple ways” for these people to demonstrate their competency.
3. The bill designates employees of private charters as public employees for the purpose of participating in the state retirement system or WRS. Calling them public employees doesn’t make it so, and if the IRS determines that they are not public employees, it would jeopardize the retirement system for all other state employees in the program, making all funds taxable.
4. The funding for private charters is “sum sufficient” meaning that the state will kick in \$7775/pupil for as many students as want to attend private charters. There is a finite, and much smaller than last year, pot of money for public school general aid. But while we are cutting funds for public schools, we will take out as much money as is needed to cover the tuition for private charter schools.

AB37/SB 20 requires MPS to allow the city of Milwaukee to sell unused school buildings to anyone, including private charter schools that would be operated in direct competition to MPS schools. We only asked that the buildings be sold to a group that would serve the people of Milwaukee either as a beneficial non-profit, or as a tax-paying entity.

AB 92 removes the cap for both numbers and income levels for the voucher schools in Milwaukee. The state will now be subsidizing the wealthy people of Milwaukee to send their child to private schools that they could easily afford.

AB 94 was introduced by a representative from Spring Green about an hour west of Madison... nowhere near Milwaukee. This bill allows a private voucher school to bill the state 10.5% of the "fair market value" of their school building if they own it. So after 10 years, the state will have essentially paid for this school building. However, the bill states that the school cannot stop the payments from the state, so the taxpayers of Wisconsin will buy that building over and over again.

Recently, Leah Vukmir introduced a bill that would give scholarships to special needs students who want to go to private charter or voucher schools. This sounds very nice, but the fact is, private schools do not want to teach special needs students. Most likely, the schools would enroll the special needs student, take the money from the state, then shortly, kick the student back to the public schools, but they get to keep the money. What a deal!

Are you getting all of this?

Then there is the general budget bill. This is AB40/SB27. There are some big hits in this bill. It would eliminate, not just reduce, but eliminate:

- Grants for aid to Children at risk
- Alternative Education grants
- English for SE Asian children
- Grants for AP courses
- Grants for alcohol and other drug abuse prevention
- Grants for improving academic achievement
- Grants for school nurses
- Grants for preschool –grade 5 programs in high poverty schools
- STEM grants

Held steady at FY 11 funding levels are

- Special education
- High cost special education
- Aid to counties for children with disabilities
- SAGE
- School lunch matching funds

Getting 10% cuts are

- Grants to start 4K
- Aid for AODA
- Aid to CESAs
- Bilingual-bicultural programs
- Gifted and Talented
- Head start supplement (to Federal \$)
- School Breakfast grants
- School milk program
- Sparsity aid
- Youth options transportation
- Public library funds
- Newsline for the Blind
- Periodical and reference information databases

It eliminates the requirement for voucher schools to administer the WKCE test. It only gave this test for one year and the results were considerably lower than their public school counterparts.

It eliminates the requirement that the school district employs a reading specialist, but third graders are expected to be proficient at reading by the end of the school year. This will be determined by a new examination to be developed and given by the Department of Administration. Apparently, all the education experts have transferred to that department.

The school year no longer has to be 180 days, but maintains a minimum number of hours. However, any time lost for things such as snow days, bomb threats or school closings by the health department no longer need to be made up.

Have you heard enough? And trust me, this is just the stuff that is easy to explain.

This budget is still only a proposal and I have heard rumblings that there may not be as much support for it as was once thought. It would be helpful for the Representatives and Senators in both parties to hear from their constituents about what you dislike about the budget bill. Hearing from you gives them the back-up to say that their email is running mostly against the bill and gives them cover to vote against it.

Things you can do to help change legislation would be to vote every time the polls are open, but know who or what you are voting for. Read the website for the League of Women Voters for candidate bios or explanations of referenda. Get involved in candidate forums. Ask detailed questions... everyone is in favor of keeping our schools open. Is the candidate willing to find new revenue or reform the way funds are allocated? How does he/she plan to do that? Attend any town hall meetings and ask what they are doing about the questions they answered in the candidate forum. Make them accountable!

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/asmhome.htm> Assembly home page

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senhome.htm> Senate home page

Senate education committee:

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/commpages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Senate>

Assembly Education Committee:

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/W3asp/commpages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Assembly>

To sign up for notifications of bills being introduced or acted upon in the Wisconsin Assembly or Senate, go to <http://notify.legis.state.wi.us/> You can use keywords such as school or education or children, or by authors of bills, or a combination.