



## We Need You to Advocate for Public Schools

With the 2015-16 Wisconsin Legislature in full swing, it is incredibly important for school leaders, especially locally elected school board members, to make their voices heard.

Many of the biggest debates facing the Legislature this session will revolve around school funding, school accountability, academic standards, student testing, vouchers and charter schools. Facing significant fiscal challenges, the governor has proposed an austerity budget that includes a significant cut to schools next year coupled with no increase in revenue limits for the next two years. As a result, on a per-pupil basis, state aid in 2015-16 will decline to a level approaching what districts received in 2009.

At the same time, the governor proposed to expand the statewide, taxpayer-subsidized voucher program by completely removing limits on enrollment into the program and, for the first time, pay for vouchers directly out of state general aid. If approved, money to fund the vouchers would come directly from individual school districts rather than a separate, general appropriation. And because school districts can't raise property taxes to make up for the lost aid, this will be another cut

for public school students.

On top of the funding and voucher changes, the governor's budget would also end the state's use of the Smarter Balanced testing, calling into serious question the future of school accountability — will curriculum standards need to be changed again? Will new state standardized tests be developed? How will the state compare public schools and private, taxpayer-subsidized voucher schools if they are using different tests?

We urge you to make your voice heard locally and in Madison.

The WASB government relations staff has prepared talking points, background papers, sample letters, and other resources intended to help you be as effective as possible in advocating during the 2015-17 state budget process.

On March 18, we encourage you to take part in the WASB Day at the Capitol. A broad-based coalition of school leaders will gather in Madison to share common concerns and meet with their state legislators.

WASB staff will provide briefings on the proposed state budget and training on how to have effective meetings with lawmakers. Your district, and the children you educate, can benefit from your participation.

In the state's current fiscal situation, public K-12 education is in competition with many other programs for scarce dollars. Regardless of whether you attend the Day at the Capitol, it is important that you communicate with your legislators about the impact of the state budget on your schools. This should include attending one of the Legislature's budget listening sessions, writing letters to the editor, and finding other ways to tell your district's story. Parents and community members need to understand how the proposed budget will affect your students.

Our success in securing additional funding will depend in large part on how well we communicate these stories and how persuasive we can be.

Many sessions at the State Education Convention in January addressed strategies for engaging with community members and many other advocacy-related topics. This edition of the *Wisconsin School News* focuses on a recap of the convention. We hope you found the event to be informative and that it re-energized your commitment to public education and the battle ahead for the future of public education. ■

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