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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

MEDIA ALERT

Doyle Budget: K-12 Cuts, Higher Property Taxes, False Equity

The governor's budget proposal abandons the state's commitment to two-thirds funding of school costs, dealing a blow to both students and home owners.

His proposal would reduce aid to schools by \$400 million in the next two years, compared with what schools would get under the two-thirds commitment. This will force cuts in critical staff and programs, already stretched by nearly a decade of spending caps. Simultaneously, families and businesses statewide will pay higher property taxes, as districts try to cope with reduced state aid.

The proposed change in the legal requirement for two-thirds funding suggests a permanent cut in the state's support for public education, and opens the way to further erosion in schools' capacity to fulfill the federal No Child Left Behind Act as well as state and local mandates.

The governor does propose adjusting the school aid formula to redistribute aid to lower-spending districts. But this creates only an illusion of greater equity, not the real thing.

Low-spending districts would have to impose higher property taxes to take advantage of the redistribution of state aid, a big hardship in poorer districts. And many higher-spending districts are in rural areas, where vacation property creates high property values but where year-round residents have some of the highest poverty rates in the state. Spending in these rural districts is higher because transportation costs and diseconomies of scale require more dollars per pupil.

The governor's proposal does not link state aid to actual students' needs.

It is disappointing that a governor with a strong commitment to education and other crucial services has rejected the reasonable option of increasing revenues by closing tax loopholes and enacting selective tax increases, an alternative so many other states are following. A commitment to a "no tax" budget is a false promise when it forces tax increases at the local level.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools is a statewide coalition whose goal is comprehensive school funding reform using an Adequacy model. Its proposed Wisconsin Adequacy Plan provides school districts with funding adequate for achieving federal, state, and local mandates for student proficiency.

For more information, see the WAES web site at www.excellentschools.org, or contact Tom Beebe at the Institute for Wisconsin's Future, 414-384-9094.