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MEDIA ALERT

Statewide Study on School Finance Sheds Light on Conditions of Urban, Suburban, and Rural School Districts

Wisconsin policymakers are poised to overhaul the K-12 public school-finance system, and the decisions they make will have an impact on our children for well over the next decade. Most of Wisconsin's 426 school districts are in financial crises, and it's crucial that a new state finance system meets their diverse needs. A new report from the Institute for Wisconsin's Future presents in-depth data on economic, geographic, and demographic factors and their unique impact on the various types of school districts throughout the state.

Titled "Wisconsin Atlas of School Finance: Geographic, Demographic, and Fiscal Factors Affecting School Districts Across the State," the report looks at data on urban, suburban, and rural districts and how they compare in the population of students they serve, the economic factors they confront, and the tax and spending responsibilities they face in Wisconsin's current school-finance system.

Since there has been minimal conclusive data to date on rural districts, the report also includes a special section on the particular situation of districts in the northern lake region of the state.

The author of the report is Jack Norman, research director for the Institute for Wisconsin's Future.

The summary and the complete report are available free online at <http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org> or in print by contacting the Institute for Wisconsin's Future at 414-384-9094 or iwf@wisconsinsfuture.org.

More state and local tax dollars are spent on public schools than on any other activity, and such an investment requires an informed decision on how resources are spent. Based on the data in the report, a new funding system must take into account the diversity of school districts throughout the state:

- Urban districts need assistance to improve proficiency among low-income students.
- Suburban communities need a system that doesn't penalize them for their high property values.
- Basic operations in rural districts are more costly because of diseconomies of scale and transportation.
- State aid must address the gap between high property wealth and low income that exists in many districts throughout the northern lakes districts.
- Redistributing existing resources among urban, rural, and suburban districts won't solve the problem.

For more information—or the names of local school district contacts—call Tom Beebe (cell phone is 920-650-0525) or Jack Norman (cell phone is 414-405-6210) at 414-384-9094; e-mail tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org or jnorman@wisconsinsfuture.org.