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Wisconsin Alliance  
for Excellent Schools

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Burmester's Budget a Big Step Forward**

The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) applauds State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmester's education budget proposal, which includes many crucial and timely initiatives to help school children get a better education and school districts address growing financial crises.

Burmester, who heads the state's Department of Public Instruction, released her proposal for the state's 2005-'07 education budget Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2004, in her annual State of Education speech in Madison.

Burmester's budget recognizes that cutbacks in state spending on education endanger the quality of the state's public schools, most of which are already reeling from years of cuts required by revenue caps and a recent reduced level of state support.

This is NOT a budget which simply asks for more money. On the contrary, it requests funds for very specific, concrete programs known to be effective in increasing student performance. Among other things, her budget emphasizes the urgency of helping students with special needs, including students with disabilities, students in poverty, students who are English-language learners, and students in rural areas.

Highlights of Burmester's two-year budget proposal include:

- State equalization aid: \$326 million in additional equalization aid, or about \$125 per pupil in the first year and \$250 in the second year.
- Special education: \$84 million in additional aid for special education, including a new program for students with severe disabilities.
- Transportation: \$42 million in increased transportation aid, especially for rural schools. State transportation aid has languished.
- Rural schools: \$24 million for a new aid program for small rural districts, which face special financial hardships.
- English-language learners: \$42 million in additional aid for students still learning English. The state's immigrant population has grown rapidly without any increase in state support for bi-lingual programs.
- SAGE and K4: \$59 million in additional funds for small class sizes through SAGE and for four-year-old kindergarten. Both improve learning for lower-income young children.
- QEO: Elimination of the Qualified Economic Offer, which restricts teacher collective bargaining. Among other things, this may spur innovative health-insurance bargaining.
- And a number of other innovative ideas, including new programming for American Indians, Advanced Placement, gifted and talented pupils, and libraries.

Many of the proposals in Burmester's budget echo the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Educational Excellence ([http://edexcellence.wisconsin.gov/final\\_report.asp](http://edexcellence.wisconsin.gov/final_report.asp)), as well as those of WAES (<http://www.excellentschools.org/events/TaskForce/TaskForceSummary.pdf>). Taken together, the Superintendent and the Task Force have given the state a guide for directing

Wisconsin's school-funding debate in the right direction, by putting the emphasis on educational opportunities for all children.

One important item that is missing from Burmaster's budget, but is included in the Task Force recommendations, is a call for a cost-out to define what staff, classes, facilities and materials are needed for a sound, basic education and how much these will cost.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) is a statewide, broad-based coalition of school boards, parent groups, educators, students, faith-based organizations and community groups working to replace the present finance system with one that links resources to academic standards and the needs of children.

For more information, see the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org>, or contact Jack Norman, Institute for Wisconsin's Future, at 414-384-9094.