

Forward Institute

“Evidence before Ideology”

State Senator Alberta Darling and Representative John Nygren,
Co-Chairs, Joint Finance Committee
Members of Joint Finance Committee

May 28, 2013

Dear Senator Darling, Representative Nygren, and Members of the Joint Finance Committee,

The Forward Institute’s recent study; “Wisconsin Budget Policy and Poverty in Education” has received bi-partisan support and addresses critical issues regarding education funding, state budget, and student outcomes. This letter is to urge you to adopt education funding policy based on the best evidence available, setting ideology aside. Our report addresses the following educational policy issues relevant to the current DPI budget:

The private school voucher expansion proposal should be removed from the budget and introduced as separate policy legislation. It is inappropriate to continue pushing voucher expansion as part of a public education budget proposal. Our study clearly demonstrates that after more than twenty years, the Milwaukee private school voucher experiment can show no measurable educational outcome benefit to students when compared to Milwaukee Public Schools. Studies conducted by the pro-voucher School Choice Demonstration Project reach similar conclusions. Private voucher schools in Milwaukee are underperforming the Milwaukee public schools they are supposed to be a better alternative for, and are actually more costly per pupil to the state for worse results in student proficiency. This important debate must take into account all relevant facts and statewide impact of expanding such an expensive subsidy, which will not happen under cover of the biennial budget.

The Joint Finance Committee should begin to implement Dr. Tony Evers’ “Fair Funding Formula” as the first step to addressing the harsh inequities in Wisconsin’s existing education funding system. In the face of increasing economic stress and growing student poverty in public school districts statewide, we submit that it is not appropriate for the state to continue subsidizing unaccountable private religious education that produces questionable results. As our report clearly shows, the best use of the taxpayer education dollar is the public schools. Further, the impact of poverty on education in Wisconsin is not being addressed by current policy. In fact, we can predict with certainty that under the status quo the student effects of poverty will get worse in the coming decade.

The critical issues surrounding the growing dichotomy in Wisconsin education between children of poverty, and those of non-poverty must be addressed by the Legislature. There is a direct correlation between student/school outcome and rate of poverty not being addressed by the Legislature. **The state of Wisconsin is failing our students, public schools are not failing.** The current budget proposals will only make the situation worse. Further, as our report demonstrates, the current funding and delivery system in Wisconsin may no longer be Constitutional.

It is time to begin addressing these critical education issues in Wisconsin. Two immediate steps the Joint Finance Committee ought to take are removing the voucher program expansion proposal from the budget, and begin adopting Dr. Evers’ Fair Funding Formula. We urge you to make these education policy decisions based on evidence, not ideology.

Sincerely,

Scott Wittkopf, Chair
Forward Institute
scott@forwardinstitutewi.org