

Forward Institute

"Evidence before Ideology"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement from Forward Institute regarding passage of the Executive Budget (AB40)

The Wisconsin Legislature has passed a budget which will do long-term damage to education in Wisconsin. In expanding the private voucher program statewide, failing to keep up with inflation in funding public schools, failing to address student poverty issues, and unfairly rewarding select schools and students, Wisconsin Legislators are basing bad policy solely on multi-million dollar marketing campaigns and lobbying efforts, not the evidence for what works in schools. The most important function of state government is the support of public education (*Brown v. Board of Education, majority opinion, Chief Justice Earl Warren, 1954*); the majority party in Wisconsin has passed a budget which is a fundamental governing failure. **Every citizen in Wisconsin will be negatively affected by this budget.**

1. Statewide expansion of private voucher schools increases spending by hundreds of millions of dollars on a program which has **failed in its fundamental purpose**: provide a better educational alternative for children of poverty. After twenty-plus years of the Milwaukee experiment, voucher schools have shown no positive benefit to student outcome and have almost no accountability to the taxpayers.
2. Voucher school expansion increases the financial burden on local public schools, especially those in areas of high poverty, as state funding fails to keep up with inflation. Students in rural and urban areas of poverty continue to be **denied equal access** to educational opportunity compared to their more fortunate peers. This is fundamentally in violation of Article X(2) Section 3 of the State Constitution and Wisconsin state statute 121.01.
3. **Property taxes will continue to increase.** Funding for the private voucher program is taken from the education budget first, with public school funding coming out of the remaining revenues. As state revenue for public education continues to diminish relative to costs and inflation, property taxpayers will shoulder the burden for the local funding gap in public education. This is also in violation of state statute 121.01 on public school financing.
4. The budget provisions allow existing voucher schools to **accept students statewide, without the new students counting toward the enrollment cap.** This statewide expansion is contrary to the original, bi-partisan voucher experiment as established during Tommy Thompson's tenure as Governor.
5. **The budget limits accountability for educational outcomes** by explicitly forbidding the Department of Public Instruction from reporting voucher school and student data without the consent of individual schools, data that public schools are required to provide. This intentionally prevents comparative analyses of the effectiveness of voucher school programs.

Forward Institute applauds lawmakers' agreement with our policy recommendation to abandon the use of School Report Cards to make critical school financing decisions. The remainder of the education budget is a disaster, ignoring critical evidence presented in the months preceding debate. Legislators who advocated for passage of the education budget have demonstrated they are **not interested in creating evidence-based policy.** Wisconsin's heritage of forward thinking public education is threatened by policies driven by outside lobby groups that want to compete for public funds, instead of focusing those funds on improving our troubled schools. The Forward Institute will continue to advocate for effective, evidence-based public policy in Wisconsin through independent research and communication efforts, and engagement across partisan lines.

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