

Gov. Evers Announces Budget Initiatives to Do What's Best for Kids, Support K-12 Schools

Governor's plan aims to improve reading and literacy outcomes, expand access to mental health services and school nutrition, address staffing shortages to help keep class sizes small, and increase per pupil and special education aids

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced major investments and initiatives from his 2023-25 biennial budget to support Wisconsin kids and K-12 schools across the state. Gov. Evers, in his 2023 State of the State address, previewed key efforts to improve reading and literacy, support school-based mental health services, and bolster the education pipeline to help keep class sizes small. In total, the governor's 2023-25 biennial budget proposal will provide an increase of more than \$2.6 billion for public schools, including the second largest proposed direct investment in state general aids since the 1995-97 biennium, the largest per pupil adjustments since revenue limits were imposed, and a historic investment in special education.

“Budgets are about priorities, which is why every budget we build begins with doing what's best for our kids,” said Gov. Evers. “For years, communities have been forced to go to referendum and raise their own property taxes to keep their local schools afloat, and while some districts have successfully passed referenda to help keep the lights on and the doors open, many have tried and failed.

“I promised I would use a portion of our state's historic surplus to make a historic investment in education, and I'm proud this budget delivers on that promise because our kids, families, and schools need our help now more than ever,” Gov. Evers continued. “Whether it's getting caught up, accessing mental health services, or getting extra time with educators and staff, the investments we make in our kids today will determine our state's future. There has never been a more important time to do the right thing for our kids.”

In September, as students, parents, educators, and staff returned back to school, Gov. Evers, together with State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Jill Underly, **announced** their shared priorities for the 2023-25 budget, which included investments to improve reading and literacy outcomes, expand access to student mental health services and school nutrition, provided financial literacy and out-of-school programming, address educator staffing shortages to help keep class sizes small, and increase per pupil and special education aids. Today's announcement delivers on these priorities and includes additional supports for Wisconsin kids, including investments to advance computer science education in schools statewide and additional resources for English Learners.

After a decade of disinvestment, Gov. Evers has worked to invest in public education at every level. Under the governor's leadership, the state passed an overdue increase in special education aid—the largest increase in state history, per pupil aid was increased by more than \$300 per student, and Wisconsin's K-12 schools have returned to the top 10 in the country after falling to 18th under previous leadership. In the 2021-23 budget signed by the governor, legislative Republicans finally joined the governor in restoring two-thirds funding for public schools for the first time in two decades, hitting that mark by the end of the biennium. However, the governor was clear that the budget sent to his desk by the Wisconsin State Legislature left much unfinished business in providing the support kids and schools deserved, and in December 2021, Gov. Evers **directed** an additional \$110 million investment using federal relief funds to provide \$133.72 in supplemental per pupil aid for every Wisconsin school district. In August, Gov. Evers also **announced** a \$75 million investment using federal relief funds to help schools meet staffing needs, keep classroom sizes small, and provide other direct classroom support.

Despite this significant progress, Gov. Evers knows that many kids and schools are struggling and that the current funding system is not sustainable. During his 2023 State of the State address, Gov. Evers announced he will be delivering on the promise he made before the election to use a portion of the state's more than \$7.1 billion projected surplus to make a historic investment in kids and schools, including providing more than \$270 million over the biennium to make his "Get Kids Ahead" initiative a permanent program to expand access to school-based mental health support for kids in nearly every school district in the state. This, along with the many other bold investments in the governor's proposal, will provide the kind of ongoing, sustainable funding Wisconsin schools need to ensure every kid can be successful.

A list of the governor's updated K-12 initiatives to be included in the 2023-25 biennial budget proposal is available below:

Overall Investment

To ensure kids and educators have the resources they need to be successful, Gov. Evers is providing an overall state investment of over \$2.6 billion in general and categorical aids for public schools. Gov. Evers' historic education budget proposes:

- \$1 billion over the biennium through the state's general equalization aid formula, the second largest proposed direct investment in state general aids since the 1995-97 biennium.
- A more than \$1 billion increase in special education aid over the biennium, which would increase reimbursement rates to 60 percent in both years of the biennium.
- Granting districts a sizable increase in revenue-raising authority, with per pupil revenue limit increases of \$350 in fiscal year (FY) 2023-24 and an additional \$650 in FY 2024-25—the largest per pupil adjustments since revenue limits were imposed.
- A low revenue ceiling increase of \$450 per pupil in FY 2023-24 and an additional \$750 per pupil in FY 2024-25, increasing revenue limit equity among school districts.
- A combined increase of \$1,000 per pupil over the biennium while keeping the estimated gross school levy increase below one percent on a statewide basis in both fiscal years.
- A per pupil aid investment of \$46.5 million over the biennium, resulting in a \$24 per pupil increase in FY 2023-24 and an additional \$45 per pupil in FY 2024-25.
- Per pupil payment increases of \$374 in FY 2023-24 and another \$695 in FY 2024-25 for independent charter schools and schools participating in a parental choice or special needs scholarship program. These increases are commensurate with the increased spending power provided to public school districts through revenue limit adjustments and per pupil aid increases.
- Freeze enrollment in schools participating in a parental choice program for school year 2024-25 at year 2023-24 enrollments, allowing families continued access to private schools while affirming the state's commitment to robust funding for Wisconsin's excellent public schools.

Special Education

Wisconsin, like its peers across the nation, is experiencing a special education staffing crisis. Special education teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than their general education peers. Before Gov. Evers took office, special education funding in Wisconsin had been held flat for a decade, during a period when costs for special education skyrocketed. Under the governor's leadership, the final 2019-21 biennial budget included the largest increase in special education aid in state history. Gov. Evers is now proposing an increase more than 10 times that record-setting amount by:

- Providing a more than \$1 billion investment in special education aid, reaching 60 percent in both years of the biennium and going beyond his fall proposal with a historic and critical investment of \$491.4 million in FY 2023-24 and \$521.7 million in FY 2024-25; and
- Investing \$1.6 million in FY 2023-24 and \$5.9 million in FY 2024-25 to increase high-cost special education reimbursements, increasing the reimbursement rate from 39.5 percent today to 60 percent at the end of the biennium.

“Get Kids Ahead” Initiative

Gov. Evers is meeting Wisconsin’s student mental health crisis head-on by investing more than \$270 million over the biennium to make his “Get Kids Ahead” initiative a permanent program, including:

- \$117.9 million per year to continue the “Get Kids Ahead” initiative, providing per pupil payments instead of competitive grants;
- \$18 million per year to reimburse schools for costs around an expanded list of school mental health professionals; and
- \$580,000 per year for staff training on evidence-based strategies.

Additionally, the governor’s investment will provide \$3.6 million in FY 2023-24 and \$7.3 million in FY 2024-25 to allow schools to receive Medicaid reimbursement for telehealth origination costs.

Increased Medicaid Support

Gov. Evers is also recommending modifying Medicaid school-based services to allow participating school districts to retain 100 percent of the federal funding received for those services as opposed to the 60 percent share they currently receive. This will result in school districts receiving an estimated additional \$112 million of federal funding over the biennium.

Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids

Gov. Evers has long maintained that a kid who’s hungry isn’t going to be able to focus on their studies or in the classroom, and his budget proposal makes critical investments to provide universal breakfast and lunch and engage local farmers and producers in the school meal marketplace. The governor’s plan includes:

- Creating the *Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids* program, an initiative aimed at improving student health and reducing hunger by investing \$120.2 million in FY 2024-25 to fully fund school breakfasts and lunches for all children;
- Providing \$4.3 million in FY 2023-24 and \$4.7 million in FY 2024-25 to increase the school breakfast reimbursement rate to 15 cents per meal and extending eligibility for the reimbursement to independent charter schools and state residential schools operated by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI); and
- Incentivizing schools to support Wisconsin farmers, food producers, and local economies by providing \$2.75 million in FY 2024-25 for an enhanced 10 cents reimbursement per meal for those including locally sourced foods.

Literacy and Improving Reading Outcomes

Gov. Evers’ is honoring his commitment to improving reading and literacy rates statewide by investing:

- \$10 million per year to fund comprehensive training for 28 new coaches in literacy and 28 new professionals in early reading instruction practices, designed to focus on school reading instruction improvement and early childhood; and
- \$4.9 million over the biennium to engage multiple stakeholders and strategies, including:

- \$1.4 million for The Literacy Lab;
- \$3 million for the Wisconsin Reading Corps; and
- \$500,000 for Reach out and Read.

This budget also provides \$742,500 per year for Wisconsin Literacy to conduct adult literacy activities, including expert trainings, personalized consultations, and workforce connections.

Financial Literacy, Mathematics, and Computer Science

Gov. Evers believes that strong financial literacy and mathematics curriculum will provide a strong foundation for students' financial futures. This budget invests in financial literacy and mathematics curriculum training by:

- Introducing a new “Do the Math” personal finance initiative, allocating \$2.5 million per year to help schools start or improve programs around financial literacy curriculum and innovative instruction practices; and
- Providing \$10 million in FY 2024-25 to the Milwaukee Math Partnership, a collaboration among the Milwaukee Public Schools district, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Milwaukee Area Technical College focused on the implementation of mathematics curriculum and professional development for current and aspiring Milwaukee teachers.

In 2022, Gov. Evers signed the National Governors Association Computer Science Compact, pledging to improve access to computer science instruction in Wisconsin's K-12 schools. Gov. Evers understands that equitable access to computer science instruction is critical to student success and the state's future. The governor's plan includes:

- Funding a statewide computer science education coordinator through DPI, allocating \$20,000 in FY 2024-25 for a computer science education task force, and providing \$5 million annually for grants to school districts to access computer science curriculum, particularly around programming concepts and professional development; and
- Creating a statutory requirement that each Wisconsin high school provide at least one computer science course.

Supporting English Learners

Gov. Evers' budget improves school capacity to support English Learners by investing:

- \$8.2 million in FY 2023-24 and \$14.2 million in 2024-25 to increase reimbursement of costs for schools with higher concentrations of English Learners from 7.9 percent to 20 percent by the end of the biennium; and
- More than \$25.9 million per year for a new Aid for English Language Acquisition program and \$310,500 over the biennium to formalize the process for Wisconsin English learners to earn a Seal of Biliteracy and support districts that assist students in achieving this seal.

Teacher Workforce

Gov. Evers' budget creatively approaches the teacher shortage to help keep class sizes small and improve student outcomes by investing:

- \$5 million in FY 2024-25 for grants to support “grow your own” educator programming, which may include providing current employees with funding to pursue additional higher education credits,

licenses, or certifications, engaging with community organizations, and supporting student organizations with “future teacher” missions; and

- \$9.4 million in FY 2024-25 to provide stipends to student teachers and interns, \$2 million in FY 2024-25 to provide stipends to teachers who agree to train and oversee student teachers or interns, and \$50,000 in FY 2024-25 for stipends to school library interns.

Gov. Evers knows the value experienced teachers provide to their communities and leverages that value amid the shortage by proposing to authorize state agencies and local units of government, including schools, to rehire a retired annuitant teacher under certain circumstances to address workforce recruitment and retention issues. This will make it easier to hire experienced educators and staff.

Supporting Tribal Partners

Gov. Evers’ budget proposes \$24,100 in FY 2023-24 and \$49,400 in FY 2024-25 to increase Wisconsin Grants for Tribal college students by 5 percent in the first year and another 5 percent in the second year.

The governor’s budget also invests \$200,000 per year for a grant program administered by DPI to reimburse expenses incurred by school districts that choose to change race-based mascots and logos.

Additional Student Supports

Out-of-School Programming

Gov. Evers’ budget provides supports for students before, during, and after school by investing \$20 million in FY 2024-25 for out-of-school time grants, enhancing offerings from schools and communities to help kids avoid risky and dangerous behaviors, keep kids engaged in their coursework, and provide homework assistance. This budget also provides \$2 million per year to Graduation Alliance, which works to reengage students at risk of not finishing high school.

Driver’s Education

Gov. Evers knows the lack of Driver’s Education funding has impacted students, families, and the safety of roads. That is why this budget provides \$6.5 million in FY 2024-25 to subsidize the cost of providing driver’s education to economically disadvantaged students. This provision was also announced as part of the governor’s [initiatives to address reckless driving](#).

Career and Postsecondary Opportunities

This budget provides \$500,000 in FY 2024-25 to pay General Education Development testing costs and increase high school equivalency attainment to open doors for employment and postsecondary opportunities.

In addition, this budget provides \$704,000 over the biennium to continue support for contract costs related to academic and career planning for pupils in grades 6-12.

Prevent Opioid Overdoses

Gov. Evers knows that the opioid epidemic is affecting communities, families, and schools throughout the state, and his 2023-25 budget proposal establishes a requirement that every school in Wisconsin have opioid antagonists, such as naloxone and naltrexone, on hand in the event of a suspected opioid drug overdose.

Encouraging Family and Outdoor Engagement

Gov. Evers’ budget provides \$243,600 per year to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to

provide fee waivers for annual admissions receipts to state parks for the families of fourth-grade students, aligning state parks with the national Every Kid Outdoors program.