

League of Women Voters of Dane County Forum

Preserving Public Education

October 5, 2023, 6-7:30 pm

Location: In person at the Goodman South Library
2222 S. Park St. or [via zoom](#)



Panelists

- **Kevin Lawrence Henry, Jr.**, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, UW–Madison
- **Julie Mead**, Professor Emerita, School of Education, UW–Madison; LWVDC member who serves on the LWVWI Legislative Committee

Moderator

- **Julie Underwood**, Dean Emerita, School of Education, LWVDC Member who serves on the LWVWI Legislative Committee

Education funding is a critical part of the state budget and has recently been hotly contested. This forum will explain how education funding works and the effect of public education on our community. We will cover:

- the result of the latest education budget,
- the motivation behind the voucher system, and
- the racial and economic impacts on our children of “school choice.”

The trend toward increasing state aid for private schools and decreasing aid for public schools has racial, economic, and educational impacts on our children. Our expert speakers will address these issues.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to support public schools?
2. How do you think the perception of teachers' roles has changed in your community? What do you think brought about this change?
3. If you were a teacher, what would you suggest to a school board member to make teaching more rewarding or more attractive?

4. What can the LWV of Dane County do to address under-funding of our public schools?

League Discussion Units will meet to discuss this case during the third week of October. If you aren't already a member of a discussion unit, [you can find contact information here](#).

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Positions

The League of Women Voters promotes educational equity and access to educational opportunities for each child through non-discriminatory policies and an equitable state aids formula while retaining substantial program and personnel responsibilities in the local district. [Education | MyLO](#)

The Problem

Education funding in Wisconsin is incredibly complex: it includes revenues from property taxes and state sources. On top of that, there are revenue limits which have decreased the funding available to public schools. At the same time, monies for voucher programs for private schools have increased.

When revenue limits were first adopted in the early 1990s, they increased every year at the rate of inflation. But that stopped in 2009-10 and was never resumed. In six of the last eight years, there has been no adjustment in the revenue limit. School districts have lost over \$3,200 per pupil since inflationary indexing stopped.

School districts have coped by finding savings wherever they could, and that included using the one-time savings allowed under Act 10, keeping staff pay below inflation, increased class sizes, and other cost-cutting strategies to the detriment of our students. The consequences of this persistent underfunding of public education is that Wisconsin's national rank in per pupil spending on K-12 education has dropped from 11th in the nation in 2002 to 25th in 2020, and that was before the freeze in revenue limit over the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years. The share of Wisconsin's general purpose revenues going to K-12 education has fallen from 38% in 2011 to 31% a decade later— a clear shift in legislative priorities.

A 2015 study by the Association for Equity in funding concluded that: "The results of this study demonstrate that the system funding the education of our children in Wisconsin actually contributes to inequity of educational opportunity." [Wisconsin School Funding and Student Outcome Study Report](#) Another study found that "increases in operational spending have substantial positive effects on test scores, dropout rates, and postsecondary enrollment, but additional capital expenditures have little impact." [School Spending and Student Outcomes: Evidence from Revenue Limit Elections in Wisconsin - American Economic Association](#)

These detrimental effects have led to increased teacher turnover which was higher in the past two years than it has ever been. [Wisconsin teachers left their jobs in sharply rising numbers | Education | captimes.com](#) It is little wonder that teachers are sharply leaving the profession when teachers earn 23.5% less than comparable college graduates. [The Gap Between Teacher Pay and Other Professions Hits a New High. How Bad Is It? - Education Week](#)

Potential Solutions

1. Increased funding state-wide

To alleviate the public education underfunding in Wisconsin, Governor Evers partially vetoed the budget bill and provided a guaranteed level of increased school funding for 402 years. [Here's what 400 years of Wisconsin school district funding means](#). However, some have asserted that the partial veto did not sufficiently address the problem. [The Wisconsin Public Education Network stated](#):

Despite misleading rhetoric, this budget doesn't even provide enough in new spending authority to public schools to keep pace with inflation, and that spending authority isn't matched by state aid for most districts. In failing to meaningfully meet current needs, it cements a system of winners and losers and widens the existing gaps across the state: a full 39% of public school districts will receive *less* state aid next year than they did this year.

2. Change how schools are funded

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction:

Wisconsin public school districts derive their revenue through four major sources:

- state aid;
- property tax;
- federal aid; and
- other local non-property tax revenues (such as fees and interest earnings).

Under current law, there is a limit on the annual amount of revenue that each school district can raise through the combination of general school aid (defined as equalization, integration and special adjustment aids), computer aid, and select property taxes.

[Wisconsin School Finance System](#)

A lawsuit is being planned to challenge the voucher system as violative of the State Constitution and is supported by the Wisconsin Education Association Council. [WEAC Backs Minocqua Brewing SuperPAC Lawsuit Against Voucher Schools - Wisconsin Education Association Council](#). See also, [We must stand up to school privatizers for the sake of Wisconsin kids – from the Wisconsin Examiner](#)

3. Incentivizing the teaching profession, aside from salary

One proposal to address teacher and staff retention is to provide affordable childcare. [One City Schools to open new on-site childcare for staff](#)

UW-Madison School of Education's teacher pledge program pays for in-state tuition and fees, testing, and licensing costs for teacher education students if the teacher works in a Wisconsin PK-12 school for three to four years after graduation. [Teacher Pledge - UW-Madison School of Education](#)

Actions You Can Take:

1. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper outlining the importance of preserving public education. (Reminder: you may write as an individual, but anything that is sent in the name of the League must be approved and signed by the Board.)
2. Attend a local school board meeting. What specific issues is the board dealing with related to the need for additional state funding?
3. Volunteer or work in a local public school. Alternatively, get in contact with a local teacher and listen to their concerns.
4. Write to your local representatives when issues in education arise in the legislature.
5. Stay informed!

Our moderator, Dr. Julie Underwood, is holding a three-part virtual seminar series to get the facts on issues related to public school law.

- Wed. Oct. 4, 7:00-8:30 pm: [Engagement Within the School Board Governance Structure](#) – with Mike Julka.
 - Wed. Oct. 11, 7:00-8:30 pm: [Recent Developments Involving Voucher and Charter Schools](#) – with Suzanne Eckes.
 - Wed. Oct. 18, 7:00-8:30 pm: [Hot Topics in Student Discrimination: Racial Harassment, Discipline Issues, and Gender Affirmation](#) – with Elisabeth Lambert.
6. Your suggestions?