

## **A School Near You: Public Education Budget Crisis**

### ***By State Senator Jon Erpenbach, 27<sup>th</sup> Senate District***

Great things happen in Wisconsin schools every day, but this budget puts in jeopardy those successes, especially for our poorest rural and urban communities. In 2011 Wisconsin had the deepest cuts in public education ever made. Those cuts were offset by allowing school districts to break contracts with unions and by making employees pay more for their health insurance and retirement. That budget also capped what school districts could fund without going to referendum. To increase school spending in 2013, the Legislature created a whole new per pupil aid that has unfortunately not been supported in this budget, leaving school districts with fewer resources to do the job we expect them to do.

We face another crisis in public education in the 2015-2017 budget caused by past stripping of funding and flexibility at the local level, Governor Walker's 2015-2017 budget now is missing any increase in per pupil revenue limit. There is no increase in general school aids in the first year of the budget. There is a cut to schools in the first year with the elimination of the per pupil categorical aid. This budget also draws funds for private school choice students out of public schools funds at an amount unknown. Asking schools to operate with these cuts is simply unrealistic.

The result of this short funding of public schools is playing out all over Wisconsin. Given the lack of state funding, more and more money for schools is coming out of the property tax on referendum questions. There have been 230 local referendum questions just since 2010 for schools. Support for our schools locally has been remarkable with 65 percent of the referenda passing. People know in the school communities around this state how important education is to the success of their communities.

This trend continues; 56 school districts are going to referendum on 73 questions just next month. It is good to have local support for referenda, however this constant referendum race creates a system of haves and have not's simply because the Wisconsin Legislature is not meeting its obligation to provide an equal opportunity education for every child as set in our Constitution.

A startling 40 percent of Wisconsin's students are now low-income; our outdated system of funding is cheating these students in both urban and rural areas of the state. Education is the great equalizer. Since the beginning of our modern society, we have known that with an education, anything is possible. With an equal opportunity to education, great things can happen no matter where you are from or how much money your family had at home.

**For more information on public school funding in Wisconsin or Governor Walker's budget contact my office at 888-549-0027 or 608-266-6670 or via email at [sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov](mailto:sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov)**