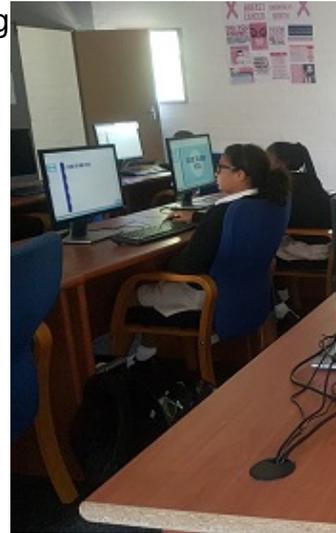


Supporting Public Schools is “A Plus” for Our Kids

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31

Wednesday, 02 March 2022 11:02 - Last Updated Wednesday, 02 March 2022 11:22

<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/schools-computer-class-1-s450.jpg>



Sen. Jeff Smith shares his experience as a classroom volunteer and member of the Senate Committee on Education, learning about ways we can support our students in our public schools.

MADISON - Wisconsin's K-12 schools are the cornerstone of our communities. The education offered at our neighborhood public schools provides the opportunity for our kids to reach their full potential. It's our responsibility to ensure this opportunity is available for all Wisconsin students—regardless of zip code.

Of course, I knew this long before I was elected to the state legislature. My wife and life partner chose a career as a teacher. When our first child was born she let me know that I'd be responsible for volunteering in our daughter's classroom when she reached school age. Little did I realize what an impact that would have on my trajectory into politics.

I took that directive to heart and volunteered as much as the school would allow. Gaining an understanding of the needs of our schools, I was an active participant in the passage of an important referendum in the late 1990s.

It also led me to creating a parent advisory committee that still is involved with the Eau Claire School District. My activism in education morphed into engagement in the Wisconsin Parent

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Teacher Association Board, the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools and an appointment on the Governor’s Task Force for Educational Excellence.



You can see how I spent years learning about how Wisconsin’s public schools prepare kids for the future. Over the years, I saw how things were changing with the drastic reforms being made that ultimately were hurting students in Wisconsin’s public schools and impacting property taxpayers.

It’s this experience I bring with me to the Senate Committee on Education. There’s a lot that’s been happening in this committee this legislative session, especially in response to the pandemic.

Unfortunately the bills being rushed through committee do nothing to address the serious challenges facing Wisconsin educators, parents and their children. To make matters worse, these bills carry a hefty price tag for Wisconsin taxpayers.

In early February, legislative Republicans introduced a package of bills that overhaul Wisconsin’s educational standards. Among the bills, one proposal gives more leeway to taxpayer-funded, unaccountable charter schools.



Another bill removes state enrollment caps and family income limits entirely, therefore making the taxpayer-funded School Choice program available to any student. In a report issued last

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week, this is expected to raise property taxes for Wisconsinites as much as \$577 million.

Before the Majority Party even considers moving more money from Wisconsin public schools, they should adopt my proposal, Senate Bill 971 to allow property owners to see just how their property taxes increased from expanding voucher schools.

Now is not the time to be raising costs for Wisconsin families—it’s up to us to invest the \$3.8 billion surplus so all kids have access to a high-quality education. In February, Governor Evers announced a plan to invest \$750 million of this surplus to improve our schools. This proposal includes initiatives to support student mental health and address achievement gaps in the state.

There’s a lot we can do with this surplus for our schools and families—it’s time for us to get it done.

Another way we can support students and local public schools is by bolstering teacher recruitment and retention. This is an issue affecting school districts all over the state, especially in our rural communities. We must remember those most impacted by the teacher shortage are our students.



In February, I introduced a legislative package with colleagues on the Senate Committee on Education to make sure our students have quality educators. This package includes bonuses for teachers that stay in the same district for more than 5 years, ensures that teachers enjoy the same health benefits as legislators, pays student teachers and sets a minimum starting salary.

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The most valuable asset to any school is the people, and this package treats teachers like the professionals they are. We must do better for our kids.

Through all the years, I learned it takes a village of dedicated people to build up our public schools. They are the cornerstone of the success of our society. Learn, get involved and someday you will understand and appreciate the success of public education.