

WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK

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Support for Kids & Public Schools Was Top Concern at Budget Hearings: Time for Legislators to Follow Blue Ribbon Blueprint for Funding Fairness

Parents, students, board members, educators, school leaders, district administrators and community supporters of strong public schools turned out by the hundreds to testify in support of fully and fairly funded public schools at each of the four public hearings on the state budget held in Janesville, Oak Creek, River Falls and Green Bay this April.

Many concerned individuals took the day off work, drove for hours, and waited all day for their two-minute opportunity to shine a light on the most pressing needs of Wisconsin's communities. Individual advocates and volunteers from local grassroots teams around the state attended every hearing, tracking powerful testimony, and bearing witness to the concerns and solutions offered by our fellow Wisconsinites.

The results were clear. At every stop, we heard new versions of the same story: for communities to thrive, Wisconsin needs to make meeting the needs of the children in our public schools its top budget priority.

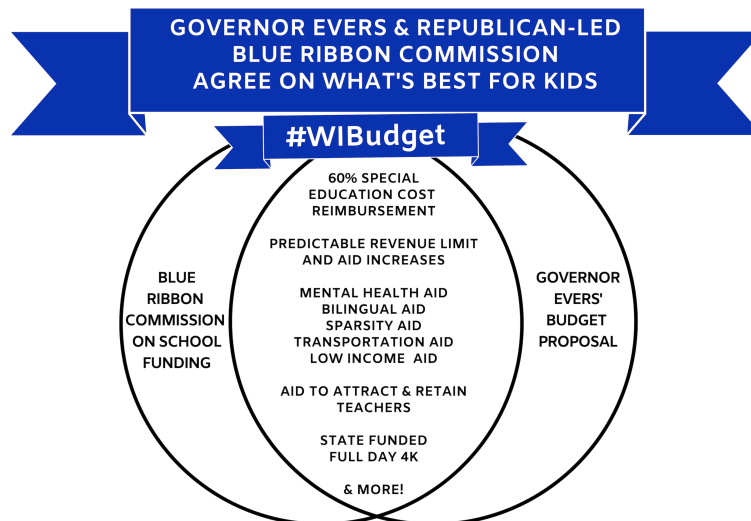
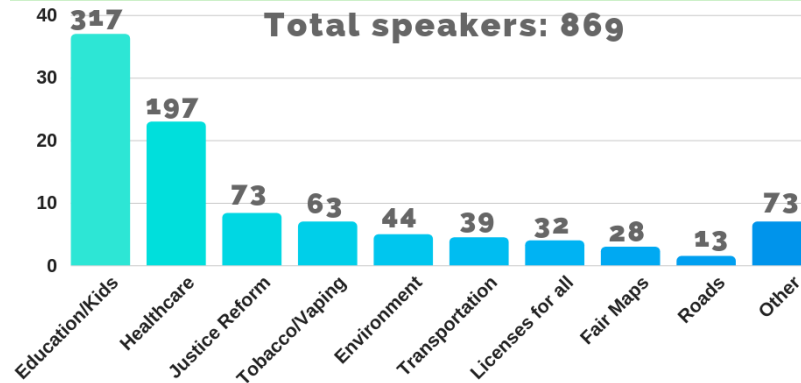
Over the course of the four hearings, at least 869 Wisconsinites testified and 45% spoke in support of the Governor's budget investments in early, K-12, and higher public education, and in favor of critical reforms to our criminal justice system and shifting state investments from prisons to schools. Calls for addressing health care needs were a close second in our count, with 23% testifying in favor of Medicaid expansion to ensure adequate healthcare for all.

The consistent message heard across the state gave many hope for bipartisan support of common-sense solutions to the many significant issues previous budget shortfalls have created for our public schools. Specifically, people spoke in support of addressing many of the funding gaps which both the Governor's proposed budget and the recommendations of the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding seek to close:

- Our children need an increase in **special education funding**, which has been frozen for a decade. Demand for restoring the state's commitment to special education funding dominated K-12 testimony, with demands for an increase the state's reimbursement of special ed costs to at least 60%. Wisconsin currently funds just under 25% of special education costs, the lowest reimbursement rate in the nation.
- Our children need **resources for English Language Learners, mental health supports, and fully funded early childhood programs**.
- Our children need us to **invest in programs to attract and retain high quality teachers**.
- In order to provide these services, **our schools need more, predictable, and adequate funding, with the authority to put dollars into our classrooms that comes with equalized aid and regular increases to rigid and disequalizing revenue caps**.

The Joint Finance Committee will now take what they heard from the public into the next stage of budget deliberations as members debate whether to adopt, adapt or discard the education budget proposed by Governor Tony Evers, and forcefully endorsed by the public at the four budget hearings. Those who wish to submit written or video testimony can still submit to the committee by email to BudgetComments@legis.wisconsin.gov.

Restoring the state's commitment to public education should be our top priority. The public hearings on the budget have shown once again that Wisconsin values its children and its public schools. Our elected officials' actions and our state budget should reflect this shared value. 860,000 children are counting on them to do what's best for kids.



**Let's build the blue ribbon budget our kids deserve.
 860,000 children are counting on us.
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Wisconsin Public Education Network, in collaboration with other nonprofit, nonpartisan partners from the ACLU of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Voices and the Wisconsin Leadership Development (WiLD Project), has organized to encourage active participation in the budget process and to promote local level action to support strong communities and schools. Learn more at our Budget HQ page: <http://www.WisconsinNetwork.org/blog/budget>.

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