

Expansion of School Voucher Program Increases Local Property Taxes

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During the 2011-2013 State Budget, the Governor and Legislature reduced funding for Public Schools by over \$800,000 citing a lack of money at the state level. Although there certainly was a need for savings, a surprising result from the same Legislature and Governor was the expansion of the state funded school voucher program which provides public tax dollars for private schools. The money to fund the increased number of vouchers going to private schools was taken out of the total amount of funding for public schools. This results in an additional decrease in state aid for public schools. A decrease in state funding for public schools pushes a larger burden to fund public schools to the local taxpayer. Therefore, the expansion of state funded vouchers for private schools will increase local property taxes. If there is a shortfall of money at the state level, is this the right time to increase public funding for private schools?

The spirit of increasing state funded vouchers for private schools is to help students in larger cities who are trapped in areas with poor public schools to get a better education. Prior to last year, Milwaukee was the only city eligible for state funded vouchers. The 2011-2013 State Budget calls for the expansion of the voucher program to cities like Racine and Green Bay. I was an administrator in the Green Bay Public Schools for eight years. I can assure you that no children are trapped in areas of Green Bay with poor public schools. Many families, just like in Columbus, exercise their right to attend private school by paying tuition for their children. I respect and support their ability to pay on their own for private schooling. Additionally, many of the private schools in Green Bay offer financial assistance if a family wants to attend but cannot afford the tuition.

Due to the volume of citizens that expressed their displeasure with the expansion of the state-funded school voucher program, Republican Legislators promised to pass a Bill this year to eliminate the expansion of vouchers to private schools in cities like Green Bay. This Bill passed the Senate and is currently in the Assembly as Bill 314. To my surprise, the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen reported on Jan. 28 that the "Wisconsin school voucher bill appears all but dead". A spokesperson for Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald said: "The official comment is we don't know if the votes are there in the Assembly to pass it right now. We haven't had a full discussion on it."

The Assembly will reconvene on Feb. 14, 2012 and it is time to have a full discussion on passing Assembly Bill 314 to eliminate the expansion of state funded school vouchers to private schools. If you, as a tax payer, do not want your taxes increased to send students to private schools in Green Bay, please contact your Assembly Representative and encourage them to have a full discussion during their February work session. To find your Assembly Representative, go online to Wisconsin.gov, click on Government and Who are my Legislators.