

Budget ax falls on K-12

Committee ends 4K grants in 2010-11

By Joe Quick, WSPRA Legislative Liaison

Faced with dramatically reduced state revenues, the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee (JFC) turned to [K-12 funding](#) – which represents almost 40% of the entire budget – to balance the \$6.6 billion 2009-11 state budget shortfall. Almost no K-12 program was spared with the exception of special education funding.

On a 12-4 vote, with majority Democrats supporting the changes and Republicans opposing, state school aids are trimmed 3.1%, a loss of an estimated \$147 million statewide. The JFC also cut the per pupil allowable revenue limit increase from \$275 to \$200 for each of the next two school years.

Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, the per pupil increase will rise again to \$275 and subsequently be increased annually according to the inflation rate determined by the Consumer Price Index.

School districts are being allowed a modest level of revenue limit flexibility; however, for the most part this local control option won't occur until the 2011-12 fiscal year. The Committee provides some revenue limit relief for the salary/benefits of school nurses, for school safety equipment/personnel and for districts with above-average transportation costs. However, districts that make expenditures for energy efficiency will be allowed revenue limit relief beginning this July.

A surprise contained in the JFC's version of the budget is the elimination of four-year-old kindergarten start-up grants. The \$4 million outlay to assist communities in beginning 4K ends June 30, 2010. MMSD had hoped to access the grant in the second year of the biennium – 2010-11. The elimination of the grant resources jeopardizes the district's goal of beginning 4K in September of 2010.

Democrats forestalled changes to the Qualified Economic Offer and interest arbitration for school districts, pushing the changes off until July 1, 2010. The Madison Metropolitan School District and other K-12 advocates have urged comprehensive school funding reform versus the piecemeal approach embraced by the JFC's Democrats. [Contact your legislators](#) asking for continued resources for 4K start-up, immediate revenue limit flexibility and comprehensive school funding reform versus a bit-by-bit approach.

The JFC budget embraces much of Gov. Jim Doyle's proposed overhaul of the Milwaukee voucher program. Changes to the twenty-year-old, \$130 million program include: pupil testing, staff credentials (current law requires only a high school diploma to teach at a voucher school), enhanced record-keeping, governing board accountability requirements and other program modifications.

The budget now moves to the Assembly, where Democratic leaders plan to take the bill up the week of June 8th. Following Assembly approval, the Senate will take up the budget

and pass it by the end of June. Governor Doyle will have the final say exercising the most expansive veto powers of any state's chief executive.

Speaker Mike Sheridan (D-Janesville) said recently that he anticipates a conference committee between the Assembly and Senate to reconcile any differences between the two houses' versions. While conference committees have languished through the summer in recent past, a more streamlined process is anticipated due to the Democrats controlling both houses of the Legislature and the Governor's office. A conference committee report cannot be amended and must be voted up or down.