School-funding reform question

Wisconsin’s public schools are the heart and soul of their communities. In many areas of the legislative districts you want to represent, the school system is the largest employer. Every night of the week, something culturally uplifting, entertaining, or educational is going on in our public schools. They produce the next generation of employees and entrepreneurs. They give moral direction and community values to our next group of leaders. And, public schools are the glue that hold society together.

Children have the responsibility to learn, educators and parents have the responsibility to teach, and citizens and taxpayers have the responsibility to make sure there are enough resources so that every public school student has the opportunity to a world-class education.

Back in 2011, however, Wisconsin schools suffered some of the largest funding cuts in the nation. As a matter of fact, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities says we have cut state investment in K-12 public schools by 15.3 percent since 2008. Despite minimal increases since then, funding is still not back to the level it was before those cuts, which means fewer well-trained teachers in the classroom, larger class sizes, fewer services for kids, and fewer opportunities for the future of communities around the state.

Additionally, as state investment has shrunk, local properties have had to increase so schools could just try to stay even.

Our school-funding system no longer works for kids, and legislators from both parties have been unable or unwilling to do the right thing for over two decades. The resources public schools get to deliver a world-class education is, according to state law, determined by something called the revenue limit. No matter what the cost of quality education, schools get no more resources than determined by the revenue limit.

Put another way, state aid plus local property taxes equal the revenue limit. If state aid goes up, for example, local property taxes must go down and no desperately needed funding reaches the classroom. Also, the revenue limit has not kept up with inflation.

In other words, the public—through the Legislature—is not holding up its end of the bargain to provide children the opportunity for a world-class education. Funding for the classrooms of your public schools isn’t even keeping up with inflation, much less planning for the future.

If elected, what would you do to guarantee that all public schools have the resources they need, as guaranteed by the constitution, so that our children are guaranteed a world-class education?

Specifically, will you support and vote for:

- A change in the per-pupil revenue limit to at least the rate of inflation? As a tool to save money, Act 10 was a one-time event and districts used it to reset their costs. In contrast, inflation is ongoing and it goes up every year. If the state does not allow districts to bring in revenue to at least match the rate of inflation, the state is in essence forcing cuts to programs at the school level.
• An increase in the reimbursement for students with disabilities? At one time there was language in state statute that compelled the legislature to reimburse 70 percent of the costs incurred by school districts for supporting students with disabilities. Today, the state's commitment to assist with students with disabilities has fallen to 27%. What percent of those costs should the state help to pay? (Would you support a reimbursement rate of 30%? 35%? 40%? More?)

• An increase in state funding to bring adequate broadband services to every school district in the state and the funding required to provide the hardware and training to use that additional capacity?

• A moratorium on the increase in the number of and funding for private schools in the voucher program and for non-instrumentality charter schools?