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Wisconsin parents call for re-investment in K-12 public education: 'Repair the damage'

It's a new year, and new, improved education funding possibilities await Wisconsin schoolchildren. Parents across Wisconsin are calling for a renewed commitment and reinvestment in the state's public schools as Wisconsin expects a budget surplus of \$300 million and substantial revenue growth. Devastating cuts to K-12 education in the 2011-13 biennial budget have resulted in layoffs, larger class sizes, reduced program offerings, and poorer results for Wisconsin's nationally recognized public education system.

"The cuts in the last budget, on top of the past 20 years of revenue limits, have been devastating for urban and rural schools. We need to put money back into our education system if we want to prepare our children for the jobs of the future," says Jill Gaskell of the Pecatonica, Wis., PTA.

A 2011-2013 expected budget surplus of \$300 million, plus \$1.5 billion in anticipated revenue growth in 2013-2015, means funds are available for increased K-12 funding for Wisconsin public schools. This after \$1.6 billion was cut from public schools in the previous budget.

<http://www.doa.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=9976&locid=166>

Concerned parents from Stevens Point, Wis. including Jeri McGinley and other members of School Funding Reform for Wisconsin, are writing to all Wisconsin legislators urging them to reinvest in public education and fix the state's broken funding system. "Increasing class sizes, decreasing course offerings, and growing achievement gaps are only a few examples of the damage being done to our schools and children in every area of our state," said McGinley. "Future projections indicate that these problems can only increase under the existing formula."

In the last two years, Wisconsin school districts eliminated more than 3,400 teachers and other personnel. Districts have found additional ways to spend less on children's education – from cutting foreign language, physical education and music offerings to neglecting necessary upkeep on aging school buildings and relying on outdated textbooks.

"Budgets are about values and priorities," says public school parent and board President of Parents for Public Schools of Milwaukee Jasmine Alinder. "There is no financial justification to not put our children first. In fact, investing in our children is key to attracting families, businesses, and preparing our kids for employment in high-demand jobs. Our state cannot hope to be competitive if we don't repair the damage that was done to public education with the last budget."

"I work at a hospital, and physicians looking at coming to the area are looking at our education system; they're looking at our district," testified parent Anne Heise at a recent public hearing in Rhinelander, Wis. "They won't come if we don't have a quality school system."

<http://www.rivernewsonline.com/main.asp?SectionID=6&SubSectionID=47&ArticleID=54256&TM=49199.71>

"In the last budget cycle, we saw the deepest cuts to our public schools in state history," said Alinder. "My child lost her art teacher and her class size grew. Our schools are *not* the same or better, and there is no excuse not to do something about it now. Wisconsin can afford to this, and we can't afford not to." ###