

February 16, 2022

Representative Thiesfeldt and members of the Assembly Education Committee,

I am emailing on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA) to express our concerns with the bills that received a public hearing on February 10th and the bills receiving a public hearing today, February 16th.

The SWSA will not be testifying on any of these bills. We are extremely disappointed that our legislators have chosen the last few weeks of the legislative session to push out a complex package of bills and expect school leaders, parents, guardians, and community members to respond within 48 hours to this proposed legislation.

Since the global pandemic began, we have been urging the legislature to work with school leaders and help navigate these uncharted waters. We've sent letters, invited you to meet with us, and continue to impress upon you the reality of what is happening on a day to day basis in our schools.

Our members have testified at JFC hearings, participated in countless task forces to provide examples of real issues they are facing, sent numerous emails, and met with their legislators- yet nothing changes. Policy recommendations from task forces are set aside and their voices are dismissed.

The legislature has been silent on the issues we continue to raise and refuse to address the real needs facing our kids. Even the "easy solutions" that would provide more opportunities for kids, such as a flexible school start date, can't seem to cross the finish line.

Instead, we find ourselves reviewing bills *that are not addressing the complex issues* our schools have been facing as they continue to educate kids during a global pandemic.

The immediate major challenges facing our districts right now have been exacerbated by the global pandemic. These include:

- **Staffing shortages** in every single position including bus drivers, classroom teachers, food service workers, custodial staff, special education assistants, student services staff
- **School districts are facing an imminent fiscal cliff.**
 - America's inflation rate is hitting levels not seen in 40 years. Our legislature did not provide an inflationary increase and school districts were told to rely on the one-time federal stimulus funds to make ends meet.
 - Many districts are facing a huge structural deficit in the 2022-2023 school year as prices for transportation, heating, food, etc. continue to rise.

The bills that have been proposed this past week do nothing to help with either of these pressing issues.

We would prefer working **WITH you** to develop sound education policy to help improve short-term staffing issues and long term teacher pipeline issues facing all schools regardless of sector.

We continue to ask for **an inflationary increase** to help avoid cutting services to children who desperately need them. The federal stimulus funds were meant only to cover costs due to COVID and not to sustain operational expenses that are rapidly rising. When the decision was made for a 0% increase, we were uncertain as to the economic impact of the pandemic. Today, inflation is running near 7%.

This was an extremely difficult email to write. We don't mean to be critical and we value the relationships we've built over the years. *At what point are we going to start working together and build a shared vision to ensure all Wisconsin children have exceptional educational opportunities and businesses have an effective workforce?*

Please take time to reach out to your school leaders to better understand the challenges they are facing. They have spent the last 2-years doing everything they can for children; it's in their DNA- that's why they chose this profession.

We are always willing to have a conversation with you and hope that we can work together for the benefit of all children in Wisconsin.

Respectfully,



Terri Phillips
Executive Director, SWSA