



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Milwaukee Public Schools
2019-2020 Legislative Agenda**

Forward

The place of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) in Wisconsin is fairly unique — an urban school district in a relatively rural state. While it may be easier to point out differences between MPS and other districts, it is our similarities that dominate. Like most other Wisconsin school districts, MPS strives to accomplish the same basic objectives — to enhance student achievement, to increase educational opportunities for all children, and to attract and retain the most qualified teachers.

As a community, our top priority should be education: high-quality schools are the foundation of first-class communities. The more successfully we educate our students, the healthier our community will become. Our children depend on us to provide them with the best education possible. We owe it to our children to fight for every dollar and legislative initiative necessary to make their public schools the best that they can be. Our children deserve no less.

Education as Fundamental Right

In July of 2000, the State Supreme Court of Wisconsin upheld the constitutionality of the state's school-finance system. In reviewing the appellate court's decision in the education funding case of *Vincent v. Voight*, Justice Patrick Crooks wrote the following:

We further hold that Wisconsin students have a fundamental right to an equal opportunity for a sound basic education. An equal opportunity for a sound basic education is one that will equip students for their roles as citizens and enable them to succeed economically and personally. The legislature has articulated a standard for equal opportunity for a sound basic education in Wis. Stat.

§§ 118.30(lg)(a) and 121.02(L) (1997-98) as the opportunity for students to be proficient in mathematics, science, reading and writing, geography, and history, and for them to receive instruction in the arts and music, vocational training, social sciences, health, physical education and foreign language, in accordance with their age and aptitude.

An equal opportunity for a sound basic education acknowledges that students and districts are not fungible and takes into account districts with disproportionate numbers of disabled students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with limited English language skills.

So long as the legislature is providing sufficient resources so that school districts offer students the equal opportunity for a sound basic education as required by the constitution, the state school finance system will pass constitutional muster.

Recent State History — An Era of Education-funding Stagnation

If the state is to live up to its constitutional obligation to appropriately provide for students in public schools, it must take action to create a sustainable and sufficient funding structure for Wisconsin's schools. The funding issues that have threatened the sustainability of this and other school districts require immediate action.

MPS is dedicated to serving the educational needs of the city's children while looking for creative and cost-effective ways to work with the community to ensure that students have a solid foundation that assists high achievement in the classroom. Community leaders understand how housing, healthcare, safety, and the overall health of the broader community impact the successful education of children.

There is a clear need to pursue a legislative agenda that protects and empowers students and that seeks to have the students and citizens of Milwaukee treated fairly. There is no question that the system designed by the state to fund schools currently discriminates against students based on district boundary lines that enforce policy decisions made in the early 1990s. Simply put, all students should have access to the same basic revenue-limit per-pupil funding and the educational resources which that funding provides. In addition, this agenda takes a research-based and practical approach that focuses on improving teacher quality, enhancing support for students with disabilities and English-language learners, improving student physical and mental health, improving safety and district stability, expanding before- and after-school programs, increasing access to high-quality early childhood education, and other initiatives that will benefit students, the district, and ultimately local and state economies.

Specific Agenda Items

As state budget development and the legislative session evolve, MPS will be committed to addressing, in an appropriate manner, any initiatives that may affect the welfare of MPS students and the district as a whole. The following are the key issues and proposals contained in the legislative agenda.

1) Establish a Sufficient and Sustainable Funding Model for K-12 Education

MPS has worked with statewide educational organizations to create a more sustainable K-12 funding system in order to ensure and to improve learning opportunities for students while protecting local property taxpayers. The state is obligated to provide students with the opportunity for a sound, basic education. As a percentage of the state's General Purpose Revenue budget, funding for K-12 education is at a twenty-year low. Solutions exist that would position the state to be a leader in improving student performance and in increasing overall educational achievement. Milwaukee Public Schools supports Governor Evers's school-funding proposal which recognizes that the Legislature has fallen short of providing schools with sufficient resources and begins to answer the call of the State Constitution that demands an equal opportunity for a sound basic education.

2) Equal Revenue per Pupil

From a revenue-limit per-pupil perspective, not all students are treated equally in the state of Wisconsin. A state-imposed per-pupil revenue gap exists between pupils in MPS and students in surrounding communities, as it does in other school districts, communities, and regions throughout the state. Although the district's revenue-limit per-pupil sits at roughly the state average, MPS has one of the lowest revenue-limits per-pupil when compared with its immediate neighbors. In a new fiscal environment for K-12 education with increasing and, in some instances, very direct competition between districts to retain and recruit the best available teachers, per-pupil revenue differences result in differences in buying power that create a distinct advantage for districts that have access to higher per-pupil revenue limits. If the call to place the best teachers in classrooms with the students who most need them is to be heeded, fiscal policy must be designed to assist with that effort. At a minimum, state law should not discriminate against students based on where they live.

3) Full Funding for All-day K4 Programming

MPS seeks to allow school districts to count each children as a full 1.0 FTE (full-time equivalent) of funding for participating in all-day K4 programming. Under the existing law, the maximum allowed revenue-limit authority for all-day K4 programming is 0.6 FTE. As longitudinal studies come of age on this topic, more and more research points to the fact that properly supported cognitive development in the earliest years of a child's life not only benefits that child, but leads to clear benefits for the larger community.

MPS recognizes that there is a scarcity of private, affordable, high-quality care that can be accessed by parents in the Milwaukee area. By recognizing and fully supporting funding for early childhood education, the state could realize the economic benefit of this investment. Aside from the

achievement gains tied to early education found in the research, a growing number of economists and institutions, including the Federal Reserve Bank of Minnesota, have made the case that early childhood-development programs are consistently under-funded and that the benefits they achieve far exceed their costs. Their work has shown that the return on investment for early childhood programs far exceeds the return on most projects that are currently funded as economic development. In taking the long view, the state could seize the opportunity to improve the academic and social lives of its students as well as its economic standing.

4) Funding for K3 Programming

Research presented in the Journal of the American Medical Association demonstrates that

The influence of poverty on children’s learning and achievement is mediated by structural brain development. To avoid long-term costs of impaired academic functioning, households below 150% of the federal poverty level should be targeted for additional resources aimed at remediating early childhood environments.

(“Association of Child Poverty, Brain Development, and Academic Achievement” — *JAMA*, 2015).

With increasing proficiency standards and the state’s effort to ensure a student’s ability to read by third grade, and for the same reasons that funding for K4 students represents a wise investment, MPS calls for full funding to support successful education programming at the three-year-old level. In addition, the district is bound by law to identify students with disabilities as early as age three. The call for funding at this level, therefore, is consistent with current law and research on early childhood development.

5) Responsible and Best-Practice Funding and Programs for High-Quality, Birth-to-Five Childcare and Education

According to “No Time to Lose: How to Build a World-Class Education System State by State,” a 2016 report from the National Conference of State Legislatures, the number-one policy element for best-in-the-world countries is that “Children come to school ready to learn, and extra support is given to struggling students so that all have the opportunity to achieve high standards.” According to the groundbreaking 2015 report, “Association of Child Poverty, Brain Development, and Academic Achievement,” “specific brain structures tied to processes critical for learning and educational functioning (e.g., sustained attention, planning, and cognitive flexibility) are vulnerable to the environmental circumstances of poverty.” As one part of this effort, through a combination of policy design and funding efforts, MPS will work to ensure that all families have access to a NAEYC-level or 5-star rated care under the Wisconsin, Young Star program.

6) Students with Disabilities

MPS seeks sufficient state funding to assist with costs related to special education. Over the past three decades, when the state has failed to live up to its statutory obligation to assist school districts by providing categorical funding for students with disabilities, the state has simply rewritten the rules: In 1975, the statutory reimbursement rate was set at 75%. In 1984, the rate was reset to 63%. And, in 1999, when the actual reimbursement rate had declined to 35%, the statutory language describing a reimbursement rate was simply eliminated. Today, the reimbursement rate stands at an estimated 24.5%.

While public school students with disabilities are valued by the state at 24.5%, students with disabilities in private schools are valued at a minimum reimbursement level of 90%. MPS supports and demands fair funding for public school students with disabilities and calls on the state to provide a minimum of 90% reimbursement for students challenged with disabilities who attend public schools.

7) Taxpayer Relief for MPCP Funding

MPS calls for the immediate end of what, in legal terms, would appear to be the irrational funding system for Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). The current funding system harms taxpayers in the City of Milwaukee to the financial benefit of the state. Although a 12-year phase-out of the voucher tax was passed into law, without an immediate fix, current estimates suggest the phase-out plan could cost Milwaukee taxpayers between \$400 and \$500 million. The voucher-funding practice in Milwaukee takes state aid away from MPS students and currently compels a property tax increase of close to \$45 million.

8) Voucher and Independent Charter School Tax Transparency

In working with the City of Milwaukee, MPS has been successful in providing voucher-tax information to taxpayers in the form of the tax-levy insert document that is included with the annual property tax bill. MPS also supports efforts that would allow for the inclusion of the cost of the Milwaukee Parental Choice, Special Needs Scholarship, and Independent Charter School programs on City of Milwaukee property tax bills and other relevant tax documents.

9) Accountability System for All Publicly-Funded Students

MPS supports a statewide accountability system for all publicly-funded students. State law now requires all publicly-funded students to take a uniform state assessment. It also includes assessment and demographic data in a new student-information system that allows the State Department of Public Instruction to fulfill the requirement of publishing a school accountability report for all publicly funded schools, including those participating in the state's various voucher programs. Proposals that would move the state away from a common system of assessment are not in the public interest.

10) The Milwaukee Pupil Achievement Grant

MPS strongly supports the reestablishment of funding for the Pupil Achievement Grant which supported the successful Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership. With increasing accountability and proficiency standards, there will continue to be a need to target sufficient resources to improve teaching and learning. Targeted funding for unique student needs would not be specific to Milwaukee. Currently, students and school districts in rural parts of the state receive significant categorical funding in the form of "Sparsity Aid" that is targeted to assist with the unique needs of those districts. Research makes clear, and best practices consistently confirm, that resources must be dedicated to make sure that the students who most need them have access to highly-accomplished teachers.

11) Transparency in State Budgeting — School Levy Credit

MPS supports policy changes that would increase transparency in the school-funding system and that would direct aid that is purportedly going to support schools to actually go to support schools. The School Levy Credit is a clear example of a policy in need of such change: Although the word ‘school’ is used in the name, the School Levy Credit is a tax credit that goes directly to property taxpayers while providing no revenue for schools. Despite that fact, and the fact that the federal government does not recognize the tax credit as funding for schools, over \$1 billion in funding is described under state law as part of the package of total education funding. In order to ensure greater truth in state budgeting, the tax-credit funding should be moved into the equalization aid’s column, where it could be used to fund schools, to support increases in per-pupil revenue limits, to hold down property taxes at the state-wide level, and to empower school boards as they build their districts’ budgets.

12) Recognition of Barriers to Achievement in State Funding Formula

MPS supports policies that build financial support for students in poverty into the state’s school-funding formula. MPS supports increases in aid and reimbursement that assist students with disabilities and English-language learners. Just as the State Supreme Court has recognized that students in school districts are not fungible, the state’s funding formula must take into account districts with disproportionate numbers of disabled students, economically disadvantaged students and, students with limited English-language skills.

13) English-Language Learners and Bilingual Education

MPS seeks an increase in the amount of state funding to meet the growing costs of bilingual education. Just as the reimbursement rate for costs related to special education has been in decline, so, too, has the reimbursement rate for what is termed bilingual and bicultural aid. In FY01, districts were reimbursed for 18% of the costs related to bilingual/bicultural education; by FY12, the reimbursement rate had fallen to 8%, where it remains. According to expert policy analysis and testimony provided in June of 2018, Wisconsin is currently the most deficient state in the nation when it comes to providing students support in this area

14) Support for Teachers in Areas of High Need

MPS, through additional state funding, seeks to create more incentives to attract new teachers and to retain current teachers in areas of high need. Efforts to attract and retain teachers could include establishing a loan-forgiveness program for those who teach and assist students in the areas of mathematics, science, special education, bilingual, Montessori, and IB, as well as in other areas of need in MPS or in districts where a substantial number of students are challenged by poverty and where there are legal and civil-rights requirements that must be complied with.

MPS supports the creation of a state-based grant program for high-poverty public, middle and high schools to attract and to retain highly qualified teachers in schools with the greatest needs. It also urges the appropriation of resources and other incentives to institute grow-your-own programs that include pathways for teaching in the areas of dual language and bilingual education.

15) “Tax Freeze” and Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR)

MPS maintains its opposition to legislative action that diminishes local control over school funding and legislation that places arbitrary caps on the ability of school boards to properly fund programs and to run schools.

16) Truancy Reduction — Chronic Absenteeism

MPS seeks the continued reduction in truancy among MPS students and will pursue appropriate policies to ensure that students stay in school. The importance of focusing on policy solutions related to this issue has increased, given the fact that the state now includes a five point deduction in the overall report card score related to a measure of “chronic absenteeism.”

17) Local Control of School Commencement

MPS seeks to re-establish local control over the setting of the school start date. 2001 Wisconsin Act 16 (2001-03 biennial budget bill) eliminated the provision which allowed a school district to commence its school term before September 1 in any year in which it held a public hearing and adopted a resolution to do so. Act 16 provides that a school district may commence its school term before September 1 only if the school board makes a request (including the rationale) to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The DPI may only grant a request if it determines that there are extraordinary reasons for granting it. Opportunities for start date exemptions are limited under current law.

18) Increased Authority for Funding for School Safety

MPS maintains its support for legislation that will provide school districts the resources and ability to better maintain and improve school safety. School safety is central in providing a proper learning environment for students; however, school districts should not be put in a position where costs associated with maintaining a safe learning environment deplete the funding available to provide quality education in the classroom. MPS, therefore, supports legislation that will provide school districts the resources and ability to better maintain and to improve school safety.

19) Community Learning Centers

MPS seeks to establish a balanced and diversified funding base to sustain and to increase Community Learning Centers (CLCs). Since 1998, the MPS CLCs have been an invaluable resource for thousands of the district’s neediest students. These students have received academic assistance, leadership, and youth-development activities, as well as the support of caring adults during non-school hours. Direct federal grants from the Department of Education have expired, with federal dollars for CLCs now flowing through state departments of education. Authors of CLC legislation at the federal level have had an expectation that school districts will turn to all stakeholders (state, federal and local communities) for ongoing support and funding to sustain CLCs.

20) Wisconsin Reading Corps — Milwaukee Succeeds

In partnership with members of Milwaukee Succeeds, MPS seeks to secure funding for the Wisconsin Reading Corps proposal. Wisconsin Reading Corps combines the power of national service with literacy science to deliver proven approaches that help struggling learners transform into confident students, something that translates into all areas of students' lives.

21) Community and Governmental Partnerships

MPS seeks to establish and to maintain partnerships with other advocacy groups and governmental agencies that address the needs of MPS students. In an effort to stabilize neighborhoods and to increase student achievement, MPS has partnered with numerous agencies and community programs. Work to continue and to improve upon these collaborative efforts will be needed in order to continue to be successful in addressing the needs of our children.

22) Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics — STEM

MPS seeks increased support for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs. MPS has made great strides in providing an increasing number of students the opportunity to become fully engaged in STEM programs. The economic development opportunities related to STEM programs have helped the district to more fully engage with the district's community business partners as it is clear that a student body with a solid foundation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education has the potential to help propel future development in Milwaukee.

23) Student Health Initiative

MPS seeks to increase the scope of wellness and healthcare coverage for students. Children's health has a direct effect on their academic success. MPS understands that, in order to effectively educate students, the district must help to ensure that their basic health needs are met, especially those who are without regular doctors and medical homes. MPS also recognizes its role in the wider effort to stabilize and to improve the health and healthcare of children in the Milwaukee community.

Increased preventative care will lead to gains in achievement, reduced costs related to 504 and IEP requirements, and reduced costs related to emergent needs in the healthcare community. Due to intensified efforts and greater cooperation throughout the City of Milwaukee, the district has been part of a successful partnership to reduce teen pregnancy. In continuing support of that effort, the district will continue to implement and advocate for research-based, best practices in the area of human growth and development.

24) Term of Employment Agreements with District Superintendents

In the interest of assuring administrative stability and a continuum of leadership in the district, MPS seeks to increase the maximum term of an employment agreement with a district administrator. Section 118.24(1) of Wisconsin Statutes dictates that the term of an employment agreement with a district administrator may not exceed two years, but does allow for the provision for one or more extensions of one year each. The challenges confronting large, urban school districts such as

Milwaukee Public Schools have evolved and gained complexity over time. To be met, such long-term challenges are not susceptible to short-term solutions. Long-term challenges are more effectively addressed through stability in administrative leadership and constancy of vision.

25) High-Poverty Aid — Proper Credit for MPS

MPS will work to ensure that the district is treated in the same manner as are all other school districts for the property-tax-reduction effect of high-poverty aid. Currently, the property-tax-reduction effect associated with high-poverty aid is attributed to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Given that the high-poverty aid that the district receives is generated based on the number of students in the Milwaukee Public School system, and based on the fact that the percentage of students in poverty within MPS is greater than 50%, it makes little sense to award the property-tax reduction to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. MPS will seek to have state law governing high-poverty aid uniformly applied to all districts.

26) Student Count: All Students within an Local Education Agency's (LEA's) Jurisdiction

MPS supports enactment of legislation to allow school districts to count, for enrollment, tax-levy, and state-aid purposes, all students in the Local Education Agency's (LEA's) jurisdiction. Such legislation should include (1) provisions to allow districts who provide transportation and LEA services — including, but not limited to, special education services — to count, for enrollment, tax-levy, and state aid purposes, all students within the LEA's jurisdiction, and (2) provisions which allow districts that have a publicly-funded voucher program within their LEA jurisdictions to count, for enrollment, tax-levy, and state-aid purposes, all students within the LEA's jurisdiction.

27) Value-Added — State Assessment and Accountability System

MPS supports the use of value-added measures within the state's accountability system. Using value-added analysis of state assessment data would contribute to the learning process and to efforts made to ensure that measurements of data are culturally fair, reasonably accurate, and reflective of MPS goals and standards. A state-wide value-added system would significantly enhance the MPS system, permitting comparisons throughout the state to better identify high-performing schools.

28) DREAM Act

MPS supports passage of the DREAM Act. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act would allow immigrant students who have grown up in the U.S., graduated from high school, and possess no criminal record the opportunity to apply for temporary legal status, with the goal of becoming permanent citizens.

29) Student Identification Cards as Voter Identification Cards

MPS supports efforts to ensure that students, as voting-age citizens, have unfettered access to participating in their democracy and to exercise their right to vote. MPS supports efforts to ensure

that various forms of identification, including school/student identification cards, can be used so that students have appropriate access to the polls.

30) Automatic Voter Registration

The State of Wisconsin currently requires students to pass a civics/citizenship exam in order to be able to successfully graduate from high school. Given that the ability to vote is at the core of our democracy, MPS supports efforts to strengthen an individual's access to the ballot box, abhors any and all efforts to suppress the right to vote, and as such, supports automatic voter registration, which strengthens our democracy by automatically registering individuals to vote, thereby securing and strengthening their essential right.

31) Concealed-Carry Legislative Refinement — Reduction of Gun Violence

MPS supports efforts to ensure the safety of students and of the children of the City of Milwaukee. Toward that end, and where appropriate, MPS will engage in efforts to help protect students from gun violence and the tragic effects that such violence has on the city's community of children and their families. MPS students have been the direct victims of such violence, and wherever possible, including changes to state law, efforts must be made to create a safer environment for children.

32) Support for Common Education Agendas

MPS will work in partnership with its education partners — including the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance, and others — to support legislative-agenda items of common concern and of common benefit to the district and to the students of Milwaukee Public Schools.