



Governor's State Budget Provides Major Investments in School Mental Health; Please Tell Legislators How Important School Nursing is to School Mental Health

On February 16, Governor Tony Evers released his proposed state budget for the 2021-23 biennium, which will run from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2023. The budget would provide more than a billion and a half new dollars for education. This includes programs that can fund school nursing.

Of particular interest to school nurses is the increase in funding for the state's school mental health program. The program currently provides \$6 million per year and it only pays for school social work services. The Governor's budget increases funding by \$22.5 million in 2021-22 and \$24 million in 2022-23. It also expands the eligibility to include school nurses, counselors, and psychologists.

School mental health is a big priority for policymakers from both sides of the political aisle right now. School nurses need to keep reminding legislators – along with their own administrators and school board members – just how important school nursing is in dealing with school mental health.

Also of interest to school nurses is the big increase in special education funding in the Governor's budget. School nursing costs can be covered by special education funds. Again, school nurses need to be making the case for yourselves to get more of that funding.

The Governor proposes an increase of \$709 million in special education aid to achieve reimbursement rates of 45% in the first year of the biennium and 50% in the second year (the current reimbursement rate is 28%). And the budget increases funding for high-cost special education by \$17.5 million to get to 31% reimbursement in the first year and 40% in the second year.

Other education increases include a \$612.8 general aid increase over the biennium. The budget also allows school districts to increase their revenue limits by \$200 per pupil in the first year of the biennium and \$204 per pupil in the second year.

The Governor's budget reduces some taxes on lower-income earners and homeowners and increases taxes on some higher income residents. It also allows counties to add a .5% sales tax increase if approved by local referendum.

The Governor's budget is now before the Wisconsin Legislature. It first goes to the Joint Finance Committee and then both houses of the Legislature, before being sent back to the Governor for his signature and partial vetoes.

Please contact your state legislators and tell them to make education and school nursing a priority. Tell them how important school nursing is to mental health in schools.

If you do not know who your legislators are, go to legis.wisconsin.gov and enter your address at "Who Are My Legislators?" Call their offices or send them an email. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jack O'Meara, WASN's lobbyist, at jack@omearapublicaffairs.com.