



**WISCONSIN
PUBLIC
EDUCATION
NETWORK**

For Immediate Release

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This call to action for a special session to fund special education for Wisconsin's public schools is presented by Dr. Julie Underwood, board chair, and Heather DuBois Bourenane, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Public Education Network, on behalf of the board of directors of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES):

**Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES)
CALLS FOR SPECIAL SESSION TO FUND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Let's show our students that we can get things done – 24 hours to a better Wisconsin

If we want to, we can make positive change for our Wisconsin students – and we can make it happen within 24 hours. Let's get it done.

In mid-September, an extraordinary thing happened. A bill, sponsored by the Speaker of the Assembly, Robin Vos, was introduced and scheduled for a committee hearing within 24 hours. After the hearing, in less than a week's time, the bill was approved by an executive committee, scheduled for a vote on the Assembly Floor and then approved by the full Assembly. This bill, for some reason, was pushed through with lightning speed. It was incredible and an example of what is possible.

The bill deals with civics education in schools, and on the one hand it can be argued that such a rushed process didn't leave much room for civics. The public was given barely any notice, the "public" hearing then came across as a bit of a sham as citizens in Wisconsin had little or no time to weigh in with their thoughts, approval or concerns. Ultimately, it highlighted some concerning trends about how the people's business is currently being handled in the Capitol.

On the other hand, it made clear that things can and do get done, government can be fast and it brought into sharp relief the fact that when the legislature doesn't really want to get something done, even when it knows that it should, an entirely different process comes into play. That process is exemplified by the report of the Speaker's Blue Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding.



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Four years ago, with no small degree of fanfare and with some level of taxpayer expense, it was announced that the Speaker would put together a commission that would travel the state to hear testimony from parents, the public, school board members, business leaders and education experts on what to do about the long-standing and obvious ills of Wisconsin's education funding system.

The Commission learned, or was reminded of the fact, that Wisconsin ranks near or at the bottom in state support for students with disabilities, it ranks dead last for supporting English language learners, unlike other states it does not have a coherent system to lift up children challenged by poverty and that under state law depending on the school district that you live in a student is worth more or less from a fiscal perspective than their neighbor. In fact, one set of national experts that were invited to speak to the commission informed the group that at this point Wisconsin has such a hodge-podge of a funding system and that it is so unlike anything in any other state (not in a good way) that they had to put it in its own category.

To their credit, the bipartisan commission took that information, looked for serious solutions and produced a report that includes a number of impressive policy recommendations that would truly help students, parents, schools and communities. The report continues to be something that many are proud of and it is commonly referenced as policy that could make an immediate difference.

One of those solutions, restoring our commitment to funding special education to a minimum reimbursement level of 60%, is something we could do today, if we chose to invest in meeting the most pressing needs of our public schools.

The solutions are sitting there, ready to go. The funds to pay for the best versions of the solutions are also sitting there, ready to go. Within 24 hours, within a week, we could improve the lives of Wisconsin's kids. Let's get it done.

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