



SAMPLE LETTER TO STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Note: To contact your representative by mail:

Last name beginning A-L: P.O. Box 8952, Madison, WI 53708-8952

Last name beginning M-Z: P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708-8953

Date _____

The Honorable _____
Wisconsin State Assembly
P.O. Box 895_* (see note above)
Wisconsin State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708-895_* (see note above)

Dear Representative _____:

Our public schools face a myriad of challenges as they adapt to meet the demands of the global economy, their changing demographics and accountability reform initiatives. As we have conversations throughout Wisconsin about the latest reforms in K-12 education, we must also talk about our investment in public education.

The state and our local communities are critical shareholders in our public education system. As such, we need to protect our mutual investment and make sure that our public schools are healthy and vibrant, geared for the future and preparing students for tomorrow's jobs.

Local property taxpayers and the state have a partnership in funding public education as both have a stake in a high-quality public education system. However, in recent years, as the state has been stepping up its demands for accountability, it has been reducing its financial contribution, leaving a greater share of the burden on property taxpayers. Not too long ago, the state contributed almost 67 percent of school costs. It now contributes less than 62 percent. Property taxes are making up the difference – to the tune of about \$470 million per year more. In addition, nearly two-thirds of our school districts are seeing a drop in state aid this year.

The recent state labor reforms gave locally elected school boards a greater say in employee compensation, which allowed them to balance their budgets in a difficult economic time. But if school boards are going to attract and retain the high-quality employees our students deserve and implement 21st century educational programs, they will need this flexibility along with adequate funding for our public schools.

[EXPLAIN HOW YOUR DISTRICT USED THE TOOLS, AND THEN DESCRIBE LOCAL BUDGET CUTS THAT WERE STILL NECESSARY *DESPITE* USING THE TOOLS.]

In that vein, as our economy improves, it's time to rethink how to restore and strengthen the state-local partnership in what has been and continues to be the most important institution in the development of this great state.

The state will soon be writing its 2013-15 state budget, and it looks like the state's revenues are increasing. It's time for the state to fund a larger share of its mandates, provide greater revenue limit flexibility, and reduce the growing burden on local property taxpayers.

To be clear, increasing the state's contribution to schools isn't merely about relieving local property taxpayers. It is about creating more equity and fairness in the system, and making sure that the burden of paying for public education is borne across all sectors which benefit from that system. State dollars help ensure that children in our property-poorest communities have the same access to a quality education as children from wealthier communities.

While mindful of the need for property tax relief, the state also needs to provide revenue limit relief for schools. Increasing state aid alone will not give schools more resources; it will only change the mix of state and local dollars that fund our schools. Schools also need an upward adjustment in state-imposed revenue limits to make technology upgrades, provide professional development to their staffs, and provide the programming needed to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. Without it, there will be a growing reliance on referendums and the disparity between rich and poor schools will grow.

Public school boards recognize that these have been difficult times for taxpayers. School boards have been good stewards of taxpayer's money. In the last three years—when the economy hasn't been where we want it to be and taxpayers have been pinched—many school boards throughout all four corners of the state have not levied as much as they could – saving property taxpayers 60 and 70 million dollars in each of the past three years. We will continue to be responsible partners in governing public education. **[Briefly describe your *local* tax situation.]**

If we want our public schools to produce graduates ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow, we need to invest in our schools today.

We ask for your support of public education. We look forward to hearing from you about your plans to improve school funding.

Sincerely,

Local School Board

Cc: Wisconsin Association of School Boards