http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/school-bus-kids-s5.jpg



Sen. Kathleen Vinehout argues the current budget stalemate is due in part to competing education funding proposals that do not address the needs facing school districts across the state. Legislative leaders know the school funding formula is broken, but they choose to ignore State Superintendent Tony Evers' plan to change that way Wisconsin funds schools.

MADISON - Progress with the state budget is at a standoff in the Capitol. Behind closed doors, leaders are talking details and trying to find votes.

Openly, legislative leaders point to a lack of agreement on public education. They say no progress can happen until they round up necessary votes for the education portion of the budget. Privately, some GOP lawmakers are also angling to spend money on a big change to business personal property taxes. However, changes to taxes could take away money promised to schools.

Education is the largest part of the general fund budget (the portion of our budget paid for with mostly income and sales tax). Local school funding is made up of a combination of state aid and local property taxes. The two sources of money interact a bit like a teeter-totter – as one source drops (state aid), the other source goes up (property taxes). For example, property taxes go up school districts pass referenda to fund needs left unserved by declining state aid.

Wisconsin pays for schools through an Equalized Aid formula, which is meant to equalize resources to children no matter where they live in the state. The idea of equal opportunity for

children regardless of their zip code is deeply rooted in our state. Principles enshrined in Wisconsin's Constitution include public education as a state function that is free with reasonable equality of education opportunities for all children and without excessive reliance on property taxes. Lawmakers must grapple with meeting those principles.

Under the Governor's proposal, school funding through equalized aid would be lower in the 2018-19 school year than it was thirteen years prior. The effect of these decisions will intensify the inequalities schoolchildren across Wisconsin face.

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