Action Alert: Urge Support For LRB 5599/1 and LRB 5695/1

Wisconsin school districts were recently notified that this year's special education reimbursement rate will fall significantly short of what was promised in the state budget. The Department of Public Instruction has confirmed an initial reimbursement rate of 35%. While DPI typically begins with a more conservative rate until all district claims are finalized at the end of the fiscal year, it is already evident that the final reimbursement will fall well below the 42% pledged for this year due to statewide special education costs exceeding the projections used during the budget process.

This shortfall means districts will receive far less than anticipated to provide legally required special education services to students with disabilities. As a result, districts will be forced to transfer additional dollars from their general fund, impacting staffing, class sizes, programming, and taxpayer pressure.

Yesterday, Democratic members of both the Assembly and Senate introduced a proposal for co-sponsorship that would fulfill the commitment made in the budget by converting special education reimbursement from a sum certain to a sum sufficient appropriation.

LRB 5599/1 and LRB 5695/1 would:

- Guarantee the full 42% reimbursement rate this year
- Guarantee 45% reimbursement for 2026-27 and beyond
- Ensure districts are reimbursed based on actual costs, not outdated estimates
- Prevent midyear reductions that destabilize district budgets

What You Can Do

I encourage you to contact your legislators and ask them to support this proposal and keep the commitment made to our students and communities. You can find your legislators **here**.

- If your Representative or Senator is a Democrat, please thank them for co-sponsoring LRB 5599/1 and LRB 5695/1 and share how the lower reimbursement rate affects your district.
- If your Representative or Senator is a Republican, please consider using one of the sample emails below to encourage them to sign on as a sponsor. Including specific examples of how the reduced reimbursement impacts your district's budget is especially effective.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions. Additionally, if you receive a response — positive or negative — it is helpful if you forward it to me so I can track legislative feedback across districts.

Thank you, as always, for your partnership, your advocacy, and your willingness to share your district's story. Your voice makes a difference.

Email Example #1:

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

I am writing to respectfully ask for your support of LRB 5599/1 and LRB 5695/1 to make special education funding a sum sufficient appropriation to ensure the reimbursement rate promised in the state budget is delivered to school districts. We were recently informed that the initial reimbursement will be approximately **35%**, leaving a significant unplanned gap. This gap must be filled from our general fund, even though special education services are legally required and essential.

This change destabilizes responsible budgeting, strains local taxpayers, and reduces the resources available for all students. Converting the funding to sum sufficient would provide predictability and keep the state's commitment to students and families.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our community. I would welcome a conversation about how this shortfall affects our district specifically.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Title / District]

Email Example #2:

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

Our district — like many others — takes seriously our responsibility to serve students with disabilities. These services are mandated, essential, and increasingly complex. The Legislature and Governor recognized this need in the most recent budget by pledging to increase the reimbursement rate to 42% this year and 45% next year. The recent announcement that the initial reimbursement rate will instead be 35% means our district will receive significantly less than planned to support students who require specialized instruction, support staff, mental health services, transportation, and contracted placements.

The proposed legislation (LRB 5599/1 and LRB 5695/1) changes special education aid to a sum sufficient appropriation, which would ensure districts receive the reimbursement level agreed upon — regardless of statewide cost fluctuations that are outside local control.

When funding falls short, we are forced to redirect dollars from general education, impacting class sizes, course offerings, and staffing stability. Making the appropriation sum sufficient gives districts the ability to budget accordingly and keeps our systems strong for **all** students.

Thank you for considering support for this legislation and for prioritizing students with disabilities and their peers.

Warm regards,
[Name]
[Title / District]

Email Example #3:

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

I hope you are well. I am reaching out requesting your support for LRB that would ensure Wisconsin fulfills the reimbursement rates for special education that were approved in the state budget. The state committed to a **42% reimbursement rate** for this year. Districts were informed in November that we will instead receive an initial reimbursement of **35%** due to statewide costs exceeding the estimates used when the budget was passed.

This results in districts, and ultimately our local taxpayers, covering a larger share of mandated services than anticipated. In our district, this means absorbing a shortfall that limits flexibility and shifts more responsibility to property taxpayers. By making special education reimbursement a **sum sufficient appropriation**, the state would avoid mid-year reductions and uphold the commitment made to Wisconsin students when the budget was passed.

These proposals are about predictability, transparency, and honoring the commitments made in the budget process. I appreciate your consideration and would welcome the chance to discuss how this affects our district.

Respectfully,
[Name]
[Title / District]