

YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Items included in the State Budget that will significantly impact the School District of Rhinelander

1. School District of Rhinelander public schools and schools across the state will have their state aid cut to allow for voucher expansion, i.e. public tax dollars used to pay for a student's private education. Voucher expansion will mean less funding for public schools, including the School District of Rhinelander. Any decision that is made to publicly fund religious and other private schools will diminish the quality of education in our public schools.
2. According to Michael Griffith, a senior policy analyst for the Education Commission of the States, this budget drives Wisconsin under the national average in per pupil spending. Wisconsin has had a proud tradition of adequately funding our public school system. The legislature is pouring money into private schools at the expense of maintaining a public system that has been a source of pride in our state for over 100 years.
3. The new law eliminates many standards for licensing teachers - no bachelor's degree would be needed to teach our students in multiple subject areas. Educational programs and training have been built and improved over decades, with Wisconsin having one of the top performing educational systems in the nation. With this one legislative change, students could have undertrained and ill-prepared educators, without the prerequisite knowledge to meet the many needs of our students.
4. The tests that students are required to take will be different for the third consecutive year. Districts will not be required to take the same tests; making district-to-district comparisons very difficult. We welcome the opportunity to compare ourselves to any competing schools. Common sense tells us that adequate comparisons can only be made when students in each district are taking the same standardized tests. This change also makes it impossible to compare public, private, and charter schools.
5. The proposed law allows students in special education to use \$12,000 in publicly funded annual vouchers to attend private and parochial schools. In these schools, students would not be guaranteed the legal rights and protections afforded to them by federal law. In addition, the dollar amount is completely arbitrary, as actual costs vary drastically from student to student. At the same time that the legislature is allocating money for special education students in private/parochial schools, it has not increased funding for public school special education students in eight years.
6. The new law would allow "learning portfolios" to replace up to one-half the credits needed to graduate from high school. The law would require that a diploma earned in this manner be the equivalent of a diploma earned through actual course completion. This proposal has the potential to change what high schools look and feel like across the state; including the likelihood that the rigor needed to earn a high school diploma would be significantly reduced, jeopardizing both in and out-of-state college acceptance.
7. The new law would allow home-schooled students and virtual school students to participate in any extra-curricular or athletic team that our school district offers. This raises a multitude of eligibility questions and different eligibility requirements for members of the same team. The WIAA (WI Interscholastic Athletic Association) has come out strongly against this proposal, as have many home-school advocates.
8. There is a new requirement in the law that mandates passing a civics assessment for high school graduation. This would be a 100 question test. This test is in addition to the multitude of other state mandated tests that students are already required to take. This proposal, set to become law, has had very little discussion and has no plan for implementation.
9. Our schools will be subject to a rating system based on stars (★). Can a star-rating system adequately portray the quality of our schools? The current school report cards indicate if schools are failing to meet, meeting, or exceeding expectations with specific feedback on areas of strength and recommendations for addressing concerns.

The inclusion of policy and provision changes in the State budget eliminates the possibility of open discussion through the hearing process. These late additions haven't been consistently vetted by appropriate stakeholders and don't belong in the budget.

If you are also concerned about the impact that the state budget has on the School District of Rhinelander, please contact the following legislators as soon as possible. They will begin voting on the budget in the upcoming weeks.

- Senator Tom Tiffany, Room 409 South - State Capitol, Madison, WI 53707-7882
Phone: (608) 266-2509 / Email: Sen.Tiffany@legis.wi.gov
- Representative Rob Swearingen, Room 123 West - State Capitol, P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708
Phone: (608) 266-7141 or (888) 534-0034 / Fax: (608) 282-3634 / Email: Rep.Swearingen@legis.wisconsin.gov
- Representative Mary Czaja, Room 321 East - State Capitol, P.O. Box 8952, Madison WI 53708
Phone: (608) 266-7694 or (888) 534-0035 / Fax: (608) 282-3635 / Email: Rep.Czaja@legis.wisconsin.gov

Adapted on May 29, 2015 for the School District of Rhinelander by Superintendent Kelli Jacobi and Judy Conlin, Board of Education Vice-President

Originators of this document were Bernard Nikolay, Cambridge School District Superintendent of Schools, Joe Pleshek, Cambridge School Board President, and Peg Sullivan, Cambridge School Board Member (Cambridge School District Communications Committee). Authorization of its use, with changes to reflect School District of Rhinelander information, was provided by Superintendent Nikolay.