

May 10, 2010

The Honorable Russ Feingold
506 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-4904

Dear Senator Feingold:

I am writing to express my strong support for the establishment of a federal education jobs fund that would provide immediate fiscal relief to school districts in Wisconsin and across the country, and urge you to support this important initiative. Legislation pending in both the Senate and the House of Representatives which establishes a \$23 billion education jobs fund would provide Wisconsin with approximately \$415 million in needed resources to support education. These funds would help stave off deep cuts and maintain the quality educational programming that Wisconsin students deserve and our citizens expect.

As Wisconsin's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, I have witnessed first-hand the devastating impact of the national economic recession on communities, schools, and children in all corners of our state. Child poverty, which has long been linked with lower levels of student achievement, has reached the highest levels in recent memory as nearly 40 percent of Wisconsin public school students now qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Yet, in this climate, our educators work to teach all students while facing budget cuts that increase class sizes and reduce or eliminate educational programs and services. As we work to improve the economy and create jobs, we also need to prioritize support and resources for public education.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided critical resources to Wisconsin over the past two years that helped prevent drastic education cuts. However, even with the unprecedented federal assistance, the depth of the national recession did not allow the state to hold education harmless from cuts. In the 2009-11 biennial state budget, Wisconsin was forced to reduce state general school aids by \$147 million each year compared to FY09. Despite increasing child poverty and rising fixed costs, the level of general aid available to Wisconsin school districts for the 2010-11 school year is only roughly equal to what it was five years ago.

Districts across Wisconsin are making cuts in core areas in order to make ends meet. Teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, reduced services, and higher student fees are becoming the norm instead of the exception. Local school budgets are being cut to the bone at the same time that we all expect – and federal education policy demands – better academic outcomes from students. A federal education jobs fund would provide Wisconsin schools needed relief, and would ensure our state's ability to pursue our shared goals of every child a graduate prepared for higher education and the workplace.

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Wisconsin is not alone. During this time of economic crisis, school districts around the country have fewer resources available for education. While ARRA helped preserve an estimated 350,000 education jobs, over 80,000 education jobs were still eliminated nationwide. In recent testimony, United States Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan warned that as many as 300,000 more education jobs could be lost in the upcoming school year alone if action is not taken now.

Now, more than ever, an investment in quality education ensures our long-term economic security. To help protect this generation of students, it is critical that Congress approve an education jobs fund as soon as possible. Several proposals, including S. 3206, the Keep our Educators Working Act, H.R. 4812, the Local Jobs for America Act, and the Jobs for Main Street Act as passed by the House in December (HR 2847), contain a \$23 billion education jobs fund. I urge you to act as soon as possible to approve these critical resources for our schools, as school districts have already begun making budget decisions for the upcoming 2010-11 school year, including laying off teachers and eliminating programs, that will have lasting impacts for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue of vital importance to the State of Wisconsin. I look forward to working with you in any way I can to secure passage of this legislation. Please contact me if I can be of any assistance to you in this matter, or any other facing PK-12 education in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,



Tony Evers, PhD
State Superintendent

TE:jj

c: Wisconsin Congressional Delegation