



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN
EDUCATION FUND**

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To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Janet Kane, Member, League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Legislative Committee
Re: Support of Senate Joint Resolution 27

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin strongly supports Senate Joint Resolution 27. League members from across the state selected financing education for primary attention in the League's 2007-2008 advocacy agenda. The League supports a system of school financing:

- which ensures equal educational opportunity and access for each child
- in which the state assumes a significant funding share, and
- which provides for increased payments for children with special needs.

Public education in Wisconsin is on increasingly shaky ground. The constraints of the current funding system are eroding the quality of education. Temporary mechanisms that were put in place in the early 1990s were narrowly designed for property tax relief and to buy time until the system could be reworked. After more than 15 years, they are not serving us well. Wisconsin has had a tradition of excellent public schools. Now we're losing ground. Our neighbor, Minnesota, has pulled ahead of us on many measures.

Sound policy is based on sound fundamental principles. Wisconsin's equalization aid formula was designed so every community could afford to fund good schools regardless of the property wealth in the area. Any new system should preserve this principle. The state has an obligation to provide good schools for all children.

The state also has an obligation to serve each child, in light of his or her individual circumstances and abilities. Many studies document that some students need more services than others. After more than a decade of revenue caps and increasingly-under-funded categorical aids, it has become impossible to serve all children well.

Financing education is very complicated and very expensive – but also essential. This bumper sticker expresses it well –

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.”

Many studies document the significant benefits of quality education – from an educated workforce and a robust economy to a decrease in crime and a reduced prison population. We need to support quality schools for our quality of life.

The good news is that many groups have worked extensively on alternatives for funding education in Wisconsin. There is detailed information and extensive analysis to provide a solid base for reforming our system. Within the last 10 years, several states have made fundamental changes to their school funding, and their experiences can provide guidance in undertaking this important task. The League of Women Voters strongly encourages you to adopt this bill.