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# State superintendent plunges ahead on school reform

## Evers defends viability of funding plan

By [Erin Richards](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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**Pewaukee** — State School Superintendent Tony Evers charged ahead Monday with the official announcement of a new proposal for funding the state's public schools, winning the support of area district leaders and defending the viability of the plan even in tough economic and political times.

Evers' Fair Funding for Our Future plan is part of the state Department of Public Instruction's 2011-'13 budget proposal. It asks for a \$420 million increase over the next two years - a 2% increase in funding from the state for the 2011-'12 school year and 4% more for the following year.

Republicans have not embraced the idea of spending increases, but Evers said Monday that he had talked to politicians from both parties who were receptive to discussing his proposed changes, which also include shifting nearly \$900 million a year from tax credits to school aid and guaranteeing school districts a minimum of \$3,000 per student.

Sen. Alberta Darling (R-River Hills), who is set to co-chair the Joint Finance Committee, told a Journal Sentinel reporter in a previous interview that such a plan would go nowhere in the Republican-controlled Legislature next year without changes. Evers smoothed over that criticism during a news conference at Asa Clark Middle School in Pewaukee.

"In no circumstances do I believe this is dead on arrival," Evers said, adding that he had talked to Darling on the phone Monday, and that she had guaranteed him that the discussion could continue.

Darling could not be reached for comment Monday.

Governor-elect Scott Walker issued a statement Monday that praised Evers' efforts but cautioned that "true funding reform means focusing on how to better spend the dollars we have today."

Evers called the reform efforts "100 times more difficult" than the failed push for a mayoral takeover of MPS or the recent effort to obtain more power for the state superintendent.

"On the policy level, everyone is saying this is right on," he said. "But the money part is going to be an

issue."

At the Pewaukee middle school, he was flanked by school superintendents from neighboring districts and Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Greg Thornton.

"It's not a silver bullet," Thornton said. "But it's certainly a more balanced approach to school funding."

The specifics of the plan forwarded by the DPI would take effect starting in the 2012-'13 school year. They include:

- Shifting \$897.4 million in money paid out in levy credits to reduce school property tax bills to the school equalization aid formula.
- Establishing a minimum \$3,000 in state funding for the equivalent of every full-time student in a school district.
- Giving school districts 20% more state aid for every enrolled student who qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch, a common indicator of poverty in school districts.
- Maintaining an annual increase in state-imposed revenue limits of \$200 per student.
- Ending 10 small grant programs and targeting \$20 million a year to districts with persistent graduation and dropout issues.
- Redesigning peer review and mentoring programs to support teacher effectiveness.

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