

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: What arguments does the lawsuit make?

Answer: The case makes six claims, based on the state Constitution:

1. **Inadequate funding:** Funding from the state is not sufficient to allow for a sound, basic education.
2. **Not uniform:** Not all students have the same access to resources and opportunity to succeed.
3. **High needs not being met:** Students are not fungible. High needs students require more funding that is not provided for under the current system. **Special education funding:** State reimburses public schools for a fraction of special education costs but reimburse private vouchers at nearly 100 percent, denying students with disabilities an equal opportunity for a sound basic education.
4. **Equal protections:** The current system does not provide high-needs students with an equal opportunity for a sound basic education. .
5. **Free government with recurrence to first principles:** Free public schools for all has been a founding premise of our state since statehood, but the promise is not being kept.

Question: What are the impacts of the inadequate and inequitable funding system?

Answer: Declining student outcomes, inadequate staffing, deteriorating working conditions, staffing shortages, staff burnout, school closings, deteriorating infrastructure and undue financial pressures on educator communities.

Question: What happens next?

Answer: We hope the court declares the state's funding system unconstitutional and tells the Legislature to do better. This could be accomplished in a number of ways, as we've seen in other cases in other states. School funding lawsuits have been successful in Kentucky, Wyoming, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Arizona.

Question: What are some of the common themes emerging from plaintiffs driving the lawsuit?

Answer:

- **Critical Shortages.** Across all plaintiff districts, critical shortages are reported in special education teachers and assistants, English language learner specialists, social workers and school psychologists, behavioral therapists and guidance counselors, school nurses, maintenance and custodial staff and security personnel. These shortages increase caseloads and workloads for existing staff, forcing educators to travel between buildings and serve more students than appropriate for effective instruction and support.
- **Deteriorating Working Conditions.** Plaintiffs point to class sizes reaching over 30 students with minimal support for high-needs learners, outdated or

inadequate instructional materials, unsafe or inadequate building conditions, inability to offer statutorily required programming and reduced summer programming and extracurricular opportunities.

- **Forced to Referendum.** Plaintiffs point to the need to go to referendum and increase local property taxes just to keep the schoolhouse doors open and learning on track because the state has not kept up its required funding. Adams-Friendship, for example, has asked voters to pass 6 operating referenda and 5 capital referenda since 2000, with mixed results. The district is in year three of a four-year operating referendum providing \$3 million annually, yet still faces \$2-2.5 million in additional cuts.

Q: What does this lawsuit represent in the larger scheme of things for educators and our unions?

A: This lawsuit represents a unified voice from educators, local unions, school districts, parents and students demanding the Legislature fulfill its constitutional duty. The unions and individual educators bring firsthand testimony about how chronic underfunding affects teaching conditions, student outcomes and the fundamental promise of public education in Wisconsin.

For Wisconsin's teachers and education support professionals, the lawsuit seeks to restore adequate resources to do our jobs effectively and meet the constitutional guarantee that every child—regardless of district or need—receives an equal opportunity for a sound basic education.