

# Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA)

## 2021-2023 Legislative Advocacy Framework

*Final 2-24-2021*

*Our mission: SWSA advocates for the benefit of all students by driving education policies supporting strong public schools to ensure world class practices, economic vitality, and community well-being.*

The purpose of this legislative agenda is to proactively influence public policy related to education through coordinated legislative advocacy efforts for the benefit of students, families, and communities. The SWSA is committed not only to the 220,000+ students we educate in our traditional public schools, but also the 860,000 traditional public school students served across the state. Our 2021-2023 Legislative Priorities are founded in our mission and our [core beliefs which can be found on our website](#).

The development of SWSA legislative priorities occurred during late 2020 as we found ourselves facing the realities of COVID, social unrest, and political divisiveness across the country. We know the pandemic has magnified and exacerbated the gaps between student populations and created a greater sense of urgency in K-12 public education to address these opportunity and achievement gaps. As SWSA considers future budget priorities, we believe that equity must be at the forefront of all K-12 budget decisions.

Observations during emergency remote learning in spring 2020 and current educational models being deployed today, have brought to light the need to focus intently on the following:

- Connectivity issues and access to technology
- Empowering a family's ability to partner in student learning
- A significant impact on families and students whose home language is not English
- The growing needs of our special education students
- Early learning opportunities
- Economically disadvantaged families
- Student mental health

This legislative agenda outlines the SWSA Advocacy Framework and Key Priorities for the 2021-2023 biennial budget. All of these items are aligned with our intent to keep equity at the forefront of our advocacy efforts.

- The ***SWSA Legislative Advocacy Framework*** remains unchanged and provides the overarching strategic areas for advocacy (page 2)
- The ***SWSA 2021-2023 Legislative Advocacy Priorities*** outlines key areas of focus for this biennial budget (page 3-4)

Many of these legislative priorities stem from the recommendations of the [Blue Ribbon Commission Report 1-4-2019](#) and our [statutory flexibility agenda for the 2020-2021 school year](#) due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The SWSA will advocate for the 2021-2023 Legislative Advocacy Priorities on behalf of the public school children here in Southeastern Wisconsin and across the state. We know sound education policies that support strong public schools, and the children who attend them, will ensure economic vitality and community well-being in Wisconsin.

## SWSA Legislative Advocacy Framework

<b>Legislative Priority 1</b>	Provide a comprehensive, predictable, equitable and sustainable funding system that invests in enhancing and expanding opportunities for our students.
<b>Legislative Priority 2</b>	Increase state support for the most vulnerable, underrepresented, and high need populations including students with disabilities (SWD), English Learners (EL), and children in high poverty.
<b>Legislative Priority 3</b>	<p>Increase support to ensure adequate resources are available for Wisconsin children to succeed. Areas for additional support include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mental Health</li> <li>● Early Childhood (Birth to 3, full day 4K)</li> <li>● Wrap around services for children to support learning</li> </ul>
<b>Legislative Priority 4</b>	Develop, attract, and retain high quality educators.
<b>Legislative Priority 5</b>	Provide taxpayers with a transparent and valid accountability system for all publicly funded schools.
<b>Legislative Priority 6</b>	Preserve and maintain local control of public schools and advocate for no future unfunded mandates on public education.

## SWSA 2021-2023 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

### SWSA will advocate for the following...

1. **An increase in general revenues** to provide the necessary predictable, spendable, and equitable resources that invests in enhancing and expanding opportunities for our children. These increases should at least match inflationary increases in school costs.
2. An **increase** in the reimbursement rate for **Special Education to 60%**.
3. **Statutory changes** that SWSA has identified as essential to support instruction for public school children during the 2020-2021 school year as the world navigates the **COVID-19 pandemic**.  
[\(SWSA Statutory Flexibility Agenda for the 2020-2021 School Year\)](#)
  - a. **Pupil Count**-SWSA recommends that for 2020-21, school districts should be allowed to use their 2019-20 pupil counts or their actual 2020-21 counts (whichever is larger) in determining general aid and revenue limits.
  - b. Temporarily allowing **retired annuitants** to return to WRS (Wisconsin Retirement System) covered school employment without limits on hours or suspension of annuities and reducing the “break-in-service” requirement to 15 days.
  - c. Provide school districts and district employees with **immunity from civil liability** for issues stemming from Covid-19.
  - d. Allow districts to use their 2019-20 student counts for 2020-21 to prevent a significant loss of **transportation aid** for school districts.
  - e. Allow districts to reset their available space **for non-resident students to open enroll** into the district in 2020-21.
4. Supporting an increase in resources to **support school-based mental health services** and continuing to provide resources for **community partnerships to support mental health services** for children.
5. Supporting early learning by **fully funding 4K (1.0 FTE)**.
6. Providing educational opportunities to **low income and English Learner (EL) pupils** by weighting such pupils ([reference the Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission 1-4-2019](#))
7. Addressing the **educator labor shortage** by examining new and innovative ways to attract and retain educators. This may include:
  - a. Flexibility in rehiring annuitants
  - b. Incentives to enter into and stay in education including (but not limited to) a loan forgiveness programs for prospective future educators

c. Diversifying the educator workforce

8. Finding a way to permanently resolve the fiscal impact that **declining enrollment** is having on more than 60% of the public schools in Wisconsin.
9. Equitable access and affordability to **broadband infrastructure** to support remote learning for all children.
10. Providing resources to support **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** as children are dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

***Basic tenets of the SWSA Legislative Agenda***

<b>SWSA will be actively engaged throughout the legislative process and cycle.</b>	
Background	<p>The political landscape is a primary factor in determining the priority level of a legislative proposal for most organizations. Often a topic that may have been at one priority level suddenly becomes a higher priority and vice versa.</p> <p>SWSA must be poised to respond to policy proposals as they are introduced during the legislative session. Some of these issues could include: Covid-19 legislation, teacher recruitment and retention; mandate relief; summer school; early childhood learning; and school safety, among others.</p>
Long term Goal	SWSA is invited to participate in the development of significant education policy before it is introduced and provides a timely response to education policy proposals as they are introduced during the legislative cycle.
2021-2023 Session Advocacy Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be at the table before a proposal is introduced.</li> <li>2. Have a well-defined process in place for a timely response to proposals as they are introduced.</li> <li>3. Coordinate a unified message with stakeholders as often as possible.</li> <li>4. SWSA members are actively engaged in the legislative advocacy process. Local district education leaders developing relationships with legislators is essential.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Each district will strive for quarterly (or more frequent) meetings and/or contacts with their legislators.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Action Steps	<p>Continue to develop legislative relationships so SWSA is viewed as a resource and partner in developing any proposals related to K-12.</p> <p>Develop an organized method to identify where valuable relationships exist across the state and where the gaps might be.</p>