



Whitmer's recommended \$61.9B 2021 budget increases education spending with controversial tradeoffs

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One priority of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's recommended **\$61.9 billion 2021 budget** is education spending. The budget aims to provide the largest funding increase for classroom operations in 20 years.

About **\$415 million** of that funding would be through a weighted formula model based on equity.

That includes a foundation allowance investment of \$290 million, which would provide additional resources of between \$150 and \$225 per pupil to fund classroom and operational expenses.

The increase aims to close the equity gap to \$343 per-student between schools at the minimum and maximum foundation allowances.

The budget includes:

- \$60 million – a 100 percent increase over fiscal year 2020, to fund special education services
- \$60 million – an 11.5 percent increase over fiscal year 2020 of additional funding to support academically at-risk and economically disadvantaged students
- \$5 million – a 38 percent increase over fiscal year 2020 of additional funding for English language learners.

A map of the per-pupil increase spending across the state is **here**.

The plan would give \$42 million in new funding for preschool programs in high-poverty areas, and give \$25 million, or \$250 for each teacher, to buy classroom supplies.

Critics argue that higher per-pupil spending doesn't necessarily increase the quality of education. For example, New York **spent** \$21,206 per student in 2015, and educational improvement **barely budgeted**.

A Cato Institute **study** found that public education costs nearly tripled from 1970-2010, but didn't proportionally increase education quality.

Dan Quisenberry, president of Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA), told The Center Square in an email that he was encouraged to see K-12 education as a top budget priority, but upon initial review, saw that many areas either specifically excluded charter schools or funded them at lower levels.

"The governor is consistently treating students who need help the most unfairly, and that's not acceptable," Quisenberry said. "Charter schools serve a much higher percentage of students in poverty, and we need to make sure they're getting all the resources they need to succeed."

Quisenberry said that MAPSA looks forward to working through the budget process with Whitmer and the Legislature to ensure fair treatment of Michigan charter school students.

"One of our highest budget priorities is to reduce the funding gap that continues to negatively impact students at the lowest end of the funding spectrum, which includes every charter school student in the state," Quisenberry said.

"Our schools are public schools and our students are public school students, and they need to be treated as such."

Rep. Thomas Albert, R-Lowell, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, said that Gov. Whitmer's budget proposal risks the pensions promised to Michigan's teachers and school employees.

"The governor's school funding increase sounds great – until you dig a little deeper and realize it comes at the expense of our teachers' pensions," Albert said in a press release. "The administration has recklessly decided to disregard both the Attorney General's office and the plain language of the law in favor of a flashy figure that grabs headlines."

Albert led reforms, signed into law in 2018, that lowered the payroll growth assumption used in the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System to ensure the teacher retirement system was more financially secure and that freed more money for future classrooms.

Albert said Whitmer's administration refuses to follow that law.

"I recently received a **response from the Attorney General's office** agreeing with my position that the payroll growth assumption must be lowered to 2.75 percent from 3.5 percent," Albert said. "This small percentage change might not sound like a lot, but it has an estimated \$166 million impact on the pension payment this year alone," he said.

"Gov. Whitmer has often accused Republicans of using pensioners money for other purposes – yet her budget flagrantly disregards the law by underfunding the pension system," Albert said. "The hypocrisy is pretty thick."