



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 31, 2023

The Honorable Jill Underly
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster Street
Madison, WI 53707-7841

Dear Superintendent Underly:

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) received your written plan for a reasonable level of tolerance when calculating whether the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has met State maintenance of equity requirements under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP Act). This written plan applies only to a subset of Wisconsin's local educational agencies (LEAs).

The ARP Act State maintenance of equity requirements help ensure that State funding supports LEAs with high concentrations of poverty and the students who have been subject to longstanding opportunity gaps in our education system and experienced the greatest impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. These requirements are vital for ensuring that States maintain funding to address the impact of the pandemic on students' education, and for protecting students in high-need and highest-poverty LEAs from disproportionate cuts if reductions in State effort do occur.

The Department determined that it is consistent with the State maintenance of equity requirements to allow a State educational agency (SEA) to calculate whether it has maintained funding equity with respect to its small high-need and highest-poverty LEAs within a reasonable "tolerance level." The Department's determination is based on the possibility of significant volatility in the calculated per-pupil funding amounts for small LEAs caused by small changes in student enrollment, which may be unrelated to whether an SEA has achieved the intent of the requirements. (See *Frequently Asked Questions, American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Program, Maintenance of Equity Requirements*, July 26, 2022, Question 21(a).)

Wisconsin DPI considers LEAs with a membership of fewer than 1,000 students, and fewer than 77 students per grade level (to account for differences in grade-span configurations (e.g., K-12 versus K-8)), to be "small districts." Under this proposed threshold, Wisconsin has 225 such LEAs. For these 225 small LEAs, DPI proposes to implement a tolerance of up to a 5 percent decline in per-pupil funding. Applying this tolerance would impact three small districts in FY 2022 that, together, served 0.22 percent of Wisconsin's public school students. Wisconsin DPI asserts that per-pupil funding amounts for small districts are significantly affected by small changes in student population as well as the distribution of State general aid and local property tax contributions. This makes the per-pupil funding amounts in Wisconsin's small districts an imperfect indicator of whether the SEA has achieved the intent of maintaining equity in funding

across LEAs.

After reviewing Wisconsin DPI's tolerance proposal and accompanying data, the unique circumstances in the State, and our further State-specific analysis, we have determined that this approach includes a reasonable level of tolerance when calculating whether Wisconsin has maintained equity for small districts.

We appreciate your diligence in developing this proposal. If you have any questions, please contact your program officer at: Wisconsin.OESE@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Laura Jimenez

Laura Jimenez
Director, Office of State and Grantee Relations
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
United States Department of Education