

for Fairness & Reform

Since 1985

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: John Jacobson, Government & Member Relations Director

DATE: February 10, 2022 RE: Assembly Bill 964

Good morning, Vice Chairman Kitchens, and committee members. Thank you for allowing me to share WPT's testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 964, and many thanks to Representative Thiesfeldt for authoring this legislation.

Wisconsin Property Taxpayers, Inc. represents the interests of its ever-growing statewide membership comprised of thousands of homeowners, small business owners, and property owners - including many agricultural producers - in all 72 of the state's counties.

Wisconsin has the unfortunate distinction of ranking in the top ten for states with the highest property taxes. According to an article published last month by Rocket Mortgage, we currently rank sixth highest in the nation. Wisconsin also ranks seventh nationally for its increasing dependence on property taxes to pay for local services. In normal times, property taxes are already one of the largest out-of-pocket expenses for residents and small business owners in the state.

Assembly Bill 964 would increase the school property tax credit for residents with certain income levels in school districts that pivot to virtual instruction for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year. WPT supports this legislation, as written.

Property taxpayers provide essential funding for schools in addition to the many other services their monies finance. Though many of our members would not be eligible to claim this credit, they support this bill because they are committed to investing in the services their communities receive - actually receive.

I hear stories every day of member businesses and farmers alike who are rising to meet the ubiquitous challenges felt on Main Streets across the country. And while they continue to live in the real world, working every day to keep our hometown economies alive, they hope elected officials understand this frustration: when their tax dollars are not used as intended or to provide the full public service they paid for, those resources could have been invested back into the needs of their own families, households, or small businesses, as costs-ofliving surge at a rate not seen in decades.

WPT members also understand that despite paying their full property taxes or rent, families' expenses rise, and their financial resources become only scarcer when their children are forced to stay home. No matter how necessary or noble the maneuver to virtual instruction is deemed to be by school district officials, good intentions do not cover lost wages or increased childcare costs.

Public school districts are receiving both unprecedented COVID relief dollars from the federal government in addition to higher state aids, making this the perfect time to pass Assembly Bill 964, providing tax relief for residents in districts that may deem virtual instruction to be necessary in the remainder of this school vear.

Thank you for your time.

WISCONSIN PROPERTY TAXPAYERS, INC.

P.O. Box 1493 Madison, WI 53701-1493 800-994-9784 ijacobson@WPTonline.org www.WPTonline.org



The mechanics of the refund, as spelled out in the bill, would increase the school property tax credit for residents in districts that close to in-person instruction for more than 10 days of instruction in the semester. Under the formula in the bill, residents would see a refund of up to 10% of their property taxes or rent constituting property taxes based on a formula that takes into account the number of days schools were closed. Residents with school children would see their refund increased to up to 25%, limited to those households with gross incomes under \$80,000 or \$150,000 for married couples.

Parents and taxpayers are rightfully concerned when their schools close, and AB 964 helps ensure it won't happen again. How did we get to this point? At the start of the pandemic, Governor Tony Evers mandated that schools closed. Facing mounting criticism, on June 22, 2020, the Department of Public Instruction published guidance for all schools to ensure a smooth transition back to in-person instruction for the fall of 2020. Yet, too many schools were reluctant to fully open to in-person learning, five days a week even when the scientific evidence said otherwise.

At the start of 2021, only 20% of Wisconsin school districts were fully open to in-person learning, five days a week, according to AEI¹. Schools were disproportionately likely to be closed in low-income areas. This improved during the year; however, by May of 2021, one out of every three school districts were still not fully open to in-person learning. This included two of the state's largest school districts in Milwaukee and Madison. In stark contrast, at the start of 2021, 100% of Florida's school districts were open five days a week to in-person learning.

These school closures not only cost parents a tremendous amount of money, they also stunted the learning and growth of students, and will have unforeseen negative impacts on students' mental health for years to come. Unfortunately it is well established that the closures were more about politics than public health. Dr. Will Flanders at the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty found in early 2021 that the school closures had already cost students future earnings of over \$7 billion². That's generational economic damage that was inflicted upon the children of these closed schools. Dr. Flanders also found that school districts that started virtual saw a great decline in enrollment³, as families found alternative education that valued in person instruction – or simply left the education system entirely. And Dr. Flanders found that it was labor unions, not a local presence of COVID-19, that drove district decisions to be open in person or not⁴. More recently, his work has revealed that districts closed for in-person learning had a 4.8% decline in math proficiency, 1.6% decline in English proficiency, and districts with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students saw the largest declines⁵.

That's why, in June of 2021, over 175 parents sent all of you a letter demanding refunds for closed schools⁶. These parents and taxpayers were forced to pick up the tab when schools closed to stay at home from work or pay costs related to childcare or virtual learning. That's unfair to Wisconsin families, especially when Wisconsin school districts continued receiving their full per-student state funding, not

¹ https://www.returntolearntracker.net/

 $^{^2\} https://will-law.org/study-spring-2020-school-closures-may-result-in-7-billion-lifetime-earnings-loss-to-wisconsin-students/$

³ https://will-law.org/study-wisconsin-school-districts-that-started-school-year-virtually-experience-greatest-enrollment-declines/

⁴ https://will-law.org/study-unions-politics-appear-to-drive-fall-school-reopening-decisions-in-wisconsin/

⁵ https://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CountingTheCost-Final.pdf

 $^{^6\} https://reforminggovernment.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-06-14-IRG_Final-parent-letter.pdf$

to mention massive federal funding for COVID relief. In short, taxpayers were paying full price and then some for an incomplete product. In any other area of life, a refund would be expected.

Members of the committee, you have an opportunity with this bill to say never again will it be okay for districts to put unions ahead of families and children. IRG Action encourages you to support this bill and move it forward to the full Assembly.



MEMO

TO: Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: Chris Reader, Executive Vice President of IRG Action Fund

DATE: February 10, 2022

RE: Support for AB 964, Taxpayer Refunds for Closed Schools

Chairman Thiesfeldt and members of the committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing today on these important education reform proposals. My name is Chris Reader, and I'm the Executive Vice President for IRG Action Fund. IRG Action Fund is the advocacy and lobbying partner to the Institute for Reforming Government, a Wisconsin based think tank.

IRG Action supports Assembly Bills (AB) 963, 964, and 965. I am specifically speaking on AB 964 today. AB 964 ensures that a child's education will be the top priority, rather than the political posturing of unions and bureaucrats. Further, this bill sends an enforceable message that the Legislature, parents, and taxpayers will not accept public school districts locking their doors to students for days and weeks at a time. AB 964 does this by requiring a school district to refund parents if the school district shutters its doors to in-person learning for an unreasonable amount of time, as outlined in the bill. After all, parents pay for the schools. They should not be paying the same price when the school district fails its most basic test: to welcome students inside to learn.

Wisconsin families work hard and know what is best for their families. Parents count on their local schools, which they pay for with their hard-earned tax dollars, to remain open and operational so that their children can prepare for their future. Unfortunately, many school districts across Wisconsin were closed to in-person learning for many weeks and even months after they were able to reopen safely. Even at the start of this academic year, we saw the largest districts in the state again close their doors to in-person learning, with little or zero notice to families, throwing the lives of families into chaos as parents had to scramble to find childcare or miss work. The impact was more acutely felt by low-income families, already struggling to make ends meet.

AB 964 holds school districts accountable when they fail to perform their most basic duties and keep schools open. Specifically, the bill increases the school property tax credit for residents of school districts that are closed to in-person instruction for more than 10 days of instruction during the second half of the 2021-22 school year. While the bill is forward-looking only, it will make districts think twice before closing schools again.

From: Frank Chapman, 1315 Altoona Ave., Eau Claire, WI 54701

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

Closing students out of in-person instruction saves money for school districts but costs parents dearly, often in the form of lost wages or increased childcare costs. It also provides only a partial public service to taxpayers who paid their full property tax bills or rent. Further, the federal funds received by public school districts in addition to increased state aids makes Assembly Bill 964 the right thing to do, particularly given the skyrocketing cost-of-living for individuals and families across the state.

Please support this legislation.

From: Dean Hestekin, W50 Evanger Road, Independence, WI 54747

Date: February 10, 2022 **Re:** Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Roger Charley, 6208 S Highlands, Madison, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Reinhold Mauritz, W6301 Highpoint Rd, Town of Washington, Monticello, WI 53570

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: We should get all that we paid for. No one in business can deliver or provide only a portion of what was purchased and stay in business.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: David Knapstein, 905 1st Ave., Woodruff, WI 54568

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

From: Marcia S. Habeck, Ringle, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Debra K. Chwala, 113 Industrial Park Rd., Stanley, WI 54768

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Sarah Kirsch, Oshkosh, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: School taxes should go towards schools that are fully operating. If they have not been - tax payers need a refund!!

From: Mark Sparhawk, 421 25th Ave. N, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Kelly Renner, W225S8495 Lake Park Dr., Big Bend, WI 53103

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Edward Haebig, 3544 Tomorrow River Road, Amherst Jct., WI 54407

Date: February 10, 2022 **Re:** Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: It is not fair to the tax payer to pay a tax for something that isn't used.

From: Dennis Hornung, 3922 Town Line Rd., Amherst, WI 54406

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Lisa Taylor-Boerner, N7501 Werthmann Lane, Sheboygan, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Dale Braunschweig, Burnett, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Art and Sandy Luedeke, Greenwood, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: Educating at home for parents not prepared for or previously homeschooling caused much disruption to their homes, especially because of their need to leave for work. Those working from home because of the mandated shutdowns also found it difficult to add school teaching to their schedules, even needing to share space and computers.

From: Terry Pawlukiewicz, Withee, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Kenneth Kreuser, Greenleaf, WI

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Please support this legislation.

From: Tammi Graser, S85W23130 Chateau Lane, Big Bend, WI 53103

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: We pay more than our fair share of taxes.

From: Blake Dahlby, Marshfield, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Valerie Weber, Juda, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Dave Jahns, Town of Eldorado, Fond du Lac, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: It is only fair that the taxpayers deserve a portion of their taxes (which they paid to keep schools operational,) back as long as schools were closed for "virtual" learning.

From: Tony Walker, 104 N. Main Street, Pardeeville, WI 53954

Date: February 10, 2022 **Re:** Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: I am in support of this bill because many of my parent customers shared with me their struggles dealing with children learning virtually. Not only with cost of child care but with the day to day requirement to verify their children were indeed getting the school work completed. And having a mother who has been on our local school board starting her 19th year, I know how concerned the school was with having children fall behind in learning not being in the classroom environment. Parents of school children during the second half of the 2021-2022 school year that were virtual for more than 10 days, deserve this assistance.

From: Jon D. Werkmeister, Fifield, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: The taxpayers of Wisconsin should not have to pay for services not done.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Douglas Kelly, 1801 W. Court Street, Janesville, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: STRONGLY IN FAVOR.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: David Beggs, 6414 Brady Road, Bancroft, WI

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From: Boyd Dosch, Dresser, WI

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From: Cory Tomczyk, 1040 Indianhead Dr., Mosinee, WI 54455

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: If the districts are not going to provide in person learning, the best way kids learn, then they are not providing the product sand services that the taxpayers agrred to support.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Jeffrey May, 104 Industrial Road, Stanley, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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From: Lonny Damewood, Marshfield, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Closing students out of in-person instruction saves money for school districts but costs parents dearly, often in the form of lost wages or increased childcare costs. It also provides only a partial public service to taxpayers who paid their full property tax bills or rent. Further, the federal funds received by public school districts in addition to increased state aids makes Assembly Bill 964 the right thing to do, particularly given the skyrocketing cost-of-living for individuals and families across the state.

Please support this legislation.

From: Deb Helt, Waunakee, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: David Lemke, W6869 Cedar St., Medford, WI 54451

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Mark Tobola, Thorp, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Eric Dreger, 1004 Lake Road, Altoona, WI 54720

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Chuck Knower, N1810 945th St., Eau Claire, WI 54701

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: This money should go back to the hardworking families who are having to make sacrifices to ensure that their children don't fall behind while not in the classroom. When my children aren't in school it makes it very difficult for me and my wife to manage getting all the things done that should be happening while they are attending classes.

From: Larry Statz, 5015 Enchanted Valley Rd., Cross Plains, WI 53528

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Steven Agamaite, N9691 Cty Rd AB, Luxemburg, WI 54217

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Joseph Zakrzewski, Bancroft, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Kathleen Bohnhoff, W6115 County Rd U, Plymouth, WI 53073

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Kort Knope, 1365 E. Green Bay St., Shawano, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Rob Newhouse, 415 Draper St., Kaukauna, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: Parents are on the hook for unforseen expenses related to school closings. The school saves money when they are closed. This should be an obvious choice.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Marie Rasmussen Hall, PO Bo 169, Arlington, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Andrew McMyler, 670 Valley Rd., Menasha, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

From: Catherine Guth, 7212 County Road BB, Bancroft, WI 54921

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

As a property taxpayer, I fully support Assembly Bill 964, which would increase the school property tax credit for residents and parents in school districts that went virtual for more than ten days in the second half of the 2021-2022 school year.

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: It is ridiculous to have schools closed and not having our children taught as they should be. The tax money should come back since teachers were not working and the buildings were closed.

From: Douglas J. Darrow, 14720 95th Avenue, Chippewa Falls, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Chad Pekrul, 211 N. Parkview Drive, Eagle, WI 53119

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: Parents that had to take time off of work to proctor virtual schooling should not have to pay as much on their property taxes related to schools because they already lost money taking off of work.

From: Harvey Wood, W11115 Hagen Lane, Black River Falls, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: David Knuth, 622 S Grove Street, Ripon, WI 54971

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Michael John Hablewitz, W9000 Madeline Ln., Hortonville, WI 94944

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Darla Crogg, 12665 County Highway B, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: When the public schools were closed by the hand of our State the reality was the cost associated with providing an education for these schools was dramatically reduced. The costs of supplies, staffing, utilities, wear & tear on facilities was saved and since the funding for these costs comes from property owners and the taxes they pay it should be reflected in saving to the ones that pay the bills.

From: Roger and Martha Jensema, W2492 County Road V, Sheboygan Falls, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: Seems a fair adjustment for very much less-than-normal school learning for children/young people/college-age citizens. The citizens did not get their money's worth! This is a attempt to reimburse those affected by the deficiencies in learning.

From: Kris Byrne, W1401 King Rd., Brooklyn, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Hans Lenzlinger, PO Box 878-800 Highway 69, New Glarus, WI

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Paul W Stokes, 3830 Atwood Ave, Madison WI

Date: February 10, 2022 **Re:** Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: I support Assembly Bill 964 because it seems reasonable to me with extended virtual schooling that overhead costs much have been significantly reduced. I understand that the schools have also been given money to help with costs related to COVID. If there are any excess funds, then an increase in tax credit is reasonable and expected.

From: David Berken, 4560 Humboldt Rd., Green Bay, Wi 54311

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

From: Kenneth Myers, 855 Phillips Blvd., Sauk City, WI 53583

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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Please support this legislation.

Additional thoughts: It would seem that there are less expense when the shoool districts go virtual.

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Education From: Gregory J Sowieja, 703 E. Mill St., Owen, WI 54460

Date: February 10, 2022 Re: Assembly Bill 964

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