You may have read that the state of Wisconsin biennial budget contains record investing in schools. This sounds great, but you need to know “the rest of the story.” As I’ve written about in the past, we have two main sources of funding for the school district, state aid and local property taxes. If we assume that our total budget remains the same, when one of these sources of revenue goes up, the other comes down. This is due to revenue caps that have been in place for nearly 30 years that limit the amount of revenue a district can receive per student based on their spending in 1993. Cornell was a very low spending school district in 1993, so we have been locked into a lower revenue limit ever since.

The budget that was approved by the assembly and senate did provide record investing toward schools, and every year should be a record as inflation continues to go up. The part that has not been highlighted is that the budget does not provide for an increase in the revenue cap. This means we can’t collect more money per student this year in state aid and local property taxes than we had last year and the prior year before that! So what does this “record investment in schools” mean? It means that since state aid is going up overall in the state, local property taxes will be going down in the state as we will not be allowed to increase our budget.

In compounding this problem, inflation is at record levels and since so many school districts have been increasing their revenue by passing referenda to exceed the revenue cap, Cornell will receive less aid. The reason for this is as positively aided districts spend more money from referenda, their “shared costs” of education go up and they receive more of the “state aid pie.”

This state budget for education is the worst one for the Cornell School District over the 20 years I have been here. Now is a great time to start talking to legislators about doing more for schools in the 2023-2025 state budget.