*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**Wisconsin Policy Forum’s top 5 research findings of 2020**

While 2020 is a year that most people want to forget, it is also one that will generate important analysis by policy researchers for years to come.

Continuing a year-end tradition launched by one of our predecessor organizations more than a decade ago, we announce our top five research findings for 2020.

[**1) Shift to online shopping helps taxpayers but not state budget.**](https://wnanews.com/2020/06/30/online-shopping-effect-wisconsin/)

As more Wisconsinites shopped online during the pandemic, we found that sales-tax collections from online purchases increased sharply while collections from other segments like restaurants and clothing stores dropped. A unique provision in Wisconsin state law requires any increase in state sales tax collections from certain online and out-of-state retailers to be used to lower state income taxes by a corresponding amount. This provision may merit new scrutiny given the state’s budget challenges and the unanticipated breadth of the shift to online commerce.

[**2) Wisconsin’s police spending has increased as a share of municipal spending.**](https://wnanews.com/2020/07/08/wisconsin-police-funding-trends/)

Wisconsin municipalities spent $1.28 billion on police in 2018. That equated to $219 per capita, an increase of 197% in raw dollars from the $74 spent per capita in 1986 and a 30% increase when accounting for inflation. Meanwhile, law enforcement spending as a share of total municipal spending grew from 17.8% to 20% during that period. Despite the increased spending, police staffing levels in most of Wisconsin’s largest cities lagged population growth in the past decade.

[**3) Wisconsin’s gap between teachers and students of color is growing.**](https://wnanews.com/2020/07/21/wisconsin-k-12-student-diversity-grows/)

From 2009 to 2019, while the share of students of color in the state’s public schools grew from 23.6% to 30.7%, the share of teachers of color increased by only 1.1 percentage points to 5.6%. Research has shown that a teacher workforce that mirrors the student population can help bridge racial achievement gaps in academic performance and other student outcomes. That finding is particularly relevant to Wisconsin, where such gaps are among the highest in the nation.

[**4) Wisconsin allocates fewer state dollars to arts and culture than any other state.**](https://wnanews.com/2020/08/19/arts-and-culture-in-pandemic/)

We assessed the pandemic as an “existential threat” to Wisconsin’s arts and culture sector after reviewing the consequences for 13 arts organizations in the Milwaukee area. We found that Wisconsin’s 13 cents per capita of state funding support for arts and culture ranked last in the nation, and that several other states had taken steps to provide emergency relief support to their arts and culture sectors. Following the release of our report, Gov. Tony Evers announced emergency relief funding for Wisconsin arts and cultural organizations totaling $45 million.

[**5) Wisconsin’s support for public higher education has plummeted when compared to the rest of the nation.**](https://wnanews.com/2020/12/23/uw-system-funding-falls-behind-peers/)

Since 2000, Wisconsin’s per-student revenues from taxes and tuition at its public universities and technical colleges has fallen from 10% above the U.S. average to 9.2% below that average ($13,640 here versus $15,018 for the U.S.). Policy options available to address the state’s higher education challenges could include relaxing tuition freezes or new state funding, additional administrative flexibility for UW system institutions, and efforts to boost enrollment.

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at*[*wispolicyforum.org*](https://www.wispolicyforum.org/)*.*