



131 E. Washington St. Suite 1A
Appleton, WI 54911
P: (920) 832-6126
www.aasd.k12.wi.us

April 28, 2021

Dear Fox Valley Area Legislators: Congressman Mike Gallagher; Representative Dave Murphy; Representative Rachel Cabral-Guevara; Senator Roger Roth; Representative Lee Snodgrass; Senator Andre Jacque; Representative Ron Tusler.

Thank you for your service to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin. We in the Appleton Area School District feel honored to have such a dedicated group of legislators who are motivated to stay aware and informed regarding the needs of our students, our district, and our community.

We feel incredibly fortunate to have received the one-time influx of dollars provided by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to support our efforts in meeting the needs of our students during the pandemic, and to help students recover from the interruption to their learning that was caused by the pandemic. The original funding we received last summer from **ESSER I** was spent on purchasing Chromebooks to allow our students to learn virtually, when needed, throughout this school year. A portion of our **ESSER II** funding was spent on staffing to reduce class sizes, which allowed us to keep students safely distanced when they returned for in-person learning on January 19th; Isolation room staffing at each of our 27 schools, which allowed students to be safely isolated when exhibiting COVID symptoms; and mitigation strategies, such as continually disinfecting our schools and providing PPE to keep students and staff safe.

The remainder of our ESSER II funding and all of our **ESSER III** funding will be spent over the next three years on addressing pandemic caused learning loss. We will address this educational hardship through the implementation of evidence-based interventions and supports. Some examples of these interventions and supports are:

- Credit recovery teachers and graduation coaches
- Alternative education staffing for evening, weekends, and summer work
- Math interventionists
- Spanish and Hmong Community Coordinators
- Intervention materials for reading and math, as well as specific materials for special education
- Alternative programming with Fox Valley Technical College
- Expanded Summer School options
- School-to-career coordinators
- Social/emotional intervention supports
- Class size reduction to provide increased student and teacher interactions
- Additional language interpreters

As you can see from our list of interventions and supports we are spending our one-time ESSER funding as the Federal government intended it to be spent, which is to address the interruption to student learning caused by the global pandemic. However, the pandemic did not change the budget challenges we continue to face each year in our day-to-day operations. The challenges we face with inflationary increases to health insurance, transportation, utilities, tech contracts, and custodial contracts, along with our desire to provide minimal compensation increases for our employees, result in a budget that cannot be balanced without an annual increase in revenue.

As we begin developing our 2021-2022 budget, and look toward the long-term impacts of the State's upcoming biennial budget, it is clear to us that there are four priority areas that are absolutely critical to our success in continuing to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student body.

1. A *minimum* increase to revenue limits by \$200 per pupil in the first year and \$204 in the second year of the biennium will allow us to maintain our current level of services and cover the inflationary increases described above. Our inflationary increases must be funded, which means if our revenue does not keep pace with inflation we will be forced to cut essential programming for our students.
2. Our district transfers over \$25 million each year from our general fund to our special education fund to offset the ever increasing costs required to educate students with special education needs. These services are a legal requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The categorical aid reimbursement we receive annually is simply not sufficient. Raising the reimbursement rate for these required special education services to 45% in the first year of the biennium and 50% in the second year will move our district closer to the true cost of educating our students with special education needs.
3. We desperately need to be allowed to replace our 2020-2021 pupil count with our 2019-2020 pupil count for revenue limit calculations. On average, we have had a summer school enrollment equivalent to a student FTE of 165, but due to the conditions of the pandemic last summer, we were only able to offer virtual summer school. Consequently, our FTE decreased to just 40, which will result in a \$1.25 million loss in revenue over the next three years. In addition, our enrollment decreased by 700 students between the third Friday of September, 2019-2020, and the second Friday of January, 2020-2021. We suspect this decrease is due in part to starting the school year virtually. The decision to start the school year in a fully virtual model was made because we felt it was best for the health and safety of our students, staff and our community. However, because the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) uses a 3-year rolling student enrollment average, the situation that has resulted from the conditions of the pandemic will significantly affect our revenue and our ability to educate our students in future years.
4. Our fourth priority area is student mental health. Our continual concern for the mental health of our children has most certainly been exacerbated by the pandemic and will continue in the years to come. Thus, we strongly support the Governor's \$46.5 million proposed expansion of the School Mental Health Categorical Aid program.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the impact the State's 2021-2023 biennial budget will have on the Appleton Area School District either via zoom or in person. One of us will be reaching out to you within the next several days to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Judy Baseman

Dr. Judy Baseman
Superintendent

Greg Hartjes

Greg Hartjes
Chief Financial Officer