

MINERAL POINT

UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



705 Ross St. • Mineral Point, WI 53565 • mineralpointschools.org • p: 608.987.0740 • f: 608.987.3766



April 28, 2021

Senator Marklein,

Thank you for taking an active leadership role in crafting a budget that will support all of Wisconsin. I know that one of the most important positions you must take is representing our students. They are our future and we must continue to provide them with the highest quality education we can.

After reviewing the Governor's budget, I am aware the difficult task of setting priorities for this biennium budget will provide many sleepless nights as it will impact every citizen in our state. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the impact some of those recommendations will have on the community and school district in Mineral Point. Fiscal decisions often imply winners and losers, but it is important that our children are not caught up in that scenario.

The COVID-19 relief support from the federal government is a one-time support that has specific limitations for expenditures. While we are encouraged to use some of the funds to provide social and emotional support for our students, these dollars will soon disappear and cause school districts to no longer provide any services or absorb the costs into already tight budgets. Our district used the initial round of funds to support virtual learning last spring when we were all shut down by the state. My district does not have a robust broadband network, especially for my rural students. We purchased wifi hotspots in order to provide a continuation of learning. We also needed to purchase cleaning and disinfecting supplies in order to get our students back into our buildings safely. These items were not in our budget, but were needed so that face-to-face learning could resume once it was possible to safely return to the school buildings.

Another area of great concern is special education funding. The cost for providing services for some of my students can be double or triple the amount we spend on regular education students. We educate every student to the best of our ability, and oftentimes, that means providing one-on-one support so the child can have academic and behavioral support while in the classroom or building. Each year my district transfers over a million dollars from Fund 10, general education, to Fund 27, special education. The governor proposed increasing the amount of state aid to help support special education. If you could support his recommendation, my transfer would be smaller, which means more money can have a greater impact on all students.

The governor proposed an inflationary increase in per pupil costs in his proposal. There are so many costs that are beyond the control of any school district. An increase in the cost of paper, technology, heat, electricity, transportation, and I fear, fuel surcharges are all out of my control. I need to heat my buildings in the winter, provide bus services for the rural students, and have so many other costs that fluctuate based on pressures that impact the market. How do I establish a budget when these factors are constantly changing and react to inflation or consumer price indexes? If the state budget were to be built

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taking these factors into consideration, it makes it easier to budget at a local level and supports all of the taxpayers, and your constituents, in my district.

The beauty of living in Wisconsin, especially southwest Wisconsin, are beautiful scenes, hills and valleys, and an outstanding quality of life. The downfall we all discovered is that internet connections are few and far between. The budget proposal that supports expanding broadband services is not only a necessity for schools, but also for any business that would like to relocate to this part of the state. Due to the natural landscape in this area, cell phone service does not provide reliable internet connections for many families, and the same issue eliminates satellite connectivity as well. Providing financial support for hardwired, broadband connections will give every child, family, and business the best possible resources to be set up for success.

In the Mineral Point Unified School District, we are also a sparsely populated area like many school districts. The sparsity aid allows us to continue to offer a safe and efficient way to transport our remote students to and from school. Without the support of sparsity aid, the district would need to shift additional dollars away from the classrooms and into transportation. We make decisions on how to have the biggest impact on student learning every day. When we have less funds available to use on our students we fear that it will have a negative impact on all of our students.

Thank you for giving so much of your attention to the biennium budget process. Your direction will be of great importance to the Mineral Point community and its children. Your leadership has continually supported rural Wisconsin and for that, I want to thank you. If I can be of any help to you in your important work, please do not hesitate to ask. Your continued support means a lot to me and our entire community.

Sincerely,

Mitch Wainwright, District Administrator