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PEPIN AREA SCHOOLS

"Home of The Lakers and Eagles"

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4/22/21

To: Joint Finance Committee Members

From: Bruce Quinton

Re: Testimony to the Joint Finance Committee at UW-Stout

I would like to thank the Joint Finance Committee members for giving me the opportunity to address your committee in regards to the 2021-2023 Biennium Budget. I would have liked to be with you today in person, but I unfortunately need to be back in my district fighting one of the 425 battles that are currently going on in each school district across the state since the facial covering order was overturned by the state supreme court.

Pepin Area Schools strongly supports the following budget priorities including:

- 1) Increasing the current level of special education aid to reimburse 50 percent of aidable costs by the end of the 2021-23 biennium.
 - a) We currently set our special education budget by \$456,000.
 - b) Local property taxes pay 61% of the cost of our special education programming.
- 2) At least \$200/pupil general revenue in each year of the biennium and distributing general revenue increases in a balanced fashion using both revenue limit/general aid and per pupil categorical aid to better meet the needs of all school districts.
 - a) This will allow us to have predictable and sustainable funding.
- 3) Allowing school districts to use the greater of the districts 2019-20 or 2020-21 pupil count for revenue limit calculations.
 - a) Our student count was down 21 students of all most 8%.
 - b) We were projected to be up 5 students.
 - c) The majority of that loss is related to COVID-19.
 - i) Families who decided not to send their children because of concerns around COVID-19.
 - ii) Families we decided not to send their children related to the politicization of the facial covering rules.
 - iii) Some families decided to hold off sending their 4 or 5 year old children until the pandemic is over.

Pepin Area School's vision is "Encouraging a community of learners in a positive atmosphere where learning is a life long process which develops responsible citizens who value knowledge."

The Pepin Area School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or handicap.

- 4) Treating the non-recurring declining enrollment exemption and base revenue hold harmless as recurring adjustments for one year only.
 - a) This will help even out our losses.
- 5) Increase special adjustment aid from 85 percent to 90 percent of prior year general aid in each year of the biennium.
 - a) Pepin Area Schools saw their 1st increase in equalization aid last year in almost 20 years.
 - b) This was due to our increasing student counts prior to the Pandemic.
 - c) If we don't get student count mitigation factor, we will return to 15% losses annually to the amount of our equalization aids.
- 6) Counting full-day 4K students as 1.0 FTE for general aid and revenue limit purposes.
 - a) This will allow our district to go to a full time 4K program and would be a game changer for our four year old students and their families.

This pandemic has been tough on our local budgets. The Federal Dollars we are receiving have and will help tremendously, but this is a one time infusion of dollars to help pay for numerous safety upgrades that have allowed us to bring students back to school in person this school year and help address student learning loss from last spring's closure and remote learning challenges. The proposed \$200 in additional dollars per pupil, per year, in general revenue will allow Pepin Area Schools to maintain the program offerings we currently provide our students as opposed to using the ESSR dollars to maintain positions in the short term, that will need to be cut when those dollars are gone. Again, the ESSR dollars were not intended to offset our state's responsibility to fund a free and appropriate public education to the students of our state. Additionally, I ask you to fund our schools with a reasonable increase, as our state's fiscal health is more than in order and it is impossible to do any long term planning without reliable recurring funding that is guaranteed in our revenue limit system. Short of this will require Pepin Area Schools to return to a continuation of short term budget goals and numerous cuts to educational opportunities for our students in the wake of uncertain funding. During a time period where we did not see an increase in per pupil aid in line with inflationary increases we were forced to make numerous cuts to the support and programs we offer our students. These included:

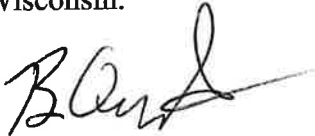
- Elimination of our local Foreign language offerings. We only offer online or distance learning opportunities to our students.
- 80% reduction in our special education teacher at the elementary level.
- A 60% reduction of PreK-12 instrumental and vocal music opportunities. We currently share vocal music and instrumental music instructors with a neighboring district.
- The elimination of our LMC teacher. We currently utilize a teacher's aide who works under the licensure of the superintendent of schools.
- A 70% reduction of our Family and Consumer Education position and

only two class offerings left for our high school students and the elimination of Family and Consumer Education opportunities for our middle school students.

- A 40% reduction in Art education opportunities for our students.
- A 50% reduction in our Reading Specialist.
- Elimination of our School Psychologist. We share our Pupil Services director with two districts and now only purchase school psychology time for testing of students when necessary.
- A 70% reduction of our 7-12 science program. We now have one science teacher for all classes in grades 7-12.
- Cooperative athletic opportunities for all sports we offer.

The last budget cycle allowed us to reinstate our EEN staffing reduction, but all other reductions remain in place as we have no way to plan for the long term from a stable funding perspective. It is not accurate to say Pepin Area Schools does not need a school psychologist, full time reading specialist, a certified librarian, and additional science, fine arts, foreign language, FAC, and STEM opportunities for our students. But without a long term stable funding mechanism, it is impossible and unproductive for our district and its students to put these programs back into place, if we will need to cut them in the next budget cycle.

Thank you for taking the time to listen and for your service to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin.



Bruce Quinton, District Administrator
Pepin Area Schools