

May 24, 2021

Dear Senator Darling,

The vision of the Mequon-Thiensville School district is *each student, every time, empowered to succeed*. We proudly educate over 3,600 students, and employ over 450 staff members, making us one of the 5th largest employers in the City of Mequon. For the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted public schools across Wisconsin in uniquely different ways. A challenge many districts share is ensuring high-quality instruction is available to every student through the pandemic. Our district has risen to meet the challenge through best practice, innovation, and adapting to meet the changing needs of our students and the high expectations of our community. We are among the short list of districts in the state that have offered in-person instruction five days a week since September 7, 2020.

Mitigation strategies necessary to keep our students and staff safe have necessitated higher spending during the 2020-21 school year of approximately \$970,000. These expenditures include additional daily cleaning of all seven buildings in our district, additional cleaning of all school buses, personal protective equipment (PPE) for faculty, staff and students, signage for floors and walls to promote social distancing, and clear dividers for classroom and cafeteria settings.

The district has spent an additional \$225,000 on increased staffing to manage recommended mitigation measures. Social distancing has reduced the capacity of classrooms and required additional staff to facilitate smaller classes. We've added overloads to teacher contracts in order to allow for the facilitation of distance learning. In addition to instructional staff, our district has increased nursing staff to effectively contact trace school-related COVID-19 cases.

We are grateful for the support of the Mequon-Thiensville Education Foundation for providing the funding necessary to purchase additional Chromebooks to allow us to offer a device to each student in grades 3-12, and implement a learning management system. The total amount of this investment was \$191,500.

We are also grateful for the support from the City of Mequon. The City elected to defer \$100,000 of their CARES Act allocation to the school district in order to support a safe reopening.

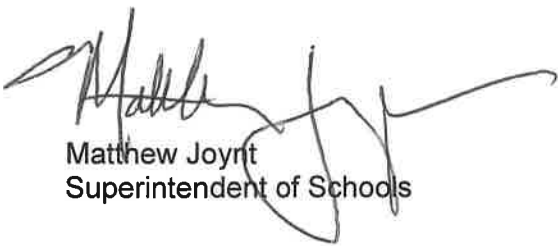
Lastly, we are grateful for the support of the CARES and ESSER funding from the federal government. To date, the district has received \$61,190 through the CARES Act and \$270,594 from ESSER II. While these funds are helpful, they are one-time allocations, and if used responsibly, should only be used to cover one-time, non-recurring costs. These funds do not provide sustainable funding for our ongoing operational costs in 2021-22, 2022-23 and beyond.

Please support and encourage others in your caucus to support the inclusion of the following items in the 2021-2023 biennial budget:

- \$200 per pupil in 2021 and \$204 per pupil in 2022 so we can continue to meet our ongoing financial obligations such as utilities, maintenance and staffing.
- Increase support for special education services so that our district can offset the nearly \$5million that we currently transfer from our general fund in order to meet these needs. Increasing the special education aid amount will help the district better meet the needs of all students in our district.
- Pupil count mitigation strategies in order to keep our funding at the level needed to support all of our school functions. These strategies include 1) Allowing districts to use the greater of the 2019-20 or 2020-21 pupil count for revenue limit calculations; 2) Increasing special adjustment aid from 85% to 90% of prior year general aid in each year of the biennium; and 3) Treating the non-recurring declining enrollment exemption and based revenue hold harmless as recurring adjustments for one year only.
- Expansion of the School Mental Health Categorical Aid program to provide financial support for services provided by school psychologists, nurses, counselors and social workers.
- Support the high-cost transportation proposal being advanced by Senator Felzkowski and Representative Mursau. This proposal would lower the aid threshold in the program from 145% of the statewide average per pupil transportation cost to the statewide average (100%). An additional \$41 million annually would fully fund the proposal and positively impact 287 districts, including Mequon-Thiensville.

The budget building process is one of the most important responsibilities you have as a legislator. We appreciate your hard work to balance the different demands from various constituents and we appreciate your service to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin.

Respectfully,



Matthew Joynt
Superintendent of Schools



Sarah Viera
Executive Director of Business Services

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