

Senator Stafsholt and Representative Zimmerman,

I am respectfully asking that you reconsider the Joint Finance Committee budget that is moving forward in the Legislature. I understand Legislators want to look at the money that school districts have received from the Federal Government and the impact that has on our budgets, but I want to remind you that money was earmarked for dealing with the impact the pandemic has had on children in both the past 15 months and the next two years. To require districts to utilize that money for regular operating expenses is not in line with the intent of the money. I also understand that there are some districts that are getting more money than others, but I can tell you that the federal money is not a windfall for the Hudson School District.

The district was planning to use our ESSR money for additional school days for students, increased tutoring and summer school, after school programming, reading and math interventions, additional staff training, and mental health needs of our kids. Some of those things will now have to be put on hold, as we reevaluate our financial position and what we can count on from the State in terms of funding. I could understand if the State was facing tremendous financial hardship that there should be an expectation for school districts to help shoulder that burden. However, with an estimated \$4.4 billion surplus it is hard for me to understand the need to not at least provide some additional spendable funding for schools that would meet even the bare minimum increase in CPI. As I have talked with Representative Zimmerman in the past, I have reiterated the tremendous wage pressure that we are facing as we work to hire and retain our staff. This wage pressure is only increasing every year. Providing virtually no new spendable money for our school district seems to send the message that those conversations continually fall on deaf ears.

I understand that not all of the surplus funding can go to public education nor do I think that it should. I also understand that tax relief is important as well. I believe we need to make sure we are investing in other programs like transportation, broadband, elderly citizens, higher education, mental health needs, natural resources, and the Department of Corrections. I just hoped the legislature would take a more pragmatic and balanced approach to the budget and fund one of the cornerstones of our democracy, which is k-12 public education.

I see the current action being taken by the Legislature as a tremendous mistake that mirrors that of the Federal Stimulus money in 2010, using one-time money for ongoing expenses. I believe this is going to have a catastrophic conclusion in the next two years and one that will not only bind the hands of the future Legislature, but also be very costly to the children of Wisconsin. The fiscal cliff that is coming with this action is irresponsible and completely avoidable.

Attached is the document that the Legislative Fiscal Bureau released today showing the difference in state funding for school districts based on the Governor's requested budget and that of the Joint Finance Committee. I have highlighted the Hudson School District on page 9 and page 23. The difference in the amount of funding proposed by the Governor and the JFC for our district is almost \$7.5 million over the next two years. I understand we will be receiving ESSR funding to help cover that difference. However, I find it hard to believe that the Legislature is going to be able to come up with the money needed to fill in the gap for the next budget and provide additional spendable funding for schools if they cannot provide hardly any additional spendable funding for schools when they have a \$4.4 billion surplus.

Once again, I respectfully ask that you both reconsider the budget moving forward, not that it all has to be put into public K-12 education, but that you will do what you think is right and put some level of additional funding into public K-12 education. Thank you for both your time and your service to the people of the great State of Wisconsin. I know many people on both sides of these issues are watching how things are being addressed, and you are both in challenging positions. You have a choice when you vote on these budget bills and I hope you choose to stand with the community and most importantly the children of the Hudson School District.

Nick Ouellette, PhD.
Superintendent
Hudson School District