

4/19/17

To: Joint Finance Committee Members

From: Bruce Quinton

Re: Testimony to the Joint Finance Committee in Ellsworth

I would like to thank the Joint Finance Committee members for giving me the opportunity to address your committee in regards to the 2017-2019 Biennium Budget.

Pepin Area Schools strongly supports the governor's proposal to increase each district's per pupil categorical aid from the current \$250 per pupil by adding \$200 per pupil in 2017-18 and an additional \$204 in 2018-19. Pepin Area Schools strongly supports the governor's proposed increases to sparsity aids for rural school districts. These additional dollars will allow Pepin Area Schools to maintain the program offerings we currently provide our students as opposed to a continuation of numerous cuts to educational opportunities that we have had to make over the last four budget cycles when we did not see an increase in per pupil aid in line with inflationary increases. Some of the reductions we have been forced to make over the last eight years include:

- The elimination of our only district building principal. Those duties now fall to the only full time administrator left in the district with help from lead teachers at the elementary and high school levels.
- 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 aid 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 Technology Education offerings for students at the high school level and the elimination of Technology Education offerings at the middle school level.
- A 50% reduction in our Reading Specialist/Title I teacher. We share our

Reading Specialist with a neighboring district which has led to a reduction of Title I services in math and reading support for our most needy students in the elementary level.

- Elimination of our School Psychologist. We share our Pupil Services director with three 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.

We have made these reductions for only one reason, our inability to increase the revenue limit in line with the increase in inflation. While not all positions would have been maintained, most would have if we could have simply kept up with inflationary increases.

Pepin Area Schools is appreciative of the governor's proposal to increase our per pupil categorical aid by \$200 in 2017-2018 and \$204 in 2018-2019 and we ask the joint finance committee to keep this level of funding for our public school in your work on the budget. Maintaining our public schools and the education we provide children is impossible without adequate funding. The state has failed to adequately fund schools, for too long a time period, to push off for another budget cycle.

While Pepin Area Schools is pleased with a number of items in the governor's budget proposal, we strongly oppose the budget provision which makes a district's receipt of the new per pupil aid contingent upon the district certifying to DPI that district employees pay at least 12% of all costs and payments associated with employee health care plans in that school year. For the record, our employees pay 12.6% of their health insurance costs and we have deductibles of \$6000 for employees with a family and \$3000 for single employees. Hence, we more than meet the requirements under ACT 10. We are additionally opposed to the budget provision requiring districts to distribute new per pupil aid equitably to each school in the district based on enrollment. Assembly Speaker Vos has recognized that this provision is "irrelevant" because each district could easily work around it making this provision a meaningless paper exercise. Small rural districts do not need more reports and paperwork to complete.

Pepin Area Schools respectfully requests a \$4.2 million increase over the biennium in state reimbursement for children with high cost special needs. This increase would move state reimbursement from the current 70% to full state reimbursement for costs in excess of \$30,000 per pupil. As you can well imagine, these high cost special needs students can have a significant budgetary impact on small rural district like Pepin.

Finally, Pepin Area Schools would ask for your support in establishing a \$1000 per pupil minimum aid "FLOOR" as part of the state school aid formula. Pepin Area Schools bleeds 15% of our state aid each year because we have elevated property values and a small number of students in our district. The Revenue limit formula considers Pepin Area Schools to be a rich district. This is not reflected in the average income level of our community's residents, which is well below the state average. There have been a number

of years in the last decade where our budget has been flat or even reduced and our property taxpayers have seen considerable increases in their property tax bill. Our local property taxpayers pay more for fewer programs for our local students. The minimum floor proposed would allow our district to stop losing aid next school year. I do not believe asking the state to provide \$1000 per pupil in equalization aid is too much to ask, given the number of mandates that all schools in the state are required to comply with, regardless of the amount of state aid they receive.

I am hopeful that we can all agree that providing adequate funding for our children's right to a free and appropriate public education is not a partisan issue. Our public schools are important to all liberal and conservative members of each community and each community's future.

Please invest in our children's future. It is a long term investment, but we all will benefit from the investment that we collectively make in our children today.

Thank you for your time,

Bruce Quinton, District Administrator  
Pepin Area Schools