



# Baldwin-Woodville Area School District

Educating our Future Leaders

April 19, 2017

To: Joint Finance Committee  
From: Eric Russell, Superintendent of Schools  
Re: Biennial Budget

First, I understand the importance of balancing a budget and the difficulties that come with trying to prioritize, both professionally and personally. However, I do believe our children need to be our number one priority because they are our responsibility and they cannot advocate for themselves.

Second, I strongly encourage you to support 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 2017-2018 and an additional \$204 in 2018-2019. Even with this increase, the Baldwin-Woodville Area School District will be looking at cutting over \$150,000 because of a 9% health insurance increase and a 2% wage increase. The district has changed to high deductible health plan but that has not stopped the costs from rising.

This makes providing our students with the best possible education very challenging. Our student population is continually changing. Not only are we growing, but the needs are changing. Students are coming to school with more and more needs and at younger ages. We are continually adding paraprofessionals to work with students one on one because of their needs. Not to mention the difficulties involved in finding special education or English Language Learner instructors. Then if we can find one, can we afford that person?

As you know, the mental health needs of our student population have also increased. That is why I also support the governor's school mental health initiative. By no means does the governor's budget proposal solve all of our problems but it seems like a great place to start working together.

Finally, I am still very concerned about the direction that education is heading in Wisconsin, with the movement of state budget dollars to pay for vouchers to go to private schools. This is not a political statement, it is about my belief in public education. We are a country built on free, appropriate, and equal education for all. We all know there are not unlimited funds. We have to set priorities and use these funds as effectively as possible. I believe the most efficient way to educate everyone is with one system. I am not opposed to choice or competition, but that does not always make things better, especially when there is not a product. Schools are working with children. There is not necessarily a better or more efficient way to make that product. Vouchers and choice have been around for 20 years in Milwaukee and they have not solved the problem there. I also look at the skyrocketing costs in the university system. Competition for students can sometimes cause us to prioritize the wrong thing. If you have not been on a campus in a while, most universities have really upgraded their facilities; nicer dorms, student centers, and stadiums. This does not necessarily translate into a better education. I also look at other states where vouchers have been in place for years. The public education system has gone down. Therefore more families are sending their children to private schools because they feel like they do not have any other choice if they want their children to get a good education. Now these parents are paying even more. They are paying taxes and tuition because the voucher does not cover the entire cost. Maybe you have a different vision and I would love to hear it.

Please know I respect all the work you do to serve the people of Wisconsin. Hopefully, we will get an opportunity to continue this conversation. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time to discuss.

Sincerely,

Eric Russell  
Superintendent of Schools  
erussell@bwsd.k12.wi.us  
715.684.3411 ext. 1114  
715.977.0210

**Viking Middle School  
500 Southside Drive  
Woodville, WI 54028**

**Phone: (715) 698-2456  
Fax: (715) 698-3315  
Greenfield Elementary  
1160 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Baldwin, WI 54002**

**Phone: (715) 684-3334  
Fax: (715) 684-5109**