

Members of the Joint Finance Committee:

Thank you for being here, and thank you for your work in service to our great state.

My name is Jerry Walters and I am the agency administrator of CESA 11. CESA 11, Cooperative Educational Services Agency, serves 39 school districts in NW Wisconsin including Spooner and Ellsworth. Our work is to provide educational services, shared staff, and professional development in a cooperative manner to our districts in an effort to allow for equitable educational opportunities regardless of district enrollment, and do it in a cost efficient manner. It is my privilege to work with so many districts and to experience first hand, the exceptional work that they do for the children of their communities. When you discuss public education in this part of the state, you cannot include conversations of failing schools, low performing schools or lack of quality teachers. What you can include are conversations about the high cost of transporting students to and from school each day; attracting and maintaining those quality teachers; the continual rising costs of maintaining our buildings; providing the technology which has become the standard of information; and the challenges of meeting student, parent and community expectations of their schools on an annual budget that is victim of a funding mechanism with a structural deficit.

I know many of our districts need to view referendums as the new normal when preparing a budget. These referendums not only consume large amounts of educational leadership time, but create an unnecessary divide in communities. They are not fun, and there are no winners.

I applaud the Governor's budget proposal in light of previous years. His attention to sparsity and transportation address a couple of the issues our districts face. I applaud the recognition of school mental health initiatives. Whether or not schools should be the answer to adolescent mental health issues, it is obvious that we have extended time with students, and the ability to often recognize issues and needs for assistance. The difficulty is the personnel to be available to provide the assistance. I support budget dollars for school mental health, as long as we find a way to provide adequately trained and available personnel to intervene as necessary.

Thank you for your support of our public schools. Our children, as you know, are Wisconsin's most important resource.