



School District of Siren

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To: Members of the Joint Finance Committee

Date: April 18, 2017

Re: **SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNOR'S BIENNIAL BUDGET PROPOSAL**

My name is Kevin Shetler, and I am the District Administrator for the Siren School District in Siren, Wisconsin. I represent the students, staff, families and taxpayers of the Siren Community and Burnett County. Our district enrollment is 482 students. We have a diverse population with significant economic challenges.

Our district supports Governor Walker's budget proposal to increase per pupil categorical aid from \$250 per pupil by adding \$200 per pupil in 2017-18 and an additional \$204 in 2018-19. These increases will help to address student achievement initiatives in literacy and math, career and college readiness and diversity integration within our district. All areas, of which, are the center of our impending strategic plan to increase student learning.

There is a concern, however, that our district has to meet the Act 10 requirement of making employees contribute 12 percent toward a health insurance premium. It is our hope that this item be stricken from the budget and local control be honored. Truth be told, our teachers will never be at the earning level of many other districts, as we have a starting salary of \$33,663. However, we make an attempt to provide reasonable health benefits, as well as options for our staff and we would simply ask for this continued flexibility through local control.

We also support the Governor's proposals to provide relief to rural school districts, such as ours, by providing Sparsity Aid and High-Cost Transportation Aid. Indeed, our district is positively impacted by the categorical aid in these two areas as we receive compensation in both. As a small rural district, spanning over 500 miles, our transportation needs are on the rise, in particular as it relates to displaced or homeless students. In short, the proposals in the budget will be extremely beneficial for our families and students that are impacted.

The proposed support of mental health initiatives in the Governor's budget is necessary and not to be avoided. Frankly, the burden of school officials to allocate their expertise to this growing need is unfair. The fact is, we don't have the expertise. The financial help provided in the budget is important to offer to students in need. While we have made an attempt to utilize our counselors' time and efforts to address the mental health issues in our school, we are worried about their capacity to provide support and assistance to our children over time. The Governor's proposal places student mental health at the high priority level it needs to be in order to ensure that students are truly ready to learn.

On behalf of the citizens, parents, and students of Siren School and Burnett County, we thank you for your time and willingness to listen. We strongly encourage the Joint Finance Committee to approve a 2017-2019 biennial budget that provides the support for our public schools. In addition, please allow local school boards to do their job.

Sincerely,

Kevin Shetler, Ed.D.
District Administrator