



An Open Letter to the Middleton-Cross Plains Area Community

Residents and Parents in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area Should Know...

Ten items in the State Budget that significantly impact our schools

1. Middleton-Cross Plains Area Schools, and school districts across the state, will have their state aid cut to allow for voucher expansion; these are public tax dollars used to pay for a student's private education. Voucher expansion will mean less money for public schools, including our school district. Any decision that is made to publicly fund religious and other private schools will diminish the quality of education for our students.
2. This budget drives Wisconsin under the national average in per pupil spending (according to Michael Griffith, a senior policy analyst for the Education Commission of the States). Wisconsin has had a proud tradition of adequately funding our public school system. The legislature is pouring money into private schools at the expense of maintaining a public system that has been a source of pride in our state for more than 100 years.
3. In Year 1 up to 67 students from MCPASD could receive vouchers to attend private religious or secular schools. \$7,856 for each high school student from our district would go with each student for a total of \$526,560 in the first year. In Year 2 up to 134 students and \$1,052,704, in Year 3 up to 201 students and \$1,579,680, etc. In Year 10 up to 670 students and \$5,265,600 could leave MCPASD to support private and religious school education- these funds are state tax dollars (these figures would be 9% less for K-8 level students). After year 10 there would be no limit on the number of vouchers offered to students in our school district. If private schools are publicly funded as proposed, the MCPASD will struggle to maintain the educational quality that people in this community have worked so hard to build.
4. The legislature plans no future cost-of-living increases for teachers and other staff. This threatens our ability to attract and retain high quality faculty now and in the future. Offering nothing will undermine our ability to maintain, let alone, improve the high quality education our children currently receive.
5. The new law would allow home schooled students and virtual school students to participate in any extra-curricular or athletic team our district offers. Students from area private schools would also be eligible to participate on our school teams in certain sports. This raises a multitude of eligibility questions and different eligibility requirements for members of the same team. The WIAA has come out strongly against this proposal as have many home school advocates.
6. The new law would allow "learning portfolios" to replace up to one-half the credits needed to graduate from high school. The law would require a diploma earned in this manner be the equivalent of a diploma earned through actual course completion. This proposal has the potential to change what high schools look and feel like across the state; including the likelihood that the rigor needed to earn a high school diploma will be significantly reduced, jeopardizing both in and out-of-state college acceptance.
7. The new law eliminates many standards for licensing teachers, with no bachelor's degree needed to teach our students in multiple subject areas. Educational programs and training have been built and improved over decades with Wisconsin having one of the top performing educational systems in the nation. With this one legislative change, students could have under-trained and ill-prepared educators without the prerequisite knowledge to meet the many needs of our students. MCPASD does NOT intend to hire non-certified teachers or teachers without a college degree, but we are concerned about the deprofessionalization of teaching in Wisconsin.
8. The proposed law allows students in special education to use \$12,000 in publicly funded annual vouchers to attend private and parochial schools. In these schools they would not be guaranteed the legal rights and protections afforded to them by federal law. In addition, the dollar amount is completely arbitrary as actual costs vary drastically from student to student. At the same time the legislature is allocating money for special education students in private/parochial schools, it has not increased funding for public school special education students in eight years.
9. There is a new requirement in the law that mandates passing a civics assessment for high school graduation-this would be a 100-question test. This test is in addition to the multitude of other state-mandated tests that students are already required to take. This proposal, set to become law, has had very little discussion and a plan for implementation of this test does not exist.
10. The tests that students are required to take will be different for the third consecutive year. Districts will not be required to take the same test; making district-to-district comparisons very difficult. Our students do extremely well on the standardized test they are given and we welcome the opportunity to compare ourselves to any competing school. Common sense tells us adequate comparison can only be made when students in each district are taking the same standardized tests.

The time is now to voice our opposition to policies and legislation that will undermine our ability to support quality education. Please be active in advocating for our schools with the legislature and Governor Walker. The future of our children depends on your involvement.

Sincerely,

Dr. Donald Johnson, Superintendent
Middleton-Cross Plains Area Schools