

March 2, 2015

To: Governor Scott Walker
All Wisconsin Senators and Representatives

From: The Verona Area School District Board of Education

RE: **Governor's 2015 – 2017 Biennium Budget Proposal**

Dear Governor Walker, Senators and Representatives;

As the elected officials representing the children, parents, taxpayers and staff of the Verona Area School District, we are compelled to write to all of you regarding our concerns about the 2015 – 2017 budget proposal as it relates to public PreK-12 education. Our primary concerns with the budget are listed below along with a brief narrative explaining our concern.

- **\$0 increase in revenue limit authority:** Local control has long been a celebrated feature of Wisconsin government. This proposal runs counter to local control by diminishing our authority as a locally elected Board to exercise revenue cap decisions based on the needs of our students and expectations of the District residents who elected us. This proposal implies that a top-down, government knows best decision-making model is better than locally elected officials exercising their judgment in such matters.
- **\$0 increase in per pupil categorical aid:** This proposal, combined with the \$0 increase in revenue limit authority will result in a loss of revenue of approximately \$775,000 for our school district. Act 10 limits base wage increases to a calculated CPI amount. That estimated percentage for the 2015 – 2016 school year is 1.6%. Rolling over salaries at this amount will require an additional \$650,000. With \$0 per pupil categorical aid and \$0 additional revenue cap authority, our district could already be more than \$100,000 in the red and that's before we build in increases for business expenses such as utilities, health and property insurances to mention three. This differential will most likely come from staffing as staffing accounts for nearly 85% of our total budget.
- **Unlimited Vouchers** --We are a School Board that supports choice for students and parents within a public school environment. We currently have four instrumentality charter schools in our school district. Two of these charters have been in existence for twenty years and three of those four were started by parents in our district. We believe there are already mechanisms in place to provide school choice for parents that ensures elected officials are ultimately responsible for those choice / charter schools. Additionally, the funding for this proposed expansion would come at the expense of all public

school students. An unintended consequence may be that the very type of public school based work force development programs that are promoted by nearly all of our state elected officials will fall victim to local budget cuts as districts are forced to redirect those funds to support core curriculum areas that are measured for accountability purposes.

- **Badger Assessment** – The prohibition on funding the Badger assessment after 2015 is particularly problematic. The governor’s proposed budget language calls for local control over the use of the Common Core, but prohibits us from using an assessment that would measure student mastery of those standards. Additionally, our staff has spent an enormous amount of time and energy preparing for the implementation of the Badger Assessment. To pull that assessment in favor of some other undetermined assessment, then link those results to a high stakes school and District ‘grade’ again is problematic and greatly concerning.
- **Local government property insurance fund** – On June 17th, 2014 one of our elementary schools, Country View Elementary School was struck and heavily damaged by an EF-3 Tornado. We were able to have the building back on line for our students in time for the opening day of school, September 2, 2014. One of the contributing factors to this remarkable reconstruction and reopening was the fact that we were covered by the Local Government Property Insurance Fund. Our representative from the fund was with us every step of the process as a valued and trusted partner.

Act 10 created a set of ‘tools’ for school Boards to utilize in an effort to increase student achievement while containing costs. As a Board, we know increased student achievement will happen only because of the work of our outstanding teaching, support and administrative staff. We have been thoughtful and collaborative in our use of these tools so as to protect the very aspect that will advance student learning and success the most; the quality of the instructor and instruction. We have made significant changes in our teacher compensation model, our health insurance and our Other Post Employment Benefits structures without negatively impacting the quality of student instruction, penalizing our staff or creating divisiveness.

We believe we have collectively and collaboratively done the hard work required and expected of us by our community and our state elected officials. We have upheld our part in providing for the children of our district. We ask that you now do your part to provide for the public school children of Wisconsin.

This budget proposal removes some of those tools that Act 10 provided. By further diminishing our local control, this budget cripples our ability to adequately provide for the children in our school district. Our electors, our students and our parents have high expectations of us as Board members. If we’re not doing the work

expected of us, our community electors will vote us out of office. This budget as proposed replaces the thoughtful decision making of our local electors with the disposition of the Legislature and Governor. We don't believe any political party espouses that form of government.

In closing, we ask that you restore in full the categorical aid for both years of the biennium and that you restore our authority to exercise revenue cap decisions. We also ask that you reject any expansion of the voucher program and lift the prohibition on funding of the Badger Assessment. Finally ask that you not dissolve the Local Government Property Insurance Fund.

Thank you for your time and attention to this memo. We would be happy to respond to any follow up questions.

Sincerely,

The Verona Area Board of Education:

Dennis Beres President

Amy Almond Vice President

Kenneth Behnke Clerk

Derrell Connor Treasurer

Renee Zook Member

Joanne Gauthier Member