



2015 State Budget Press Conference

CESA 4 – West Salem

Tuesday, June 9, 2015

James Kuchta, District Administrator

De Soto Area School District

Governor Walker, Senators and Legislative Representatives of Wisconsin:

First, thank you to those present and to the media, for the opportunity to speak with you today and for holding this press conference on the state budget. I am here today to point out some detrimental effects of the proposed 2015-17 state biennial budget and to ask for your support of public education. I believe the recent actions by state legislative leaders restoring the \$127 million cut to Per Pupil Aid, as well as any positive commitments that will be made, comes as a direct result of the tireless work and advocacy of those legislators and individuals with foresight to see the future of Wisconsin is built on a strong public education system. This belief represents the majority of the general public around the state.

The recent Marquette University Law School Poll found 78 percent opposed cutting \$127 million from the K-12 public school budget, while 18 percent supported the proposal. I want to stress that as important as this is for schools, it still only gets our public schools back to a ZERO increase. School costs go up every year and funding has not kept pace with inflation. Also, a recent public poll found that Wisconsin voters favor supporting public education over cutting taxes by a 54% to 40% margin, so why would you oppose this majority? These polls are indicative of the public protest against taking so much from our public schools.

I urge you to help keep Wisconsin on a path to success by raising the revenue limit for schools in this budget, stop voucher expansion that takes tax-payer money from public schools and gives it to private schools, to remove the civics graduation test requirement, keep teacher preparation requirements high to keep the integrity of our Wisconsin education system and eliminate the objectionable requirement to allow students who attend a non-resident district to participate in their resident school sports, which they do not attend. That provision is like allowing a student attending Viterbo to play for UW-La Crosse or a student attending Edgewood College to play for the Badgers. Should a student be allowed to attend La Crosse Aquinas and play for De Soto, Onalaska or West Salem? `Take away local control from our school boards and what happens next? Are we on a path to close small rural Wisconsin schools? Legislators, I ask you, would you allow this, and would the residents of Wisconsin allow this?

I want to encourage the legislature and Governor Walker to use funding allocated in the current budget for property tax relief to provide a modest increase for schools. The property tax savings is insignificant (\$11 per median home over two years) compared to what that money would mean for kids. Property tax cuts are more appropriate when the state has excess revenue. Reallocation of these funds, rather than offering such a minuscule amount of tax relief, would be a logical and sensible step and would reflect positively on all legislators on both sides of the aisle, while benefiting so many school children.

For our small Wisconsin school district of just over 500 students, we are facing increasing costs of transportation, instructional supplies and insurance costs. Our school board had to make some difficult decisions in recent weeks to eliminate staff positions including a Library Media Specialist and to reduce a school secretary. In addition, next year there will have to be even more cuts with the proposed budget. Cutting supplies and programs only goes so far. Deeper cuts will mean a more negative impact on our students than we already have faced. De Soto, like many rural Wisconsin school districts, is a frugal and fiscally responsible school district. There just is not much to cut, so staff positions have to be cut to realize any real gain in creating a balanced budget.

The De Soto Area School District is made up of several very small communities and has a very rural population along the Mississippi River south of La Crosse. Community members are proud of the school district and of the students who are wholeheartedly supported. We ask that you continue your strong advocacy for doing what is in the best interest of the future of this great state. Continue to support funding for public schools so that we can do a great job educating our future doctors, mechanics, technicians, medical professionals, computer programmers, educators, accountants, farmers, carpenters, electricians, laborers and all of our future work force.