



*Seymour Community School District
Administration/Board of Education
10 Circle Drive
Seymour, WI 54165*

June 23, 2015

Members of Joint Finance Committee
State Capital, Madison, WI

RE: Increase General Aids to Schools

Dear Members of Joint Finance Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to read this at a very busy time. I will be brief and to the point. Senator Nass generated a press statement yesterday that sheds light on a practice of poor governance with respect to the biennial budget process currently underway. These are his words:

“During the past few weeks, we have seen a broken budget process yield a stalemate between the Governor and the leaders of both houses. However, the rank-in-file members of the Legislature have been sidelined, while the special interests seem to be at the table behind closed doors, as is the case with the prevailing wage issue, the Buck’s arena and last minute pork barrel items being readied for insertion to the budget by the Joint Finance Committee. Enough is enough.”

The Senator and I couldn’t agree more completely on this issue. Apparently billionaire owners of the Bucks (and others impacting the budget through “pork barrel politics”) are more important than our public school children. It is appalling that only minorities of our legislators vocalize the incredible return on investment and increased economic activity that our public school systems provide. I assure you our K-12 public education system is **far more impactful** per dollar invested than a Buck’s arena in both income tax revenue generated and economic investment created. Our K-12 public school system, injects economic activity into every community in our state benefiting children, families and community members from all walks of life and in all four corners of our state.


While the debate about spending public dollars on public school children has been in the open and not behind closed doors, it has not been adequate. Those who support public education for our children do not have access “behind closed doors” and must take their cause to citizens rather than the lawmakers that represent all of us. For example, moving

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\$211 million budget dollars to increase the levy credit rather than restoring much needed funds in equalization aid is a budget decision that's wrong. At least it's a budget decision in the open. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau in Paper #595 provided legislators a great analysis that clearly showed the \$211 would be better spent as direct aid to public schools. Clearly, equalization aid is the best, most efficient method to provide taxpayer relief to taxpayers that have the greater burden to locally fund their public schools. Contrast that decision to the way special needs vouchers or the weakening of teacher licensing standards was simply "inserted" in the budget. No debate and no analysis. Policy insertion, without open debate, in a biennial budget is poor governance.

In summary, it appears as though tax money is available for the Bucks and other pork barrel projects at a time the legislature must borrow for transportation and hold public schools to less Revenue Limit authority than was provided in 2008. It also appears as though there is no will to openly debate policy issues, rather just to shove them in the budget. The "Hallmark" of the 2015-2017 State Budget should be about making our public systems stronger...showing the nation what we value in Wisconsin...a strong government practice of investing in public sector economics in a manner to improve the quality of life for all citizens. There is no better way to do this than to invest in and support a strong system of K-12 public education for all children. Unfortunately the "Hallmark" of this budget will be, in the words of Senator Nass, "a treasure chest for the special interests".

Thanks sincerely for your time,

Pete Ross 
Superintendent of Seymour Community School District

CC: Assemblyman Steineke
Senator Cowles