



St. Francis School District
Special Education Department
3680 SOUTH KINNICKINNIC AVENUE
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(414) 482-8403

To the Members of the Joint Committee on Finance,

Thank you for your tireless efforts in serving the good people of Wisconsin and for allowing us this opportunity to connect with you regarding the biennial budget. I proudly serve as the Director of Special Education and as a School Psychologist for the St. Francis School District, a vibrant public school system located adjacent Milwaukee and serving approximately 1,100 students.

I am confronted on a daily basis with the ever growing and changing needs around mental health. I am also charged with providing a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), the educational right of students under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Too often, the disability related needs exceed the current scope of programming and staffing in our district. Nevertheless, these services must be provided regardless of cost.

Students with disabilities are some of our most marginalized and vulnerable students. It is important to remember the students with disabilities we serve have a wide variety of complex impairments and needs. Their needs must be addressed by highly qualified staff who often times are charged with supporting children's access to the most fundamental life functions, such as the ability to communicate, ambulate, socialize, eat or even breathe, in addition to increasing academic proficiency.

The Governor's budget recognizes and addresses the issues surrounding equitable programming in education. Increasing the states reimbursement rate from 25% to 60% for Special Education categorical aid is a moral imperative. The current rate leaves not only Special Education students, but all children in Wisconsin egregiously underserved. In St Francis, the gap that exists between what the district receives in state and federal funding and the excess costs that exist for servicing students with disabilities is significant and places a considerable burden on general funds.

In the spirit of our state motto "Forward," please show your support by fully funding the education budget to help advance the vision of the Department of Public Instruction in making every child college, career and life ready.

Sincerely,

Amanda L. Mack, Ed.S.
Director of Special Education