

DRAFT TESTIMONY 4-10-2019

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY – JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE

CO-CHAIRS SENATOR DARLING AND REPRESENTATIVE NYGREN,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today regarding the upcoming biennial budget (AB 56/SB 59). I currently serve as the Chief Business and Finance Officer of the Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District. Furthermore, we appreciate your visit to our community and to Representative Jesse Rodriguez for hosting this session.

The Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District is a district that is considered low spending and we were positively impacted by the legislation last spring that is set to raise the low revenue ceiling to \$9,800. For us, this is a step in the right direction and a necessary step for us to maintain a high quality school district while being fiscally responsible with our state and local property tax payer dollars. We ask that the low revenue ceiling be taken into consideration and adjusted accordingly with any new funding provided to districts to continue to move towards equity for all children in Wisconsin within low revenue limit districts. In addition to maintaining the low revenue ceiling adjustments, we ask that you, at a minimum, increase public education funding at a net increase of \$200 for per student for each year of the biennium. Additional funding is essential to maintain the high quality programs, staff, and facilities we currently have.

Even with the additional low revenue ceiling funding adjustment, we still have many challenges. We have an increasing population of special education students. State law requires a “free and appropriate public education” for all students. Like many districts, we are trying to make ends meet within special education and IEP legal requirements. This requires us to consistently find creative funding ways to make ends meet to help limit the impact on our general education dollars. Special education funding, at the state level, has not increased in 10 years. It currently funds approximately 25% of all special education costs state wide. An increase in special education expense reimbursement from the state would have a significant impact on our population of special education students by allowing us to provide additional resources, in the form of licensed educators and para-professionals to work with some of our most needy students.

We are also a district seeing a steady increase in the amount of students requiring care in the form of social and emotional needs. This form of student education outcomes is impacted by



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school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers. Just recently, our seven elementary principals petitioned our school board to eliminate world languages from our elementary schools in favor of additional support in the form of a full time school psychologist at each elementary building. As a district, we are not able to afford both world languages and additional support for SEL, and this has caused a large rift within our district in trying to meet the needs of our students, and has forced us to make an extremely hard choice in order to meet these needs. Additional support, specifically in the area of social and emotional needs is important. The grant funding related to additional support of social workers is not adequate. It provides one time funding, not sustainable funding.

Finally, we are currently struggling to meet the needs of our English language (EL) learners. Our current EL staffing is 70 students of need to 1 educator. This is not sufficient to move students forward. Ideally, we would staff our EL students at a ratio of 40 students to 1 educator. For us to accomplish this goal, we need additional funding of \$400,000 to hire the additional 5 staff to serve this underserved population. While I understand staffing differs by district, we currently staff general education at 24 students to 1 educator in elementary, 27-30 in middle school, and up to 35 in high school. These numbers show that we are maximizing our student to staff ratio. We highly implore you to consider additional funding for EL students, which again, are one of the neediest populations served through public education.

In summation, we urge you to continue: the strong support for public education you provided in the previous biennium budget, additional funding for special education, additional funding for social and emotional support, and additional funding for English language learners.

Thank again for the opportunity to testify before the Joint Finance Committee. I appreciate you listening to my testimony and I wish you the best in making these very difficult decisions.

Sincerely,

Andrew Chromy  
Chief Business & Finance Officer  
Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District