

BRUCE QUINTON
District Administrator

PEPIN AREA SCHOOLS

"Home of The Lakers and Eagles"

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4/15/19

To: Joint Finance Committee Members

From: Bruce Quinton

Re: Testimony to the Joint Finance Committee in River Falls

I would like to thank the Joint Finance Committee members for giving me the opportunity to address your committee in regards to the 2019-2021 Biennium Budget.

Pepin Area Schools strongly supports the governor's proposed increase of:

- 1) At least a \$200/pupil general revenue in each year of the biennium.
- 2) Increase in funding for special education.
- 3) Increase in funding for school-age mental health.
- 4) Increase in funding for English Learners.
- 5) Eliminating current restrictions on hiring retired educators to fill key positions.

The proposed \$200 in additional dollars per pupil, per year, in general revenue will allow Pepin Area Schools to maintain the program offerings we currently provide our students as opposed to a continuation of numerous cuts to educational opportunities that we have had to make over the last five budget cycles. Four of those budget cycles we did not see an increase in per pupil aid in line with inflationary increases. Some of the reductions we have been forced to make over the last ten years include:

- Elimination of our local Foreign language offerings. We only offer online or distant learning opportunities to our students.
- 80% reduction in our special education teacher at the elementary level.
- A 60% reduction of PreK-12 instrumental and vocal music opportunities. We currently share vocal music and instrumental music instructors with a neighboring district.
- The elimination of our LMC teacher. We currently utilize a teacher's aid who works under the licensure of the superintendent of schools.
- A 70% reduction of our Family and Consumer Education position and only two class offerings left for our high school students and the elimination of Family and Consumer Education opportunities for our middle school students.

Pepin Area School's vision is "Encouraging a community of learners in a positive atmosphere where learning is a life long process which develops responsible citizens who value knowledge."

The Pepin Area School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or handicap.

- A 40% reduction in Art education opportunities for our students.
- A 50% reduction in our Reading Specialist.
- Elimination of our School Psychologist. We share our Pupil Services director with two districts and now only purchase school psychology time for testing of students when necessary.
- A 70% reduction of our 7-12 science program. We now have one science teacher for all classes in grades 7-12.
- Only cooperative athletic opportunities for all sports we offer.

We have made these reductions for only one reason, our inability to increase the revenue limit in line with the increase in inflation. While not all positions would have been maintained, most would have if we could have simply kept up with inflationary increases.

Pepin Area Schools is appreciative of the governor's proposal to increase our per pupil categorical aid by \$200 per pupil in each year of the budget. We ask the joint finance committee to keep this level of funding for our public schools in your work on the budget. Maintaining our public schools and the education we provide children is impossible without adequate funding. The state has failed to adequately fund schools, for too long a time period, and more importantly, school district boards and administration can not long term budget for the future when they do not know how much of an increase in per pupil aid we will receive every two years. I implore you to put a guaranteed \$200 per pupil increase, plus an inflationary increase tied to the CPI, into this budget that will carry over into future budgets from this point on. This would allow school districts some idea of what they will have, not only this year, but more accurately estimate what we will have to work with in the next five years for planning purposes.

Pepin Area Schools supports an increase over the biennium in state reimbursement for children with high cost special needs. As you can well imagine, these high cost special needs students can have a significant budgetary impact on small rural district like Pepin.

I am hopeful that we can all agree that providing adequate funding for our children's right to a free and appropriate public education is not a partisan issue. Our public schools are important to all liberal and conservative members of each community and each community's future. We need all legislators to stand up and support public education.

Please invest in our children's future. It is a long term investment, but we all will benefit from the investment that we collectively make in our children today.

Thank you for taking the time to listen and for your service to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin.



Bruce Quinton, District Administrator
Pepin Area Schools