



School District of River Falls

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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JFC Testimony

My name is Jamie Benson and I am the Superintendent of the School District here in River Falls. Thank you for your service to Wisconsin and for allowing me this time today.

Let me start with an invitation to all legislators to visit our school district here in River Falls just as Rep. Shannon Zimmerman has done many times. Come see why our district annually exceeds expectations on the State/DPI Report Cards, and how our staff inspires and motivates students in ways that far exceed any measure on a report card. I will *also* show you first hand where we have some challenges.

We take pride in educating our children yet, we need some help from you.

MENTAL HEALTH

Please support the Governor's proposed increase in funding for school-age mental health. We need help with our students experiencing trauma, stress, and anxiety. Mental health affects learning -- as well as the overall well being of individuals and families. Our kids are NOT different today than they were 10, 20, 30, years ago - however societal influences and stress factors that surround them are different today. Please support funding for school-aged mental health supports.

\$200/PUPIL REVENUE INCREASE IS THE MINIMUM

Please support at least a \$200/pupil general revenue increase in each year of the biennium. The importance of these increases in per pupil revenues allows our district to simply maintain operational costs such as:

- A) Provide modest cost of living wage increases to our professional staff.

The School District of River Falls, innovative leader in personalized learning, ensures the development of every student's unique potential in order to excel as responsible, productive, global citizens, facilitated by forward-thinking staff in a safe, nurturing, and collaborative environment.

- B) We struggle with attracting new teachers to the profession -- and we need to offer appropriate wage and benefits to attract and retain the best and brightest people in front of our kids every day.

- C) Allow our district to appropriately staff our classrooms, provide appropriate resources, and continue to build on partnerships with CVTC and UWRF to provide job dual-credit courses and workforce development practices that prepare students to be to be college, career, and life ready.

\$200/pupil is a minimal and responsible ask.

SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

We need your support in the Governor's budget to help offset special education costs.

Our district spends over \$4.7M on special education services. We love and proudly serve the needs of *all* students but when our district transfers \$3M from Fund 10 (to help cover the \$4.7M for special education services), it removes funding for other important needs that exist in our district.

A recent Marquette public opinion poll revealed **74%** non-partisan support in favor of such an increase in state funds for local special education services.

PLEASE HELP US WITH OTHER COMMON-SENSE SUPPORT FOR KIDS:

*Increase in funding for English Learners.

*Eliminate current restrictions on hiring retired educators to fill key positions.

*Support the Age 21 Vaping law change -- as vaping is not a problem -- it is an epidemic.

Thank you for your time and for my opportunity to represent the voices of our children as I ask you to please, let your values see these opportunities to invest in children among your highest priorities.

With my respect,



Jamie Benson
Superintendent