



April 5, 2019

To the Members of the Joint Finance Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to advocate on behalf of public school students this morning. My name is Jill Underly, and I am the District Administrator for the Pecatonica Area School District - in Southwestern Wisconsin. We are a small school.

More categorical aids help us and small schools like ours. That's why when school districts struggle with costs, legislators need to look at how they can alleviate that pressure - **and it is categorical aids.** Simply by increasing the special education reimbursement rate, which is considered pitiful currently, would put funds back into our general fund and **that benefits all students.** Last year, we transferred \$538,000 - over half a million dollars of our \$5.5 million dollar budget from Fund 10 to Special Education to cover the deficit of providing programming to our neediest kids. If the governor's request is approved, while it would not entirely cover our shortfall, my district, Pecatonica would receive \$268,000 more the second year. That's \$268,000 that we could put back into instructional costs for ALL students. That's a social worker and mental health professionals. That's computers and cutting edge instructional technology. That's additional field trips or supplies for science labs. We're not asking for the world. This small change in our funding formula - an increase in special education reimbursement, however, would CHANGE our world. Invest in the kids we have in our public schools, and in two-thirds of the cases - our rural schools. There is low-hanging fruit out there. Invest in areas we know **will help ALL kids** - and especially the rural kids in areas that cannot raise revenue elsewhere - otherwise our state perpetuates the existing inequity in school funding. *I'm tired of hearing that increasing aid to public schools is impossible and that the Governor's proposed budget is "irresponsible." What is irresponsible is not fully funding our schools.* Thanks for listening.

Jill Underly, Ph.D.

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