

April 5, 2019

Testimony to the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee

Focus: Support for the Governor's Budget on Education and Health Care

My name is Pam Streich and I am honored to serve as the District Administrator for the Lake Mills Area School District and to support educational aspects of the proposed state budget and the Blue Ribbon Commission Report. This is my first time testifying at a budget hearing and I hope this highlights the urgency and significance of this budget cycle.

Lake Mills is a District that serves 1,600 amazing, thriving students. We employ 225 dedicated staff members making us the largest employer in the community. And while we shine as a District that Exceeds Expectations, we quietly struggle financially. I cannot be quiet any longer.

Lake Mills plays by the rules.

We live within our means and have not yet gone to an Operational Referendum. But we are struggling.

We have desperately low teacher salaries; we have the one of the lowest starting salaries in the area.

We have a skeleton Support staff, often hired as part-time employees to avoid the additional cost of escalating health care costs.

We have drastically reduced benefits for our staff and drastically reduced our Other Post-Employment Benefits.

We play by the rules, and still we struggle.

We struggle to add much needed staff without knowing what our state funding will be for the fiscal year starting in just 3 months.

I urge you to work quickly and strategically to pass a budget as soon as possible. I urge you to create a system for predictable, sustainable funding so that we can continue to play by the rules and maintain our quality education system.

We struggle with exploding special education costs that need to be subsidized by our local budget while WI plummets to the bottom of the national list of state funding for special education. We struggle most with the unpredictable cost move-ins, mid-year identification of young students and the need to support students in crisis. Placing a student in an alternative program can cost up to \$90,000 annually.

The Lake Mills School District has doubled its need to transfer funds from its general budget to the Special Education budget by 100% in the last 20 years to a level of almost \$2 million dollars of our \$16 million budget. Every percentage increase in promised state funding would return funds to the local budget to support ALL students.

I urge you to take aggressive steps to increase special education funding which increases funding for ALL students by freeing up local dollars

And finally, we struggle with families in mental health crises and other medical crises. These vulnerable families often lack health care resources to address their students' needs. As a result, the schools become the health care and mental health care providers for families. We DO NOT have the resources to handle these needs.

I urge you to address health care for all which in effect with support ALL students in the public education system by freeing up resources to where they are needed: educating ALL students.

Thank you for your continued support of Wisconsin Public Education which truly is our investment in the future of Wisconsin.