



April 5, 2019

Dear members of the Joint Finance Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity. I appreciate the time and energy you spend in service to our state as you conducted these various hearings. I also appreciate the complexity and difficulty of the assignment you have accepted. Many of you know me as I have always given testimony to Joint Finance and speak on other policy issues affecting schools. When I testified in front of some of you at the Blue Ribbon Commission hearing in Oshkosh this past spring I was asked if I felt my community understood the funding of schools. I responded, "No!" The funding of schools in Wisconsin is very complicated and difficult for people to understand. Even our elected officials, some of your colleagues, don't understand school funding. I have held dozens of meetings since Oshkosh and the public still doesn't understand. They expect that the you are providing districts with the funds they need to operate the schools they expect. That isn't happening.

I am here today to speak about funding for the special education services that school districts are required by state and federal law to provide. These services are unique and expensive services that, by law, students deserve and are required to receive. Each year for the last seven years the amount of money required to support these services has increased from \$5.4M to \$6.3M while the number of students we serve has decreased. The needs are more significant than ever. During that same time, the amount of support we receive from the state has decreased, going from almost 29% in 2007-08 to 26.24% last year. This is a decrease of almost 3%. We have gone from transferring \$4M out of our operating budget to pay for these mandated services to almost \$5M. That amount would pay for 62 teachers. Because we are a declining enrollment district our general operating budget is going down every year. Yet our special education costs are going up every year due to increased needs. Our fixed costs are going up due to inflation and we are transferring more every year out of our general operating budget to cover the cost of special education. We need your help.

We are proud of the services we provide to our students with special needs. These students enrich our schools. These teachers are important members of our teams, building capacity in our staff in support of all students. But we need to serve our regular education students also. Our community just told us they will not support funding our district on a level that is equal to others in Waukesha County. Our operating referendum failed. I ask that you fund special education for us to meet the needs of all our students, both special and regular ed.

My community has told me that they expect you to fund schools. Please do so in a manner that they expect.

Sincerely,

Patricia F. Deklotz, Ph.D.
Superintendent