

For Immediate Release - June 3, 2016

The recent “restoration” of proposed cuts to public schools simply places our schools at a “break even” point. I heard someone refer to the plans to restore this funding as follows: “the negation of a loss is still a loss.” Coupled with the expansion and increase in funding for voucher schools and their attendees we have created a dual education system in the State of Wisconsin. How can two systems operate and operate well when recent history has revealed significant support and endorsement for our public schools by the general public?

The backbone for economic growth in the State of Wisconsin is predicated on an educated workforce. With diminished fiscal resources the ability of local public schools to prepare students to become “college and career ready” becomes a pipe dream at best. A wise investment in public education in Wisconsin, in keeping with rates of inflation and tradition, is necessary to maintain our position nationally. As you know – “you get what you pay for.” Students enrolled in our public schools should not have to suffer as a result of misguided and short-sighted fiscal decision making.

As noted above, why are some individuals promoting a dual system in our state – one public and one private – when there is no evidence to support the idea that public schools are not adequately preparing students for the future? Further, to drain already precious and sparse fiscal resources away for the public schools to support another system of accessible education to some, but not all, citizens appears to me to exceed the concept of “choice.” The process of public school choice or Open Enrollment has already created “winners” and “losers” among our public schools. The expansion of vouchers and voucher programs only further exacerbates the gap existing in and among many parts of the state.

Exceeding current funding under the existing Open Enrollment program by nearly doubling the costs for a special needs student served by a non-resident private school simply makes no sense and, in some instances, significantly under values the actual costs for many high-cost students. With no assurances that a student will have their unique educational needs met in a setting outside of either a resident or non-resident public school district this effort makes no sense.

At the present time, the status and morale of public school teachers in Wisconsin is at an all-time low. Why would injury be added to insult by lowering the gate keeping function of college and university schools and departments of education to adequately prepare the next generation of educator? Apart from several specialty subject/content areas (such as Technology Education), at minimum, at least a bachelor’s degree should be an expectation of someone responsible for the education of children and young adults placed in their care in our public school classrooms. To assume that anyone can teach would be tantamount to assuming that anyone can play quarterback in the National Football League.

Adding a civics test requirement to high school graduation (while easy to defend under the guise of valuing our democracy) flies in the face of a foundational principle of democracy – choice. Further, adding another assessment to an already expansive testing environment in this era of greater accountability is simply foolish.

Participation in athletics and extra-curricular offerings in a school district is part of the overall educational experience provided by public school districts all over the state. To have some individuals eligible to participate who are not physically present for all other education opportunities is outlandish. This move seriously calls into question issues related to eligibility and attendance for every middle and high school in the state.

I would encourage you to devote time to the reading of the publication by the Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance “Wisconsin’s PK-12 Pathway to World-Class Students Success” which provides an evidenced-based approach to public policy development in those areas that have been found, via research and implementation, to best support student success in public school settings. While there are no doubt varied and competing interests for the money currently being considered for allocation in the state budget there can be no dispute that our future lies with a prepared and well-educated citizenry. History, and the evidence, has demonstrated clearly that the public schools in the great State of Wisconsin have continued to meet that challenge – in spite of the erosion of fiscal resources to do so.

Sincerely and on Behalf of the Palmyra-Eagle Area School District
Dr. Steven M. Bloom, Superintendent