



## MOUNT HOREB AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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District Office | 1304 E. Lincoln Street, Mount Horeb, WI 53572

September 3, 2020

Dear Representative Pope,

As parents, staff, Board of Education members, and administrators we comprise the Mount Horeb Area School District's *Community and Legislative Engagement Committee*. We meet monthly to develop advocacy strategies for children and public schools. We appreciate the work you and the Legislature have undertaken to support your constituency and the pandemic is not an exception. Thank you.

As residents on the western edge of Dane County, our surrounding communities (e.g., Barneveld, Pecatonica, Dodgeville, etc.) are not held to the requirements outlined in Public Health Madison and Dane County's (PHMDC) Order No. 9. The disparities in services Mount Horeb can legally offer are in stark contrast to other districts west of Dane County. This has resulted in a precipitous increase in alternative open enrollment applications. As a public school advocate, we know you understand the long-lasting affect student departures can have on our schools' financial outlook and the sense of community we have long worked hard to nurture.

With updated revenue forecasts waiting until after the November elections, a reasonable person could conclude that there will be a bleak outcome for public education in the next biennial budget. We need your continued advocacy *now*. Below, please find suggestions for how you can help children during this critical time:

- **Pupil Counts – September, January, and Summer School** Actual student counts on the third Friday in September, the second Friday in January, and summer school have a significant impact when determining a school district's general aid distribution and revenue limit. Because of COVID-19 and PHMDC's August 20 last-minute decision, these actual student counts are decreasing. What's the solution? The Mount Horeb Area School District should be allowed to use its 2019-20 pupil counts or its actual 2020-21 counts (whichever is larger) to determine general aid and revenue limits.
- **Open Enrollment Space Determination** As part of PHMDC's last-minute order, Dane County schools were required to slash each classrooms' maximum capacity from 25 to 15. There was no accounting for square footage. Our district needs the flexibility to reset our available space for non-resident students who open enroll into the District in 2020-2021.
- **Student Assessments** The Mount Horeb Area School District supports suspending student assessment requirements for the 2020-21 school year. Administering assessments can create COVID-19 related challenges to the health and safety of students and educators. Furthermore, teachers need to focus on overcoming the loss of instruction, and addressing the social and emotional needs of children. They need time to build relationships with students and move instruction forward based on individual student needs. In the current environment especially, these student-centered objectives are much more important than taking time to prepare for standardized tests.

Dr. Steve Salerno, Superintendent | [salernosteve@mhasd.k12.wi.us](mailto:salernosteve@mhasd.k12.wi.us) | 608.437.7010

Mr. Scott DeYoung, Associate Superintendent Business and Finance | [deyoungscott@mhasd.k12.wi.us](mailto:deyoungscott@mhasd.k12.wi.us) | 608.437.7030

Ms. Sara Errthum, Human Resources Coordinator | [errthumsara@mhasd.k12.wi.us](mailto:errthumsara@mhasd.k12.wi.us) | 608.437.7034

Mr. Brian Johnson, Director of Student Services | [johnsonbrian@mhasd.k12.wi.us](mailto:johnsonbrian@mhasd.k12.wi.us) | 608.437.7016

Mrs. Sarah Straka, Director of Instruction | [strakasarah@mhasd.k12.wi.us](mailto:strakasarah@mhasd.k12.wi.us) | 608.437.7013

- **School and School District Performance Reports** Given the tremendous instructional disruption surrounding COVID-19 and the 2020-21 school year, we question the value of school and district level reports to parents and to the larger community this year. The Mount Horeb Area School District recommends suspending the school report card for 2020-21.
- **Retired Teachers/Staff Returning to Work** Districts need flexibility to rehire retired teachers and staff for critical full-time, part-time, virtual, and substitute teaching positions. We respectfully request that annuitants be allowed to return to WRS-covered school employment without limits on hours or suspension of annuities. We also recommend reducing the “break-in-service” requirement to 15 days.
- **Broad Flexibility in Teacher and Professional Staff Licensure** We are facing escalating challenges in hiring teachers and professional staff to meet student needs. Districts need the flexibility to leverage existing licensed teachers to teach outside of their existing licenses. Licensed paraprofessional staff will also be needed to deliver content instruction in cooperation with licensed teachers. Districts may also need to flexibly deploy teachers with substitute-only licenses.
- **Immunity from Civil Liability for Schools** Boards of Education throughout the state were forced to make decisions some constituencies view unfavorably. We suspect this might give rise to costly civil litigation and attorney’s fees that further take dollars away from children/classrooms. Districts should not be subjected to costly litigation stemming from COVID-19. The Mount Horeb Area School District recommends that Wisconsin provide school districts, Board of Education members and district employees with immunity from civil liability for deeply troubling events that may be associated with COVID-19.

We end this letter where we began: in gratitude for the partnership and support you routinely show our children and dedicated staff. Of course, if we can provide additional information that may be helpful please do not hesitate to connect with our District's superintendent, Dr. Steve Salerno. He may be reached at [salernosteve@mhasd.k12.wi.us](mailto:salernosteve@mhasd.k12.wi.us) or 608-437-7010.

Warmest regards,

Mrs. Jessica Arrigoni  
Committee Chair/Board Member

Mrs. Leah Lipska  
Board Clerk

Mr. Matt Phair  
Teacher

Mrs. Kimberly Sailor  
Board Vice President

Ms. Julia Thoe  
Parent

Dr. Steve Salerno  
Superintendent