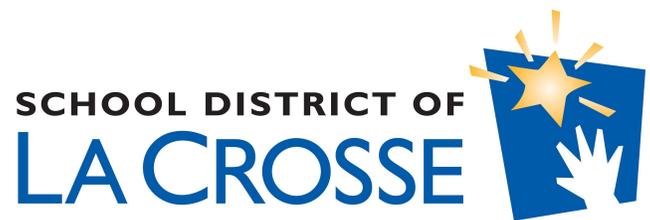


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Thank you Senators and Representatives of the Joint Finance Committee for hearing me today. I am Aaron Engel, the Superintendent of the School District of La Crosse.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown just how important public schools are to our communities and our economies.

While Federal assistance to schools has helped with COVID expenses, we continue to face budgetary needs to buy iPads, purchase hot spots, provide PPE, improve HVAC, and many other items. Federal funding is one-time money for one-time expenses and it is not enough.

Three critical needs for public education are special education reimbursement, inflationary increases to school funding, and enrollment mitigation.

Schools must receive a significant increase in special education reimbursement. Last school year the State covered just over 28% of expenses incurred for students with disabilities, requiring the School District of La Crosse to transfer over \$10M from the general fund for special education expenses. Reimbursement at 50% would cover an additional \$3.7M of special education services for our most vulnerable students and make more funds available to all students.

Schools must receive an inflationary increase to general school funding. As costs for materials and services increase so must the aid to schools. An inflationary increase to revenue limits of \$200 per FTE is crucial or we will not be able to provide the same high quality education for our students next year.

Schools must be given relief for the one-year loss of students due to COVID. The School District of La Crosse experienced a one-year loss of 166 FTEs to our aid formula this year due to concerns about COVID. These lost students are already enrolling in the district for next year. This budget must mitigate the impact COVID had on enrollment or the School District of La Crosse will lose \$1.1M in revenue limit authority next year due to the temporary, one-year loss of students.

Additionally, we must provide greater support for the mental health needs of our students through categorical aid as well as ensure affordable, reliable, high speed internet for all families in our state.

More than ever, we have seen the crucial asset that public education is to our community and our economy. More than ever, we need to invest in our children, in our public education system, and in our future. Thank you.