



April 28, 2021

Dear Members of the Joint Finance Committee:

Hello, my name is Claudia Henrickson and I am the Executive Director of Student Services for the Green Bay Area Public School District (GBAPS). We are the fourth largest school district in the state of Wisconsin. Our school district currently serves slightly more than 2,000 students with disabilities. That is about 15% of our total student enrollment.

To serve our students' needs, GBAPS employs special education teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, occupational and physical therapists, Special Education Academic Support teachers, behavioral specialists, and speech and language pathologists. Since we also serve students who have deaf and hard of hearing and visual impairment needs we employ audiologists, sign language interpreters and a Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

While the overall number of students who receive special education services has remained similar over time, our students' needs have grown in severity, requiring more intensive services. These services include contracting with outside agencies to provide services as well as hiring additional school psychologists, and 1:1 paraprofessionals.

For the 2021-22 school year, GBAPS has shifted \$33 million from its general education fund to fill the gap between special education reimbursement and the actual cost of services. The lack of special education funding impacts students in the following ways:

- Services may be limited to what is legally required.
- Case sizes for special education educators/therapists may be larger than desired.
- Class sizes in the school district may be larger than desired due to general funds being transferred to cover mandated special education services.

In addition to concerns regarding special education funding, I would also like to express the growing impact of Special Needs Scholarship Program, which diverts state aid to private schools, where they are not required to follow a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or have a licensed IEP teacher or staff.

In most cases in Green Bay, the students receiving the scholarship have never attended our public schools. Because a student has to have a current IEP or a Service Plan in place to receive the scholarship, GBAPS has had more than double the requests for initial evaluations and reevaluations, which must be completed by the public school district, at no cost to the family or private school. We currently have a 27% placement rate from private school referrals. In other words less than a third of the students referred are qualifying for special education services.

In addition to conducting evaluations under Child Find, we must still provide them with Equitable Services which means that they receive \$12,00 per student AND we provide special education services to their eligible students. Both of these requirements take resources, fiscal and actual, from our public school students.

In closing, GBAPS supports Governor Ever's proposal for increased funding, which totals \$720.6 million for special education in the biennium budget. As a public school district, we proudly serve all students, and do not discriminate based on students' abilities. We do this because ALL students deserve the best education possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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