

Downsville  
Elementary N2681  
460th Street  
PO Box 78  
Downsville, WI 54735  
(715) 664-8546

April 22, 2021

Knapp Elementary  
110 South Street  
Knapp, WI 54749  
(715) 665-2131

Menomonie High  
School  
1715 5th Street West  
Menomonie, WI  
54751  
(715) 232-2606

Menomonie Middle  
School  
920 21st Street South  
Menomonie, WI  
54751  
(715) 232-1673

Oaklawn Elementary  
500 21st Street South  
Menomonie, WI  
54751  
(715) 232-3798

River Heights  
Elementary  
615 24th Avenue West  
Menomonie, WI  
54751  
(715) 232-3987

Wakanda Elementary  
1801 Wakanda Street  
NE  
Menomonie, WI  
54751  
(715) 232-3898

Dear Distinguished Members of the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my thoughts related to the state budget, and thank you for your great service to our state. Not only am I a taxpayer and resident of Wisconsin, but I am also the superintendent of schools in Menomonie, the husband of a special education teacher, and the father of three school-age children. Today I am here to speak about the need for more state funding for public education and the expansion of broadband in Wisconsin.

While I was pleased to see public education as a high priority in the Governor's budget, I am concerned about the lack of support this part of his proposal has received from some in the Capitol. This is a critical time for public schools in Wisconsin, and more financial support from the state is needed if our schools are going to recover well from the pandemic and continue to provide 21st Century learning opportunities for all of our children.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Menomonie stayed open this year. I could not be more pleased with our faculty, staff, families, and students who worked together to make this happen. With the exception of a brief pause at our high school in November, children in Menomonie have been provided with the opportunity to have in-person instruction, participate in sports and co-curricular activities, and we are all looking forward to having a great in-person graduation ceremony this spring. If committee members are willing to stay in town long enough, our high school principal could put you all to work as chaperones at this weekend's high school prom.

While we are very proud of what we have accomplished during the 2020-2021 school year, the school district needed to spend big to make this happen. Approximately \$2.7 million of additional expenses were needed to keep our schools open. In addition to purchasing all of the safety equipment, PPE, and cleaning supplies needed to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, our school district needed to build some temporary learning spaces, beef up technology services, add bus routes, increase ventilation, and hire several new staff members to reduce cohorts sizes. Extra staff members were also needed to provide health and nursing services, clean and disinfect classrooms, serve as substitute teachers, and supervise smaller groups of students who, in a normal year, would have been gathered together in larger groups during recess and other non-instructional parts of the school day. Federal relief funding will help mitigate these extra costs, but these funds will not be sufficient for addressing many other needs in our schools.

Enrollment in Menomonie was stable prior to the pandemic, but despite offering both in-person and virtual schooling options, 184 less student FTE registered for classes this year. This resulted in a 42 FTE reduction in the 3-year enrollment average used for the district's revenue limit and a declining enrollment exemption hit of \$425,963. In addition to working through the COVID-19 pandemic, the school district has also had to deal with a significant increase in the number of students needing special services and mental health support. It is critical that the state adopt the Governor's call for higher special education reimbursements and more mental health categorical aid. Without an adjustment to how students are counted, an increase in special education aid, and the full \$200 per student proposed by Governor Evers for each year of the biennium, our school district will likely have no choice but to reduce basic programming and services.

Lastly, I would like to express how important it is that the legislature support the Governor's \$204 million proposal to expand access to affordable, reliable, and high-speed Internet across the state. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that this is a huge issue across Wisconsin, and in particular, Dunn County. Even within the city limits, there are too many families who have been unnecessarily limited in their ability to take advantage of many online opportunities that have become basic services in areas with sufficient access to broadband. Poor broadband access in much of our community hurts jobs, education, healthcare, and what should be the simple ability to communicate with others.

Thank you again for considering my thoughts and please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to hear more about how the state budget impacts the School District of the Menomonie Area. With your support of the Governor's K-12 budget proposal, we would be able to go into the new biennium without reducing programming for our kids.

Yours truly,



Joseph E. Zydowsky, PhD  
District Administrator  
School District of the Menomonie Area



