



## School District of Manawa

*Students Choosing to Excel, Realizing Their Strengths*

April 29, 2021

An Open Letter to the Esteemed Senators and Representatives of Wisconsin,

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your ongoing support in endorsing both the federal ESSER funding as well as considering the passage of an educational budget that is as close to the Governor's proposal as possible to enable the School District of Manawa to maintain our current staffing and program levels. This letter will outline budget proposal items that would have a financial impact on the public school districts throughout the state and specifically local impacts facing the School District of Manawa.

### **Increased Reimbursement Rate for Special Education Categorical Aid:**

The State of Wisconsin provides a fixed dollar amount of Special Education Categorical Aid to financially support special education programming. This amount reimburses district costs at approximately 28%. The Governor's budget proposal provides additional funding that would increase the reimbursement rate to 45% in 2021-22 and to 50% in 2022-23.

In the 2019-20 school year, the School District of Manawa incurred \$948,142 in special education expenses. This amount was partially reimbursed by Special Education Categorical Aid. Special education costs in excess of the aid received from the state and other federal sources is funded by a transfer from the general fund budget (Fund 10). In 2019-20, the amount of the transfer from the general fund (Fund 10) to the special education fund (Fund 27) was \$481,640.

If the Governor's proposal is accepted and Special Education Categorical Aid is raised to 45% in 2021-22 and to 50% in 2022-23, projected revenue would increase by \$106,799 in 21-22 and \$138,210 in 22-23. This directly reduces the transfer from the general fund to special education. The savings stays in the general fund and goes directly to supporting educational programming for all students in the district.

### **Per Pupil Increases in Revenue Limit Authority:**

Revenue limits determine the amount of funding that can be generated for a school district through local property taxes and state equalization aid. If state equalization aid goes up, property taxes go down, and total revenue stays the same. To adjust for inflation, changes can be made by increasing the per pupil amount in the equalization aid formula. Increasing the low-revenue ceiling per member amount adjusts how much a district can levy in property taxes.

The Governor's budget proposal includes increases to both the per pupil amount in the equalization aid formula and the low revenue ceiling amount. These increases collectively increase revenue by \$82,750 in 2021-22 and by \$137,250 in 2022-23. The School District of Manawa has declining enrollment. Neither of these increases will overcome the deficit caused by the decrease in student FTEs. But, the increases do make the deficits more manageable. Essentially, these per pupil increases will allow for fewer staff reductions.

### **Federal ESSER Revenues and Continuing Costs:**

Federal funds have been allocated to schools to support additional expenses experienced as a result of COVID-19. These funds are not intended to support ongoing costs. The cost of transportation, utilities, and building maintenance cannot be paid for out of federal ESSER funds. Therefore, the support through the state budget process is necessary to support long-term, ongoing costs.

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#### **School District of Manawa**

800 Beech Street  
Manawa, WI 54949

Phone: (920) 596-2525  
Fax: (920) 596-5308

#### **Little Wolf High School Manawa Middle School**

515 E. Fourth St  
Manawa, WI 54949

Phone: (920) 596-2524  
Fax: (920) 596-2655

#### **Manawa Elementary**

800 Beech Street  
Manawa, WI 54949

Phone: (920) 596-2238  
Fax: (920) 596-5339

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-2-

The School District of Manawa received \$78,237 from ESSER I. This was used to purchase protective equipment to welcome students back to school in the fall and keep them safe. Home internet service for students and professional development for staff was also purchased using ESSER I. Manawa was also awarded GEER grant money that was used to buy Chromebooks so that all students had devices in the event of school closures or remote learning needs. Some software and other auxiliary tech equipment were also purchased. This amount was \$80,357. Funds received for ESSER II will equate to \$361,354. This money is planned to purchase more Chromebooks as well as math, reading and social studies learning materials. The district plans are to use this one-time federal money for allowable, one-time or short-term costs.

### Mental Health and Student Wellness:

Mental health and student wellness has been a priority in the School District of Manawa for many years and has only been heightened as a result of the pandemic. Being a small, rural district, Manawa has struggled to access mental health resources for families. The Governor's budget proposal includes implementing a Mental Health and Student Wellness categorical aid program that would reimburse districts 10% of costs for pupil service categories like school counselors, nurses, and psychologists. Although this would not be enough to fully fund the programs and resources needed, it is a step in the right direction.

### Counting Pupils for Revenue Limit:

The Governor's budget addresses the pandemic-driven decreases in enrollment in schools across the state. If the School District of Manawa were to be allowed to use the greater of the 2020 or 2019 pupil counts, this would add 12 FTEs and change the 3-year average by 4 FTEs. This helps in the short-term and is neither helpful or hurtful in the long-term.

### Summary:

The Governor's proposal would increase the School District of Manawa's funding. Without the Governor's budget proposals, the district estimates a **\$117,489** shortfall in 2021-22 and a **\$415,607** shortfall in 2022-23. This is roughly a **6% decrease** over the next biennium. With the Governor's budget proposals, the district is able to balance the budget without staffing or program cuts and could use the added \$72,731 for one-time 2021-22 spending. There would be a **\$49,469** shortfall in the 2022-23 school year. This additional funding would allow for modest inflationary increases while maintaining the current level of programming for our students.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. I can be reached at: 920-596-5300 (office), 920-896-3133 (mobile), or [moppor@manawaschools.org](mailto:moppor@manawaschools.org)

Sincerely,

Melanie J. Oppor, PhD  
District Administrator

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