



April 21, 2021

Dear Members of the Joint Finance Committee,

In Rice Lake, with the exception of one week, we have maintained full-time, five days per week, face-to-face instruction during the entirety of the school year. We are proud of this fact.

For this year, we will spend an additional \$1.5 million above and beyond what we had planned to spend. The additional one-time ESSER funds will be helpful in terms of addressing our shortfall, and in helping us build additional services for students to address learning loss. We are expanding summer school at all three levels, and hiring four additional math and reading interventionists to help address the needs that have been identified with our students. This does not eliminate the need for continued funding for school districts moving forward.

We strongly support the \$200 per pupil revenue increase in each year of the biennium. These funds are needed to continue, and expand, our current educational opportunities for the students and families we serve.

Increasing the special education aid reimbursement rate is another step toward meeting the needs of all students in the state of Wisconsin. In the Rice Lake Area School District, we currently transfer over \$2.7 million from the general fund to fund special education services. This is over 10% of our operating budget.

In the Rice Lake Area School District during last school year, 70 students were referred for school based mental health services. As of today, 115 students have been referred for school based mental health services this year. This is over 5% of our total student population of 2,225 students. In Rice Lake, we have added a school social worker, a mental health navigator, and a mental health therapist in recent years. It is not enough. These needs continue to grow. Please support the proposed \$46.5 million expansion of the School Mental Health Categorical Aid program to provide financial support for services provided by school districts.

In closing, thank you for your time and your service to this great state we all call home.

Sincerely,
Randy Drost
District Administrator