



## MOUNT HOREB AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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District Office | 1304 E. Lincoln Street, Mount Horeb, WI 53572

April 9, 2021

Dear Distinguished Members of the Joint Finance Committee -

The 2021-23 budget biennium serves as an opportunity for our state leaders to make legacy decisions. Your ability to leave a positive imprint upon children's education, mental health, and well-being has never been more stark or essential. Thank you for your service to our fellow citizens, most especially our young people.

As a school superintendent, I urge you to please advocate, at the very minimum, for the following:

- **Enrollment mitigation to adjust the three-year rolling membership average** – The Mount Horeb Area School District, usually a beacon for open-enrollment, lost approximately 77 students due to pandemic-related public health requirements. As the most western school district in Dane County, this meant families sought to open enroll “out” to bordering counties. Those districts were not subject to the same public health school closures which precluded Mount Horeb from in-person learning.

Without permission for districts to use the greater of their 2019 or 2020 pupil count for revenue limit purposes, districts like Mount Horeb will experience drastic enrollment decreases in its three-year average. This enrollment decrease, all borne from something not of our own making, will devastate our future financial outlook and the students we serve.

- **Increase revenue limit authority** – A minimum of \$200/\$204 per pupil over each of the next two years, respectively will permit districts to maintain its current level of services, despite burgeoning increases in operational costs. Furthermore, indexing the revenue limit authority to a rate greater than inflation is even more optimal, as stagflation concerns begin mounting nationwide.
- **Raise the low revenue ceiling** to at least \$10,250 in fiscal year (FY) 2021-22 and \$10,500 in 2022-23. An increase in the low revenue ceiling just for 2021-22 would provide approximately \$175,000 more in Mount Horeb's revenue limit. Since the inception of revenue limits, the Mount Horeb Area School District is one of approximately 140 districts that is perpetually penalized for being good stewards of our generous taxpayers' dollars. Increasing the low revenue ceiling is the surest way of beginning to “right” the inequities forced upon low spending districts, like Mount Horeb.

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- **Truly and profoundly confront students' mental health needs** by allocating an additional \$22.5 million General Purpose Revenue (GPR) for school mental health categorical, non-competitive aid in FY 2021-22 (and an additional \$24 million GPR in FY 2022-23).

Our community has collectively consoled one another far too many times upon hearing the news of another student's suicide (four enrolled students in three years and two alumni in one year). This, coupled with the knowledge that a growing number of our beautiful children are receiving in-patient mental health services or utilizing our district partner resources, demonstrates the very real, heartbreaking realities of our students' plight.

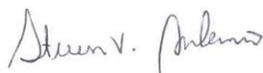
- **Convert special education aid to a sum *sufficient* appropriation** – Given the current sum *certain* appropriation system, the state is not able to meet its promise to this extraordinary population of young people. The current reimbursement rate hovers around 28%. Raising this rate to 45% and 50% during each of the next two FYs, respectively, would move districts closer toward the true cost of providing our students the education they richly deserve. Mount Horeb's transfer from our general operating budget last year to fund special education was \$3,080,286.00. As you can appreciate, any increase in special education funding supports all children.

I believe these are the most urgent requests needed to maintain the current level of services to our children. While we are very appreciative of the federal stimulus dollars that will support public education, using these "one-time" dollars in this manner to balance our upcoming budgets would be fiscally irresponsible and would cause any district, including Mount Horeb, to hit a funding cliff when these funds are gone.

Long term, I am seeking your voice in calling upon your colleagues to establish a taskforce with the express purpose of restoring the state's commitment to two-thirds funding of partial school revenues. Achieving this attainable goal would permit Wisconsin's schools to reach breakthrough levels and return our state atop the list of our country's highest achieving.

I seldom provide such testimony; however, I am moved to do so because the stakes are so high, and I have great faith in you to make the decisions needed to support our most precious gift, children. Thank you for your kind attention and consideration of these comments.

Warmly,



Dr. Steve Salerno, Superintendent  
Mount Horeb Area School District