



May 10, 2021

Re: 2021-23 Biennial Budget

Dear Members of the Joint Finance Committee,

Each year, schools and school districts are presented with a variety of challenges when it comes to delivering an exceptional education to students. We must do so while meeting the unique needs and interests of each and every child to ensure their future success. When we make this happen, there are wide-ranging benefits to children, families, schools, and communities.

Needless to say, the past year has presented some of the biggest challenges we have ever seen in education.

In the East Troy Community School District, we are proud that we have been able to provide and maintain five-day-per-week in-person learning to our students since September 1, 2020. We have also offered a virtual learning option for children, with a great degree of flexibility between the two learning models. This has resulted in additional instructional and infrastructure needs for our district, leading us to delay other pressing needs.

As board members, the superintendent, the business manager, the director of teaching and learning, and the director of pupil services for the East Troy Community School District, we support any and all efforts to provide an inflationary increase to Wisconsin public schools within the 2021-2023 state biennial budget. At a minimum, we urge you to strongly advocate for the following:

### **Special Education Funding**

There remains an ongoing need to increase the state reimbursement for special education. Local costs for special education have increased 43 percent in the last five years due to our student population's increasing complexity of needs. The current budget, after a minimal increase from last year, reimburses approximately 28 percent. An increase in special education funding would allow the district to allocate more of its general education operating funds to other important areas.

### **Revenue Limit**

We encourage the Joint Finance Committee to accept the current proposal of a \$200 and \$204 per-pupil revenue increase in the biennium, as well as requests to tie future increases to the Consumer Price Index. Even with this increase, our revenue limit would still be projected to decrease by about 1.26 percent the first year and increase by 0.77 percent the second year. These declines will lead to staff reductions. We are in favor of implementing a predictable funding formula for districts to determine revenue, set budgets, and plan for the future.

### **Membership Count Figures**

We ask that districts be able to use their 2019-20 pupil counts for their actual 2020-21 numbers (whichever is larger) in determining general aid and revenue limits, and allow the use of this figure to remain in the three-year rolling average of membership computation. ETCSD, even while offering both in-person and virtual learning options since the start of the 2020-21 school year, saw a decrease of 101 FTE and 84 students in our head count. About 50 percent of this was due to low numbers at the four-year-old and five-year-old kindergarten levels. These declines, after the hold harmless exemption of 2020-21, will again have negative impacts on the level of



service provided to our existing student population. We ask for support in mitigating the impact of what would otherwise create a multi-year reduction in revenue for school districts across Wisconsin.

### **Mental Health Funding**

We encourage the Joint Finance Committee to accept the proposal to increase mental health funding by \$53.5 million. The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated high levels of anxiety and depression. To address these needs, we have increased our local funding related to social work, psychologists, and pupil services. We have also partnered with a student family assistance program. We support the creation of a systemized approach to the identification and treatment of mental health illnesses across regions and the development of sustained funding resources to maintain mental health personnel.

As a final note, we are grateful for the support of the one-time ESSER funding from the federal government. These funds have been used and will continue to be used to offset the costs resulting from COVID-19. However, they are only one-time funds and therefore cannot be relied on to maintain ongoing costs like staffing, which is our biggest expense.

Finally, we pledge to continue our efforts to serve each and every child and our community in the most effective and efficient manner possible. We ask that, at a minimum, the priorities outlined above be approved toward helping Wisconsin schools provide equity in access to high-quality instruction for all students.

Sincerely,

Ted Zess  
School Board President

Anna Janusz  
School Board Vice-President

Bob Dignan  
School Board Treasurer

Steve Lambrechts  
School Board Clerk

Dale Ames  
School Board Member

Dr. Christopher Hibner  
District Administrator

Kathy Zwirgzdas  
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Amy Foszpanczyk  
Director of Teaching and Learning

Katherine Harder  
Director of Pupil Services