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School District of Poynette

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May 4, 2021

Dear Senator Ballweg and Representative Plumer,

The School District of Poynette is a small (1000+/- student) district located within your represented area in Columbia County. We are proud to be the "education destination on highway 51" but we need your help to continue to provide services for our students and community. I am honored to serve as the Superintendent and I feel it is important that you hear from constituent schools and the budgetary challenges we face

As you work with your colleagues to develop a K-12 education funding plan in the state budget, I am asking you to please support a state budget proposal to boost state aid and spendable resources to schools:

- Please allow per pupil increases of \$200 in 2021-22 and \$204 in 2022-23 in per pupil revenue limit increases. We've been good stewards of taxpayer dollars, but with a relatively flat enrollment, low per pupil spending, and increased needs, we need your help to maintain programming. Costs continue to increase, but our revenue limit does not.
- It is vital that Poynette sees a significant increase in special education categorical aid in each year of the upcoming budget. These are some of the students who present the most need. In Poynette, like all public schools, we are obligated to provide a "free and appropriate education" (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This is often resource heavy. We need your help to meet these needs. We currently have to transfer about \$1,000,000 from our Fund 10 general education budget to cover these expenses that were long promised to public schools.
- Like most districts, students in Poynette are demonstrating a need for more mental health support. We have trained many of our staff members to provide mental health "triage", but we need more than professional development to help solve this issue. We need a significant funding increase for school-based mental health services to students (and staff). Competing for short-term grant dollars is not a solution to a long-term problem. We need a commitment from our legislators to help fund this growing need. As a smaller, rural district, we don't have ready access to mental health professionals. We've set up limited partnerships with nearby providers, using a patchwork of resources, but it isn't sustainable and it simply isn't enough to meet demand.
- Poynette lost summer school and four-year-old kindergarten enrollment due to the pandemic. Although we anticipate this to be a one year drop, this decrease will haunt our funding for years to come. Please allow school districts to use the greater of student counts in September 2019 or 2020 to offset the drop in student membership counts (which affect both revenue limit calculations and per pupil aid allocations) caused by the pandemic.

Please work with your colleagues to ensure that public schools are truly a priority for the state. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your response on your position on K-12 funding in the 2021-23 state budget.

Sincerely,



Matthew Shappell, Ph.D.
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