

**SCHOOL BOARD:**

**CHRIS FINCH, President**  
**SUSAN SHAFER, Vice President**  
**RUSSELL J. IWANSKI, Treasurer**  
**NICHOLAS BANACH, Clerk**  
**STEPHANIE RAY-KUCZYNSKI, Member**

***St. Francis School District***  
4225 South Lake Drive St. Francis, Wisconsin 53235  
Phone (414) 747-3900  
Fax (414) 482-7198

***Dr. Mark Elworthy***  
*Superintendent*

Date: April 30, 2021

To: Joint Finance Committee

From: Dr. Mark Elworthy, Superintendent

RE: Testimony by St. Francis School District

**St. Francis's Story.** The St. Francis School District is a public suburban school district that borders the City of Milwaukee's Bayview neighborhood on its south side. We are a District of 1,043 students, in which 40% of our students attend via Open Enrollment; 60% of our HS students are from Open Enrollment. The City of St. Francis incorporated in 1952; the St. Francis School District detached from the Cudahy School District in 1962. The Community is proud of its identity and accomplishments. We collaborate with neighboring school districts on a regular basis, although the community has indicated that it will not support consolidation or contraction of the School District. The District has been declining in enrollment since 2005 and has balanced its budgets with Open Enrollment revenue. These revenues have not been enough in recent years. The District has operated at a planned deficit in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 after a failed referendum in April 2019.

After the April 2019 Referendum, the District engaged the public and staff to listen to what they believed we needed and what the community would support. As a result, voters in the St. Francis School District approved a \$30.6 million capital referendum and an \$800,000 non-recurring operational referendum on Tuesday, April 6. The funds for the capital referendum will cover District-wide capital maintenance and building improvements; safety, security and accessibility updates; and upgrades to accommodate STEM programming. The operational referendum will address funding shortfalls created by the difference between state funding and inflationary increases. \$800,000 of operational dollars is for maintaining programming and staff, but does not allow us to add additional supports for mental health, or address other identified needs like new curriculum adoptions or partnerships with business and the community. Recent federal dollars will assist us with addressing learning loss during the pandemic, but these programs will go away after the funding is gone. The mental health services that the St. Francis School District provides is far less than the two previous districts that I have led in Dane County and Walworth County. Despite existing in a densely populated area of the State, the resources and accessibility are limited, at best. Onsite mental services is the best option for our students.

**Special Education.** Thank you for the increases in special education reimbursement in the prior budget. Our number one request is that the State increase the reimbursement rate for special education to 60%. Our District is committed to providing a first rate education for all students; and in the context of special education, we devote significant amounts of our revenue to support special education students. Every student who receives special education services is covered by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Public school districts are mandated by federal

law (IDEA) to provide special education services to students with disabilities. Each of our special education students receives an individualized education plan (IEP), which outlines the programs and services required for each student who has a disability identified under the law. Each IEP is designed specifically for that student and is the cornerstone for a quality education for each child with a disability. The current reimbursement rate from the State of Wisconsin is well below the level necessary to cover the required special education costs to meet the programs and services required in our special education students' IEP. The reimbursement rate is inadequate and barely covers 28%.

Year	Total Number of Student	Total Number and percentage of Special Education Students	Special Education Budget (Fund 27)	Buy-out of General Budget (Fund 10)	Percentage of Overall Budget
20-21 (est.)	1043	180, 18%	\$2.644 M	\$1.669 M	18%
19-20	1075	176, 16%	\$2.712 M	\$1.925 M	18.9%
18-19	1120	181, 16%	\$2.420 M	\$1.696 M	17.5%

In summary, increasing the reimbursement rate for special education would allow St. Francis to provide additional services and curriculum materials to educate our students

**General Revenues.** Annual increases continue to not keep up with the cost of inflation and educating all of our students, as well as, maintaining our buildings. Prior to the passage of the April 2021 Referendum, there was over \$14.5 million in deferred maintenance, in addition to the reduction of annual capital projects of \$200,000 for the last 10 years. This amount does not include projects that would enhance learning opportunities. Our last capital referendum that was passed 2008 did not fully address the 2008 capital needs. The District did not ask for additional dollars because it would have most likely not been approved by the electorate. Annual increases will benefit our District.

**Mental Health Resources Beyond ESSER Timeframe.** This has been identified by State leaders as a priority, and we request that it be funded. We are in need for two additional Social Workers with specialized training to better support our students. Onsite mental health support reduces time out of the classroom and meets student needs in real time. I have personally witnessed the spectrum of benefit from growing student confidence/self-image to overtaking tragedies like student death.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership. I can be reached at [melwort@sfsd.k12.wi.us](mailto:melwort@sfsd.k12.wi.us) or 414-747-3910 for further conversation.