



UNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

1908 150TH STREET/HWY 46 NORTH, BALSAM LAKE, WI 54810

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WWW.UNITY.K12.WI.US

@UNITYSCHOOL

"EXPECT GREAT THINGS"

#UNITYEAGLEPRIDE

May 25, 2021

Representative Gae Magnafici
Room 7 West
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Senator Rob Stafsholt
Room 15 South
State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Legislators,

Thank you for your leadership and service during these difficult times. We appreciate the attention and commitment that you provide to northwest Wisconsin while serving at the Capitol. To that end, I respectfully request that you please support the following items in the 2021-2023 biennial budget. These items will directly impact Unity School District and the Unity community.

- A \$200 per pupil general revenue increase in each year of the biennium. The increases in per pupil revenues impacts the programs, services, and opportunities that we provide students. These increases help the school district to meet its ongoing financial commitments, such as facilities maintenance, fixed utilities costs, and staffing needs.
- The expansion of the School Mental Health Categorical Aid program for services provided by school psychologists, nurses, counselors and social workers. Categorical aid is a more advantageous approach for schools and students than the grant award program. Categorical aid would ensure that all schools receive some financial support for these critical services for students with mental health needs.
- A comprehensive pupil count mitigation approach that allows districts to use the greater of the 2019-20 or 2020-21 pupil count for revenue limit calculations, increase special adjustment aid, and treat the non-recurring declining enrollment exemption as recurring adjustments for one year only. These strategies would have an immediate impact for school districts like Unity, providing a buffer for pupil enrollment trends that occurred during the pandemic.
- An increase in the level of special education aid to reimburse 50 percent of aidable costs by the end of the 2021-23 biennium. Most importantly, this would help to meet the ongoing needs of students with disabilities. In addition, to cover the funding gap between required special education costs and current state funding, Wisconsin school districts collectively transfer about \$1.15 billion annually from district general funds. Unity School District's annual transfer for special education is approximately \$1 million. This funding deficiency has a lasting impact on programming and services throughout the district.



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The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) have been and will be beneficial for Unity School District, as well as all districts in the state. These funds address the impact the pandemic has had on our school systems and our students. For school districts like Unity that provided in-person learning throughout the school year, the impact was substantial. Providing learning opportunities for students at school, while still meeting the needs of students who were quarantined or had family members with health conditions, proved to be a challenge. If the ESSER funds are used to offset state funding for school district operational expenses in the upcoming biennial budget, there will be a negative impact for school funding in the future. ESSER funds are a one-time fund that cannot be relied upon to provide ongoing revenue and financial support.

Please contact me with any questions at (715) 825-3515 x5000 or brobinson@unity.k12.wi.us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brandon W. Robinson, Superintendent