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July 12, 2017

Dear Members of the Joint Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Green Bay Area Public School District, we urge you to consider the following as you debate the state biennial budget.

Statewide voucher program

Prior to making any changes to the Statewide voucher program, the District contends that any revisions should be presented to the voters of Wisconsin, no different than when a public school district is required to ask its local taxpayers for additional revenue to fund their public schools. At a minimum any proposed significant increase to the eligibility level for the Statewide voucher program deserves an opportunity to be vetted and reviewed by the voters in a public forum, not behind the closed doors of a budget negotiation.

Currently the median household income in Brown County is \$54,802. If the purpose of the Statewide voucher program is to provide opportunities to families with insufficient means to choose alternative educational options besides a public school, then we believe the current 185% above poverty level provides sufficient opportunities for Brown County families to participate in the program.

In addition, any changes such as lifting the cap for the Statewide voucher program or shifting to a statewide cap should also have a public vetting. As currently funded, the Statewide voucher program has a direct impact on property taxes and any significant changes to eligibility would have a direct impact on our school district's property taxpayers without their input.

Referendum Legislation

We are opposed to any effort to include the "referendum bills" in the state biennial budget. The effort to remove local control from elected school boards and silence voters' voice by reducing successfully passed operational referendums to no more than five years is an action that should be visible so that voters can hold legislators accountable for their vote.

Open Enrollment

We are also opposed to the GOP Assembly's proposal to increase the amount of revenue that follows students that open enroll out of their resident school districts. When reviewing the Legislative Fiscal Bureau Report, we noted that more than half of the school districts would be negatively impacted, thus creating winners and losers. Since it has not had a hearing or opportunity for public comment. We believe that this change to open enrollment should be addressed by the Blue Ribbon Task Force that was created to address equity in the current funding formula.

Within Brown County many families have taken advantage of the choice opportunities available for a variety of reasons. In the past, the Legislature has always held that in offering choice to families, resident school districts should be held harmless, with the recognition that when a student chooses to another district, the resident school district's costs don't necessarily reduce by the amount of the per pupil student revenue. For the Green Bay Area Public School District this change in funding level would result in a loss of revenue of more than \$2M, significantly impacting the students who are served in our school district. In addition, all school districts voluntarily accept open enrolled students and do so fully aware of the current funding allowed under the law.

K-12 Public Education Funding

Finally, we ask you to support the Governor's proposal for an increase of \$200/\$204 for K-12 public education funding. As residents of the Green Bay area, taxpayers, registered voters, and the elected officials and leaders responsible for the education of almost 21,000 students in the Green Bay Area Public Schools we ask that your priority remain the funding of public education, where resources are needed to educate ALL students to be college, career and community ready.

We appreciate your attention to these very important considerations. Each has a significant impact on the future of the students and families across the state of Wisconsin. Thank you also for your service.

Sincerely,



Michelle S. Langenfeld, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools and Learning School



Brenda Warren
Board President

cc: Senators Lasee, Cowles and Hansen and Representatives Genrich, Kitchens, Macco and Steffen