

Wauwaukee Community School District

Committed to Children · Committed to Community · Committed to Excellence

April 8, 2013

The Honorable Scott Walker
Governor of Wisconsin
115 East Capitol
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Walker:

Developing an effective 2-year budget for the State of Wisconsin is an important and challenging task. We appreciate your time and efforts to listen to constituents as you advance priorities and make decisions on funding for programs and services that benefit the residents of our state. Our interest in contacting you is to illustrate the impacts of K-12 funding proposals on the Wauwaukee Community School District, and to advocate for changes we would like to see in the 2013-2015 budget.

As a suburban school district in northern Dane County, the Wauwaukee Community School District has experienced substantial student growth over the past decade. This level of growth under a previously funded school finance system has allowed us to expand and develop quality programs for all students. Our students consistently test above Dane County and state averages on state assessments and our average costs per student are lower than county and state averages. We are proud of our student success and the ability for us to provide a quality product to our community at a reasonable cost, however, several items in the proposed state budget threaten our ability to continue offering the high quality education families expect when they choose the Wauwaukee Community School District.

We request that you support three areas that directly impact the quality of education we provide in Wauwaukee: increase the revenue limit; removal of policy items that should be heard through the regular legislative process; and request no increases to the amount of money in school levy tax credits.

(1) We request at least a \$150/student revenue cap increase as proposed by Senators Olsen and Ellis. While \$150 does not meet the student needs across our growing district, it is considerably better than the unsustainable \$0.

In our district, a \$0 revenue cap increase will not enable us to increase math support for High School students or hire necessary staff for growing student enrollment numbers in our Middle and Intermediate Schools. We currently project class sizes over 30 students in some areas without additional staffing. Additionally, we will not be able to provide a consumer price index salary increase for employees. Under a \$0 revenue cap increase we are not able to fund increases to insurance premiums (even with plan design concessions) and operating costs such as transportation, utilities, and facility maintenance will pull funds away from instructional programs. Some of our taxpayers (not staff) want us to tell legislators "we want our money back so that we can give it to our schools".

The Wauwaukee Community School District is a progressive, yet fiscally conservative public school district. We have worked collaboratively with our employee groups to change health insurance providers, maintain incentive systems to reward staff for continuing education, and modify post-employment benefits. Over the past two years we have successfully refinanced debt, saving \$2.84 million for our taxpayers. Additionally, employee insurance contributions have increased, while benefits have decreased, and we've tried our best to continue rewarding those who invest in continuing education to improve their practice. Today, higher levels of accountability, more testing across more grades, and mandates across our system are stretching our financial and human capital. Asking staff to continue to do more for less is beginning to have negative impacts on motivation and morale.

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(2) Education policy changes do not belong in the state budget. Policy items need to be presented and debated separately before being considered for funding. This process is what our taxpayers expect of us and what they expect from their state government. We are concerned with the following policy changes as they are presented in your budget proposal:

- (a) The expansion of choice options that include private school vouchers, and special education scholarships.
- (b) Changing regulations for independent and instrumentality charter schools
- (c) Expanding the part-time student enrollment programs.

All of these items have the potential to increase our costs and reduce our funding. One of these items (item c), does not consider recommendations from 2012 special legislative study committees assigned to look into the issue(s): *Improving Educational Opportunities in High School* and the *Academic and Career Plan Subgroup of the Governor's Council on College and Workforce Readiness*.

While all of these items enable choice, there are no items presented in your budget proposal which consider the revision or elimination of potentially outdated statutory regulations that limit the ability of traditional public schools to be flexible with our own local offerings. This is not fair to families who choose to support innovative public schools such as ours in Waunakee.

We believe the focus for our state should be on one flexible system for public education, as opposed to establishing two educational delivery models. We believe these three policy issues warrant a thorough public dialog that should take place through the legislative education committees.

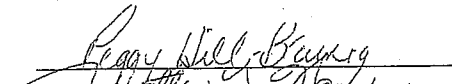
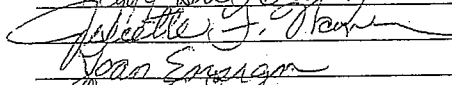
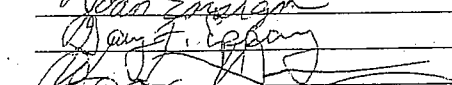
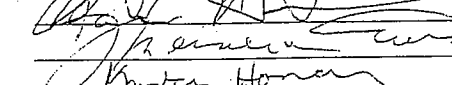
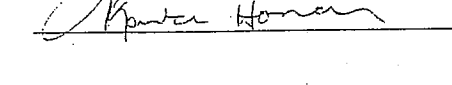


(3) We do not support continuing to increase the amount of state equalization aid monies into the school levy credit (presented as "property tax relief"). *The current budget proposal contains language that increases the amount of GPR money going into the school levy credit, which increases the size of the levy "bucket" ... essentially decreasing the likelihood of ever fixing the school funding formula.*

Several state legislators have publicly stated one big reason they will not consider recent proposed changes to the school funding formula is due to the high one-time cost of eliminating the tax levy credit in a way that ensures every district remain whole (no "losers" when the change happens). Continuing to add to the size of this credit makes the problem worse. Growing districts such as Waunakee continue to lose in the current scenario. In the last Legislative Fiscal Bureau analysis on this topic, our growing district lost \$350,000 dollars in potential aid that would have been available had the funds flowed through the equalized aid formula.

Thank you for your time to consider our thoughts and recommendations on the 2013-2015 state budget. We believe strongly in public education in our state and feel that we provide great results to the communities we serve. We ask for your help to ensure that we have the funding and policy flexibility to operate our school district in the manner in which our constituents have come to expect.

Sincerely,

WAUNAKEE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION

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