

To: The Honorable members of the Wisconsin Joint Finance Committee:

As the Waunakee Community School District (WCSD) School Board, we are reaching out to you with concerns that we and most Wisconsin school leaders share regarding the State budget and its impact on education. We respectfully ask that you please take these concerns into consideration as you develop the state's 2025-27 biennial budget.

The WCSD is highly ranked for student achievement, #2 in Dane County. We are fiscally accountable - at \$13,679 our per pupil spending is in the bottom third of Dane County, \$467 below the county average. But, like other employers, the WCSD and all Wisconsin school districts are facing rising costs due to inflation.

We truly need your financial support as you craft the 2025-26/26-27 State budget.

Per pupil categorical aid from the state has not kept pace with inflation. Since 2010 when per pupil aid ceased being indexed to inflation, we are \$3,300 per student behind the cost of inflation. In the WCSD this per student amount equals \$14,572,800. This issue is the primary factor in the number of operational referendums across the state.

We appreciate the \$325 increase in per pupil aid the 23-24 and 24-25 Legislative budget provided, but even this increase was below the rate of inflation. Many school boards face having to make cuts to programs and/or staff, decreasing opportunities for students, thus negatively impacting student achievement or seeking additional operational referendums to cover the difference.

Special education categorical aid reimbursement rates are not keeping pace with the increasing number of students qualifying for special education, the increasing costs of staff, and mandated services for students with disabilities. Schools statewide face well over a billion dollars in unreimbursed special education costs each year. For the 24/25 school year, we were assured that the State budget would provide 33% of our Special Education expenses. Last fall, the DPI informed districts that the actual reimbursement will be closer to 29% to 30%. This difference negatively impacts our budget by \$425,000. This makes it difficult to budget for when the Board finalized our 24-25 budget in October.

In consideration of the above concerns, the WCSD Board of Education strongly urges:

- That you index per pupil aid to the rate of inflation
- That you increase state special education categorical aid to 60%, and
- That you guarantee the percentage of special education aid by either making it sum sufficient or agreeing to make up the difference between the actual special educational needs and sum certain budgeting with a portion of the over \$4 billion in surplus.

Thank you for your public service and consideration of our request.

Respectfully,

The Waunakee Community School District Board of Education