

April 21, 2017

Dear members of the Joint Finance Committee:

My name is Crissy Kumhala and I am a middle school special education teacher in the Ashwaubenon school district for 18 years. What is unique about my testimony today is that my support of public education does not stop in the classroom. I support public education from the boardroom as well. I am the third generation in my family to serve on the Oconto Unified School district Board of Education. I have been honored to serve the district the last four years. The past three serving as their board president.

Sitting on both sides of the board table, I can see full circle the effects that a decreased budget the past several years has had on public education. For the past six years, I have personally witnessed increased class sizes, and an influx of students who need tremendous amounts of support, yet resources continue to decrease. Public schools are the cornerstone in our communities where highly qualified educators can level the playing field and prepare all our students for the future.

For the 3,458 students, and the 125 teachers in the Ashwaubenon school district, I am here to urge you to fund a budget that provides the necessary investments for a quality public education.

As a board member of the Oconto Unified School District, I see the difficulties our small district faces each year when trying to balance the budget. Since 2010-2011, Oconto has had to spend down the district's find balance by \$1,410,770 during that timeframe. This decrease in funding has created a tremendous difficulty for us to attract and retain quality educators, as well as maintain new and innovative programming that will prepare our students for the next stage of their lives. We have cut our budget to the bone.

The Governor's proposed increase to per pupil categorical aid over the next few years will be essential in providing our district the financial support we need. Without any excess revenue, even with the proposed increase, similar to many of our neighboring districts, we will still need to consider an operational referendum to support our staff and programming.

Both the school districts that I am proud to be a part of believe in hard work, investing in our children, and that Wisconsin can be strong again by fully funding public education.

Respectfully,

Crissy Kumhala



OCONTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

"Leaders & Learners, Today & Tomorrow"

April 21, 2017

Dear Members of the Joint Finance Committee:

My name is Andrew Bucheger. I am a special education teacher at Oconto Middle School. I have been teaching for 26 years. I am here today to speak on behalf of my students and coworkers.

I strongly support Governor Walker's proposal to increase the per pupil aid over the next two years. Our school has many students that struggle with poverty. On an average day, Oconto Middle School serves 58 free and reduced breakfasts and 75 lunches. These students and their families face a struggle just to meet basic needs. Our school provides a stable environment where they can learn and feel safe. We will always provide a safe learning environment. It becomes more and more of a challenge if staff and programs are cut and reduced.

I asked my 7th and 8th grade students how potential school budget cuts would affect them. We had a good discussion about what is important to them for their education. My students are worried that Chromebooks and technology could be cut. They wonder if they will still be able to participate in sports when they get to high school. They do not want to see cuts to our teachers and support staff. They like the class sizes and extra help they currently have. The proposed budget will directly impact these students and students across the state.

I also support Governor Walker's mental health initiatives for Wisconsin schools. Our Guidance Counselor, Cathie Connell, reported dealing with the following mental health issues in our school; substance abuse, depression, anxiety, cutting, self-worth, body image, and teen suicide. Mrs. Connell works hard with students facing these issues. She said the cases are becoming harder to handle in a school setting without outside professional assistance. She gave an example of a teenage girl in our building facing the threat of suicide. Mrs. Connell spent three full days working with the student, local support agencies, and the Oconto Police Department in order to ensure her safety. The Governor's proposals will give our schools resources to help meet the needs of these students.

In conclusion, I encourage you to stand up for the children of Oconto and all Wisconsin public schools. Thank you for listening and serving the citizens of Wisconsin.

Andrew Bucheger
Oconto Middle School Teacher

Joint Finance Committee Members,

I have been a special education teacher for the last 23 years, but I didn't come into the profession like most teachers. In fact, when I was in high school, I was not a good student. I struggled. I was disconnected. All I wanted to do was to get out of school and get a job. And that is what I did. However, after about 10 years of working in a factory, I decided I wanted to give college a try. I worked hard and I did well in my college classes. That is why I decided to go into special education. I wanted to help those students who struggle. I know what they are going through and how difficult it can be for them. In my 23 year career, I have worked with students with severe emotional and behavior disabilities at the elementary level, the middle school level, and for the last 15 years at the alternative high school.

These students are the most vulnerable members of our society and the most at risk to not graduate from high school and end up unemployed, homeless or incarcerated. These are not bad kids. With proper investments in our public schools, these students can overcome poverty, dysfunction and their disability. Given the fact that it costs Wisconsin \$30,000 or more per year to incarcerate one person, it is time to increase our state investment in our public schools and special education students.

Regular education students are being short changed as well. Class sizes have increased, special education resources such as classroom assistants have been reduced, and special education teachers' caseloads have increased. If this continues students will fall through the cracks and this is not acceptable in a 21st century society. It is already difficult to hire fully licensed highly qualified special education teachers. It will be even more difficult to fill positions that are already seeing a teacher shortage. Please support the increases in public school funding and increases in special education reimbursement rates.

Dean DeBroux

Ashwaubenon Education Association

Good afternoon Rep. Nygren, Sen. Darling and members of the Joint Finance Committee. My name is Kandace Larsen, and I am a special education teacher here at Marinette High School. I work with students who have severe intellectual disabilities. I am here to speak as an educator in support of public education, but more importantly, I am here to speak for my students - many of whom are not able to speak for themselves.

Public education has seen many cuts in funding in recent years and Special Education funding has been frozen for a decade. What does this mean for my students? It means less staffing for those students who need it the most, because districts can't afford the personnel needed to provide the support for those students who need the most. It means larger class sizes, and less classroom materials. Many of my students come from low income families, families in which budget cuts affect the most. I have purchased pencils, notebooks, food, clothing, laundry soap, bar soap, shampoo, etc., out of my own pocket for students in my classroom who are in need, because these are some of the basic items they need in order to be successful at school.

My students deserve a quality education - one that will prepare them for the future. They all hope to obtain jobs once they graduate from high school, a goal that can be difficult to achieve with a disability. Freezes and cuts in funding make it difficult for public schools to prepare students for the workforce, leaving the future for these students uncertain.

Budgets often come down to being a "numbers" game and legislators often balance the budget by taking money away or by freezing spending from public education. Money spent on education is always an investment, as we are investing in our children. My students are not numbers, they are people. People with ideas, goals, dreams, and the right to a public education that will provide them with the tools to be successful in their adult life and to be productive citizens in their communities.

My students and I, along with fellow educators and members of the community call on legislators to meet their obligation to our children and their communities by restoring funding to our public schools through a \$300 per pupil increase to the revenue limit and by increasing special education funding, which has been frozen for ten years, to 30%.

Thank you for your time.

Kandace Larsen
Marinette Education Association

Hello Representative Nygren, Senator Darling, and members of the Joint Finance Committee. My name is Brian Larsen and I have been a special education teacher in the Oconto School District for the past 10 years. Our school district, like so many around the state, since 2011 have been in a perpetual "cut the budget" mode, still resulting in deficit budgets year after year.

What does this mean for our children? What does this mean for their future?

It means students will have less access to a quality public education. It means our children have fewer opportunities to learn. It means students will be unprepared for college, as well as the workplace. This puts the future of our children in jeopardy, and sets them up for failure. As an educator, I work hard to set my students up for success, and the state budget should promote my students' success.

My students want to go to college. They want to obtain jobs, have families and own a home. They want to be members of their communities.

They need a quality public education to make their dreams happen.

My students and I, along with fellow educators and members of the community call on legislators to meet their obligation to our children and their communities by restoring funding to our public schools through a \$300 per pupil increase to the revenue limit and by increasing special education funding, which has been frozen for ten years, to 30%.

Thank you for your time.

Brian Larsen
Oconto Teacher Education Association

My name is Brian Borley and I am a high school social studies teacher. I am advocating for an increase in the per pupil spending in the biannual budget. It is unfortunate that this issue has become a political one over the past few years in Wisconsin, because education is not political, it is essential for communities to function. As one of our Founding Fathers, John Adams, said, "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it." When the legislators of Wisconsin do not invest in education, it is not just the classrooms that feel the brunt of those cuts, it is entire communities. As districts are forced to do more with less, they begin to make cuts to social workers, psychologists, and after school programs. Without these services, schools have to rely on educators to deal with mental health and family issues with students. Teachers are often the first people that young people turn to when they need guidance, and without the resources to help these students, even the most gifted educator can feel at a loss of how to help.

Please take this budget as a chance to increase property values, while also lowering the unemployment rate and health insurance premiums of our residents; aspects that have all been proven to occur when states invest and prioritize a strong, public school system.

Sincerely,

Brian Borley
Port Washington Saukville Education Association