

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF WHITEFISH BAY

1200 EAST FAIRMOUNT AVENUE  
WHITEFISH BAY, WI 53217  
TEL: (414) 963-3901  
FAX: (414) 963-3959

The Whitefish Bay School District



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## The School Board of the School District of Whitefish Bay

### Areas of Concern in Public Education & the 2017-19 State Biennial Budget – April 13, 2017

Our district supports the Governor's request to increase the State investment in K-12 education, specifically the per pupil dollar increase as part of the biennial budget. The biennial budget lays out the State's priorities and we are aware that, at present, lawmakers will see education and transportation infrastructure as competing priorities. However, education and transportation are both investments in future growth; one in human capital and the other in physical infrastructure. These priorities should not be pitted against each other because they can be worked on in tandem to create a better future for the State of Wisconsin. Investment in education allows all schools to receive the needed resources to support relevant student learning and innovative programming to better prepare students for college, career, workforce, and life.

**Funding for Schools** – A comprehensive, predictable, and sustainable funding system for traditional public schools with annual increases tied to inflation needs to be a priority given the yearly increases in costs that local school districts cannot control.

The governor's \$200/\$204 increase over the biennium is basically a 2% cost of living increase. This is reasonable and certainly not excessive. Our district asks that you do not tie this funding to verification of a minimum health insurance contribution. Since Act 10, we have used the tools provided to freeze salary and fringe benefits and to implement changes to health insurance and post-retirement benefits. Sound long range financial planning and employee feedback since Act 10 have allowed the Board to hold back salaries rather than increase health insurance premiums. Given the many factors that determine the actual cost of health care for districts, such as experience, deductible amounts, and plan design – we do not believe that a specific percentage contribution represents the best way to ensure shared cost with employees. And we view responsible use of Act 10 tools as a local decision.

**How would the additional health plan premium requirement impact our team members?** Moving from our district's current 8% health plan premium contribution to a 12.6% contribution would require our employees to pay an additional \$968 per year on a family health plan. While the proposal has the potential to save the district \$211,000, it would also put us in a position of having to repurpose other resources to keep employees whole or risk retention challenges. With base wage increases tied to the consumer price index at 1.26% this year, a majority of our employees would take a step back in overall compensation. The proposed tying of additional public funding to receive a per pupil increase to health plan premium contribution is inconsistent and inequitable as it does not require this of other employee groups, independent charter schools or private voucher schools.

**District Areas of Priority for Student Success** – The State's investment in education would foster more innovative learning designed to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the additional resources are needed to sustain and grow programs. Relevant and innovative learning to best address the current skills gap and position our students to meet the new workforce demands is the essence of our work. Specifically, we are expanding our Project Lead the Way (STEM) offerings, implementing new programs at the high school level to guarantee all students are ready for future success, continuing to enhance our District literacy programming, as well as expanding Advanced Placement Courses. These initiatives are at risk if the state does not provide additional

funding for our public schools. Without the governor's \$200 cost of living increase, our District would have to consider cuts to programs and services.

**State and Local Assessment System** – We support assessment aligned with student learning targets and accountability and transparency for all. Stabilization of the state assessment system is vital. Ongoing false starts in the arena of high stakes assessments are counter to the local curriculum development process and what is best for students.

As we focus on the whole child in Whitefish Bay, we feel our locally-created curriculum as well as our formative and summative assessments are the best measures of local expectations and reflect the local values of the Whitefish Bay community.

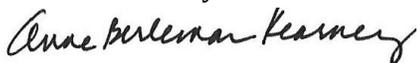
**Level Playing Field** – Local taxpayers need disclosure to ensure that they have a role in the local control of their schools. Taxpayers should be provided with a transparent and legitimate accountability system for all publicly-funded schools, including public schools, independent charter schools, and private voucher schools. Funding increases, mandates, accountability measures and reporting requirements should be absolutely consistent for *all* entities receiving tax dollars for educating students.

Current state funding for various educational entities is a puzzle for taxpayers footing the bills. Aid for an open enrollment student is \$6,748 (\$12,000 for students with disabilities). Voucher students, on the other hand, are supported at \$7,323 for K-8, \$7,969 for 9-12, and \$12,000 for special education. These aid levels are slanted to the disadvantage of traditional public schools.

**Funding for Special Education** – We believe in improving support for students with disabilities. An increase in the State's reimbursement rate for special education to 30% and 33% in the next biennial budget is warranted in order to support the educational needs of our students with disabilities. The current estimate for the 2016-17 reimbursement rate for special education in the State of Wisconsin is approximately 26.15%. As we move to a more inclusive and equitable model, the cost for providing the required and specialized services does not decrease and may, in fact, require more dollars.

**Summary** - In conclusion, the Whitefish Bay School Board supports the Governor's proposed increased investment in public education. In addition, the board continues to support local control. Local control has deep roots in Wisconsin and has resulted in high quality education for all students in the School District of Whitefish Bay. Recently, this long-standing tradition has begun to erode, shifting away from decisions made in partnership with our community toward more legislatively-imposed mandates. Our district remains committed to the idea that local control should be a foundational principle of education policy in the state and that initiatives that do not embrace this principle are not in students' best interests. The State of Wisconsin will thrive when we recognize that investment in our schools secures a strong future with a vibrant workforce and educated citizenry.

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