

# Appleton Area School District

Preparing Our Students for Their Future

*Every Child, Every Day*

## Appleton Board of Education

Kay S. Eggert, President; Diane S. Barkmeier, Vice President; James R. Bowman, Treasurer  
Barry P. O'Connor, Clerk; Alvin T. Dupree, Member; Leah C. Olson, Member; Deborah C. Truymen, Member

## The School Board of the Appleton Area School District Areas of Concern in Public Education and the 2019-2021 State Biennial Budget

April 22, 2019

Members of the Joint Finance Committee,

We appreciate the commitment to public education you demonstrated in the last biennium. The following is a list of funding and policy priorities for the Appleton Area School District. We hope that it helps you with your work. We are happy to answer any additional questions you may have.

**Predictable, Sustainable Funding** - Our ability to deliver a high quality education to the students of the Appleton Area School District depends on our staff. Our ability to meet the changing needs of our students, Wisconsin's future workforce, depends on a predictable funding stream. **Our current funding model lacks predictability, which hampers our ability to innovate and implement strategic improvement efforts in our schools.**

As an example, our district experiences inflationary increases to fixed costs each year such as transportation, utilities, and contracted services. This results in little to no remaining funds to support evidence-based initiatives to address mental health challenges or to guarantee competitive salary ranges to attract and retain high quality educators. **This problem could be solved by providing a minimum of \$200 per pupil general revenue increase in each year of the biennium.**

**Special Education Funding** - We believe each one of our students is capable of success. We are honored to provide an excellent education to all our students, including our students with special education needs. That commitment, however, does come at a cost. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau calculates that school districts diverted over \$1 billion of their general fund dollars in 2015-2016 to pay for special education costs. The AASD is no different. In 2009 we transferred just over \$15 million from our general fund to our special education fund to cover expenses. This past year we needed to transfer over \$24 million, an increase of 61%. Fewer dollars in our general fund means fewer dollars to provide opportunities that would benefit all our students.

In the last ten years, the cost of delivering special education services has increased while funding has remained flat. State funding of special education has fallen from 28.9% in 2007-08 to an estimated 24.5% this school year. We ask that our legislators and Governor work together to reverse this trend. **An increase in special education funding would mean fewer dollars transferred out of our general fund. In our district, our first priority would be to use those dollars to hire the social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors needed to effectively address the growing mental health (social/emotional, behavior) concerns of our entire student population.**

**Weighted Student Funding** - We recognize that some of our students experience greater needs and challenges than their peers. To provide an equitable education for all our students, we must take these needs and challenges into consideration. Our district recently moved to a staffing model that devotes a base amount of funding for each student in a school, but then provides additional funds (weights) for students who need additional services to be successful. We weight the following characteristics: English learner, emotional behavioral disability (EBD) or autism, low-income, homeless, non- proficient in reading, and non-proficient in math. It is important to note that no student or school in our district lost resources due to this change. Instead, we used the weighted funding model to determine how to spend this year's additional \$204 of per pupil aid. **We are confident that the resources allocated to our most needy students will lead to increased student success. We believe this model could be effectively used by the State to allocate resources.**

**Voucher Transparency and Accountability** - Prudent financial management is a hallmark of the Appleton Area School district, reflected in our Aa1 bond rating from Moody's Investor service, the highest possible rating for a public school. We keep our taxpayers in mind, and we are proud of our mill rate. As a board, we are concerned about the growing impact that vouchers are having on our taxpayers. That amount has grown from \$664,064 to \$1,812,484 in the last three years. This trend is especially troubling to us because our local taxpayers have no oversight of these schools through a publicly elected board and the loss of these students to the private schools does not result in a cost savings to the district.


We ask that legislators support a measure that provides voucher transparency. Our voters should be fully informed of the programs' tax consequences. We also ask that legislators pass additional accountability measures so that any school receiving taxpayer dollars is accredited by the state, and staffed with state-licensed teachers. High standards should be universal for any program accepting taxpayer dollars.

For any legislator who is concerned that these measures might negatively impact parental choice, we invite him or her to visit the Appleton Area School District and any one of our thirteen public instrumentality charter schools, which fall under the governance of our board. **In Appleton, we recognize the importance of parent and student choice, and we have found a way to honor it through our public school system.**


**No Time to Lose** - As board members, we appreciate the importance of balancing immediate needs with longer-term vision. Numerous polls and the passage of an unprecedented number of school referendums in the past few years, remind us that there is widespread support for public education across the political spectrum. **We agree with our colleagues at the School Administrators Alliance and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards that the time is ripe to begin a broader conversation among all stakeholders on educational reform in our state.**

As a district we support many of the ideas brought forward in the *No Time to Lose* report, and thank Senator Olsen for his continued championship of public education in our state. For generations, Wisconsin has been known for its commitment to public education. Our leaders have been trailblazers. **The board members and administrative leadership team of the Appleton Area School District stand ready to help our legislators continue the conversations regarding the recommendations contained in this report.**


  
Kay S. Eggert  
President


  
Diane S. Barkmeier  
Vice President

  
James R. Bowman  
Treasurer

  
Barry P. O'Connor  
Clerk

  
Alvin T. Dupree  
Member

  
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