

Dear JFC Committee Members:

As a duly elected official like you, I have been elected as a school board member representing the School District of South Milwaukee. My charge is to be certain that we meet the academic, mental health and safety needs of our 3,100 students.

As the governing board, we have been forced financially to make decisions that do not help our 3,100 students. In some cases, we have been unable to hire new teachers which has allowed class sizes to exceed 30 students even in some of our elementary schools. We have had to reduce or lay off paraprofessionals (teachers' aides) and guidance counselors even at a time when our students are facing unprecedented levels of social emotional stress in their daily lives.

This past year, in order to make ends meet, we were forced to go to our community and ask that they voluntarily raise their own property taxes to meet the safety and mental health needs of our students as well as to maintain our current regular education programs. Nearly 60% of our community decided that their 3,100 children were worth that property tax hike.

In the meantime, as the costs for meeting the needs of our special education students has increased, our special education funding from the State of Wisconsin, has remained flat/unchanged for the past ten years. So, how can we meet our special education children's needs? As we have deliberated and strived with fidelity to satisfy the crucial mandate to teach and reach our most vulnerable students with special needs we have been continuously forced to **divert** a larger and larger portion of our scarce resources from our regular education programing toward special education programing...these **diversions** have translated to the larger class sizes and reductions in staffing that I have referred to earlier. These consistent cuts represent death by a thousand paper cuts or budget cuts to our regular education programing.

There are, however, solutions to this challenge that we school districts find ourselves. We are asking that you legislators, who were elected to represent your constituents, do the right things and help us to live up to the mandates that we have been charged to follow.

Please find a way to do what has not been done for the past ten years...**increase the special education reimbursement to 30% in the 2019-20 school year and to 60% in the 2020-21 school year.** Further, give local school boards the ability to plan ahead by **increasing the revenue limit by \$200/pupil in 2019-20 and by \$204/pupil in the 2020-21 school year.**

If these proposals are not agreed to by the legislature and the governor, we in South Milwaukee will be forced to **divert** more scarce resources from our recently passed referendum, toward special education programs and away from safety, mental health and regular education programs.

The 3,100 students in South Milwaukee and the 860,000 students statewide are depending upon you for this greater financial support from the State of Wisconsin and they are worth it! **We need you to support the Governor's proposals to increase special education funding and revenue limits.** Our students' needs are crucial and they need the "adults in the room" to come to their assistance.

Thank you for standing up for the 3,100 students in South Milwaukee and the 860,000 students statewide.

Sincerely,

Doug Perry

Board Member, School District of South Milwaukee