



Columbus School District

200 W. School Street | Columbus, Wisconsin 53925 | (920) 623-5950

Columbus High School
1164 Farnham Street

Columbus Middle/Intermediate School
400 S. Dickason Boulevard

Columbus Elementary/Discovery Charter
200 Fuller Street

June 1, 2021

Dear Legislators:

The Columbus School Board is incredibly disappointed and frustrated with the Joint Finance Committee's (JFC's) state education budget approved on Thursday, May 27. The JFC's approved plan was short-sighted on many levels and will have a number of long-term negative impacts on our district, as well as districts of all sizes statewide. We encourage you to review the Governor's budget for education, to consider the long-term benefits to public education and our communities, and to support additional funding in the biennial budget above what the JFC approved for public education.

Four specific areas of the education budget are of special interest to us:

1. Pupil Count Mitigation – due to various family decisions related to the pandemic, school districts saw an unprecedented movement of students from the district from 4K-Grade 12. The membership number used for a school district's state aid is based on a three-year average. With this three-year average, the decline in enrollment due to non-enrollment in 4K or choosing a K-12 accredited all-virtual option will negatively impact our funding for a number of years. Allowing a freeze of membership used in calculating 2019-20 state aid will allow Columbus to retain \$100,000 annually.
2. Revenue Limit Increase – With the current biennial budget, much of the per pupil increase of \$200 in year one and \$204 in year two, allows us to meet the inflationary needs and maintain the operating budget of our District.
3. Special Education Funding – to meet the needs of our Special Education students, the Columbus School District spends ~\$2,700,000 on our special education program. We receive ~\$750,000 in state aid to offset those costs. A majority of the \$1,900,000 in costs come out of our general operating budget. Increasing the state's reimbursement rate to 50% would free up over \$530,000 in our general operating budget to address learning needs and opportunities for all students.
4. Mental Wellness - The social and emotional impacts of the pandemic on school-age students is widely acknowledged. In planning to serve the needs of our 1300 students, surveys indicate that the district has a need for additional school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and access to third-party resources. None of these essential positions can be filled with the cuts to state education funding as approved by the JFC. It is unknown how long students will need additional resources to recover from the disruptions of the pandemic. It is obvious that failing to provide the resources for students to achieve socially, mentally, and academically is simply robbing them of the education they deserve. School districts cannot help put people back to work without the funding for the positions needed to meet student needs.

The Board of the Columbus School District does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its education program or activity and is required by Title IX and its implementing regulations not to discriminate in such a manner. The requirement not to discriminate in its education program or activity extends to admission and employment. The District's Title IX Coordinator is: Lisa Blochwitz, Director of Student Services, (920) 623-5950, 200 W. School Street, Columbus WI 53925. lblochwitz@columbus.k12.wi.us

Any inquiries about the application of Title IX and its implementing regulations to the District may be referred to the Title IX Coordinator(s), the Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, or both.

The Board has adopted a grievance process and procedures that provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee complaints alleging any action that is prohibited by Title IX and/or its implementing regulations. The grievance process and procedures are included in Policy 2266 – Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities, which is available at: <https://go.boarddocs.com/wi/cbus/Board.nsf/vpublic?open> The grievance process and procedures specifically address how to report or file a complaint of sex discrimination, how to report or file a formal complaint of Sexual Harassment, and how the District will respond.



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Most importantly, the JFC's education budget fails to maintain required state K-12 spending and puts federal funding at risk for all districts. By cutting state funding for ongoing operations because federal pandemic money was available, the JFC is burdening districts with an ongoing shortfall of operating money after pandemic expenses are met. The Columbus School District relied on one-time federal pandemic funding to assist in covering the unexpected expenses incurred to address pandemic needs from March 2020 through the 2020-21 school year. We incurred significant unexpected expense to:

- Execute building management protocols to provide a safe, and healthy learning environment for students and staff.
- Provide the most equitable education for students who lacked adequate internet access. Our District incurred \$100,000 in hot spot expenses alone to provide reliable internet access to students and staff.

As our school district continues to anticipate the future needs of our students and staff and recover from the financial impacts of the pandemic, we need your help in supporting the Governor's budget for public education.

Thank you for your careful consideration. We are happy to discuss our priorities with the state education budget at any time. You can contact Superintendent Annette Deuman at adeuman@columbus.k12.wi.us, Business Manager Nathan Knitt at nknitt@columbus.k12.wi.us, or Board President Julie Hajewski at jhajewski@columbus.k12.wi.us.

Sincerely,

The Columbus School Board

Julie Hajewski, President

John Pearson, Vice-President

Travis Heiman, Clerk

Keith Loppnow, Treasurer

Mike O'Brien

Tessie Sharrow

Lee Trask

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