



May 27, 2021

Senator Cowles
State Capitol: Office 118 South
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Cowles,

Thank you for meeting with the Howard-Suamico School District (HSSD) Board of Education on August 17 and March 26. We value your willingness to engage with us in long-range planning related to the 2021-23 biennium budget development process. Since that time, Board President Garry Sievert and Vice-President Teresa Ford also testified at the Joint Finance Committee Budget Hearing hosted at UW-Stout on April 22. Public Policy Correspondent, Vanessa Moran, has been in touch routinely throughout this process. As you prepare to enter a critical stage of the process, please allow us to reiterate key school finance priorities important to the health of our local school system.

Due to a revenue limit law passed more than 25 years ago, the Howard-Suamico School District has had significantly less revenue on a per pupil basis than most school systems in Wisconsin. In fact, we remain in the bottom 2 percent in the State relative to maximum revenue per member.

Despite inequity in school funding, we have not stood idle at HSSD. We have taken action, like we are asking you to do. For example, attempts to generate alternative funding include:

- Launching a capital campaign targeting resources for facilities and equipment improvements;
- Selling obsolete property to a home developer to increase resident student enrollment;
- Numerous cost-avoidance strategies and efficiency measures;
- Partnering with Senator Cowles and the Villages of Howard and Suamico to utilize the villages' unused CARES Act dollars for PPE and other mitigation measures to get our students back in school beginning early December;
- Annual advocacy sessions with you to promote shared understanding of our school district's financial needs; and
- Partnering with our taxpayers to pass a \$5.0 million five-year operational referendum.

Despite our best efforts to close the funding gap, we remain in need of your help. Therefore, we respectfully request your support of the following priorities:

- Setting the low revenue ceiling at 90 percent of the statewide average maximum revenue limit per student;
 - The current low revenue ceiling amount of \$10,000 is 87.3 percent of the current state average revenue limit of \$11,450. A steadily improving low revenue ceiling policy is an important part of ensuring equitable resources for all children no matter where they live.
- Increases in special education aid;
 - The Howard-Suamico School District transfers about \$6,000,000 annually from Fund 10 to Fund 27 to provide equitable learning opportunities for 718 students with special needs.
- An inflationary increase in general revenues;
- A plan to mitigate the detrimental three-year fiscal effects of the COVID-19 declining enrollment this school year.

One-time ESSER funding alone is not sufficient to aid in our post-pandemic recovery process. Please partner with us to ensure we have the necessary funding to meet the needs of our learners to help them prepare for their future, not our past. Innovation, economic growth and workforce development in Wisconsin depend on it. Our students deserve it. All students deserve it.

Thank you in advance for your consideration, advocacy, and support.

Forward Together,

Damian LaCroix, Superintendent
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