

January 3, 2007

Governor Jim Doyle  
P.O. Box 7863  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Governor Doyle,

The Lake Holcombe School District is a partner in the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools. The District represents the rural area Holcombe, Wisconsin and educates all the students in that particular area. The future of young people in our community and around the state are in great jeopardy because of the way we fund our public schools. Unless we do something now, it will only get worse. We expect and hope that you to stand up for our children as you have in the past.

The Lake Holcombe School represents a staff of 60 (professionals and support staff) and a student population of 413 students. We are defined as lake-district where the valuation of the land is assessed high while the school is experiencing a decline in school enrollment. Each of the items mentioned can cause a decrease in state aid, and when you put these items together, it multiplies the negative effect it can have on small schools. If the rising cost of education along with the revenue cap formula is added to the declining enrollment and the increased valuation, the future for small rural schools like ours becomes disheartening because none of these are under our control.

To get around this, the state has continually stated that referendum is the way to go. That is acceptable if the community is willing and has the ability to pay for a referendum. We have tried two in the last two years only to see each of them fail. These were to help fund the upgrading of the building and to exceed the revenue cap to save programs. This may sound like people in the area are not in favor of education, but this is not true. They are rebelling against increased taxes of which the school is not creating. Our mil rate dropped this last year, but in other areas of government along with increased assessment, the taxes have increased. Since we are the closest unit of government to the people, we hear the problems on a continuing basis and feel the effects of it on a daily basis.

We are now in consolidation feasibility studies with the neighboring district because they are experiencing the same thing. The problem is that it doesn't solve the problem that each is facing. We have found that bigger is not always better and with declining enrollment, the consolidated school will be in the same situation as the two schools are now if something doesn't change. What do we do if consolidation is not the answer?

Whenever meetings have been scheduled (professional, social, or community) financing of the school seems to be the number one topic. Complaints, discussion and ideas are discussed, but the number one idea for a solution to the budget problem is to figure out a different way to fund schools.

When this was brought to state legislators at a local meeting, the answers given to the people of this community were be careful what you wish for and go find industry to bring to your community so people will move in. I couldn't believe what had just been told to people who were trying to make things work. The implications of those answers were it is better to die than to try, and somehow we were not doing our part to make things work.

We have cut from our budget five straight years and will have to do it again this year. Programs have been eliminated and will be done again in the future. If we are to consolidate, a school will have to be shut down. No community should have to be forced into those concepts.

As a partner in WAES, the Lake Holcombe School is committed to fighting for increased categorical aid to address the critical short-term needs in all school districts. At the same time, we urge you to work with us along with other education stakeholders, and the Legislature to begin comprehensive reform of the school-funding system in 2007.

If we cannot adequately invest in our children, what kind of future can we expect for our state?

Thank you for your time and help,

Tom Goulet  
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Holcombe, WI  
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