



Dear Sen. Grothman and Rep. Strachota:

I did not attend the legislative breakfast this morning, but my assistant superintendent, Jeff Nennig did. I want to follow up on a few of the comments you made to the group and to ask for clarification for myself and the Board of Education within West Bend.

First, you indicated that none of the district superintendents that you work with have been vocal publicly regarding their concerns with the mediation and arbitration laws that were changed by the Legislature during the last budget cycle.

Clearly, you know I have and will remain vocal about my concerns with the state funding formula as well as the requirements of mediation and arbitration. The funding process and the statutes limiting our flexibility are and will continue to compromise the West Bend School District. While you argue the formula for the equalization aid distribution has closed the gap across districts, you did not include how the shift to the use of the (property) tax levy credit continues to compromise the system you represent. This concerns me (because) as you clearly know that your school district (West Bend) has lost state aid as a direct result of this action. We will continue to further lose aid unless you represent your schools vocally and reverse this trend.

This action directly impacted your local property taxpayers by shifting further the burden of education to the property taxpayers. That must stay the focus.

I agree the equalization aid formula equally distributes aid. When the aid is not applied within the formula though, it doesn't go to your district to support education. When the level of funding itself is inadequate to fund the state statutes, is it irresponsible to state the formula is doing its job by underfunding everyone. By not addressing these issues directly, it is avoiding the issue.

Secondly, you asked whether youth options was really an issue. Any programming mandates that are shifted to the local taxpayers as a requirement that are not funded remain the issue right now. It is very clear that the dollars are limited. We cannot continue to mandate programming that the state is not willing to fund.

Third, at the breakfast the discussion shifted to the (opinion that the) per-pupil allocation in the next biennial budget could be "\$0, \$50 or \$100." In my previous e-mail to you I requested that you both indicate to the board and the leadership team where the aid level could end up so we may adequately plan our long-term forecast. We ran our budget scenarios at \$00, \$50 and \$100—we assumed another drop in state support. If we are calculating at "\$0, \$50, or \$100" as the likely scenario, our deficit in state support is significantly higher that we are projecting. We need your help.

We need you to clearly communicate to this community that the state—and not the local school boards—are shifting the burden of the state requirement for public education to the local property taxpayers. We need your help in communicating directly that the requirements are set and the state Legislature and the Department of Public Instruction are unwilling to change them or to allow waivers.

Fourth, it was also stated that the federal government is planning to shift all ESEA dollars to a competitive distribution and to those who have the highest poverty. This will again be significant dollars lost for our school system—really significant (I am having the amounts run, but millions).

I am again stating publicly, to everyone, that this is critical for our school system. We need our state legislators to be as passionate about protecting the investment in our public schools as our leadership team and board members are trying to be.

We cannot continue to shift aid to the tax levy credit, increase requirements, decrease funding, require binding arbitration, increase the mandate for years of health coverage, shift the state burden to the local taxpayers, and then make statements that the local superintendents and boards are not being vocal enough about their concerns. Really?

This is compromising the quality of education for our students and our community. You are taking a district—that by all measures is high performing and low spending—and putting together every condition possible to pull it apart. It takes years to build a quality system. This community won't be able to recover from this if you continue down this path.

We remain fully committed to do our part sharing in the critical issues and problem solving. So if there is any assumption that I have not been vocal enough about my concerns, I want all of the media personnel to understand I am going on record to say the following: The tax levy credit is compromising our aid level, the state is shifting more tax locally and increasing requirements, binding arbitration is a requirement which further compromises our system, the state is unwilling to fund the current requirements and unwilling to change them, and the aid is likely going to continue to drop.

To say that the local taxpayers can pass a referendum is a cop out. It is not dealing with the issues directly related to a process of aid distribution that does not keep pace with expenses. We are crafting the future of schools for our community and our state.

I clearly understand funding is limited. Then, like any responsible budget, one must match the requirements with the available funding. We have submitted waivers to the state and been denied. We have asked the legislators to re-examine the statutes and have been told they are constitutional.

Well, then, start now. I am asking you to publicly request that a bipartisan committee be formed to problem solve—really problem solve—and reach a solution. I am asked to do that every day with handcuffs on. Now, I am asking those who have the ability to influence the system to do so. Determine what you want for the future of education for your taxpayers in the state, what requirements for college entrance, and what you want as your economic future for business and industry, and then determine the funding mechanism that will get there. Do not require anything more or less that you want for the future of Wisconsin and, in turn, are willing to fund. We will do the very best programming with what resources we have, but we cannot have the requirements spelled out and have them extend beyond our ability to resource them.

Also, do not—please do not—continue to shift the focus to the school boards and leadership teams that cannot impact what you have control of.

If you believe I am not being vocal enough regarding these key issues, call me directly. I will be willing to pick it up in any way you believe impacts action. We have written, testified, and presented to the public. Any additional ideas ... let me know.

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