

## Media Release School Funding 10/28/22

The State of Wisconsin ended its Fiscal Year on June 30, 2022, with a record positive balance of \$4.30 billion, according to the new state Annual Fiscal Report released by the state Department of Administration. That report also confirms that Wisconsin has a record \$1.73 billion in its Budget Stabilization Fund (a/k/a “Rainy Day” Fund).

Yet the state continues to underfund K-12 education. There has been no revenue limit adjustment 6 of the past 8 years despite the increasing cost of inflation.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) have been beneficial for Mellen School District. These funds address the impact the pandemic has had on our school system and our students. For school districts like Mellen, that provided in-person learning throughout the school year, the impact was substantial. Providing learning opportunities for students at school, while still meeting the needs of students who were quarantined or had family members with health conditions, proved to be a challenge.

If the ESSER funds continue to be used to offset state funding for school district operational expenses in the upcoming biennial budget, there will be a negative impact for school funding in the future. ESSER funds are a one-time fund that cannot be relied upon to provide ongoing revenue and financial support.

A \$200 per pupil general revenue increase in each year of the biennium would positively impact the programs, services, and opportunities that we provide students. These increases help the school district to meet its ongoing financial commitments, such as facilities maintenance, fixed utilities costs, and staffing needs.

The expansion of the School Mental Health Categorical Aid program for services provided by school psychologists, nurses, counselors and social workers, is a more advantageous approach for schools and students than the grant award program. Categorical aid would ensure that all schools receive some financial support for these critical services for students with mental health needs.

A comprehensive pupil count mitigation approach that allows districts to use the greater of the 2019-20 or 2020-21 pupil count for revenue limit calculations, increase special adjustment aid, and treat the non-recurring declining enrollment exemption as recurring adjustments for one year only. These strategies would have an immediate impact for school districts like Mellen, providing a buffer for pupil enrollment trends that occurred during the pandemic.

An increase in the level of special education aid to reimburse 50 percent of aidable costs by the end of the 2021-23 biennium, would help to meet the ongoing needs of students with disabilities. In addition, to cover the funding gap between required special education costs and current state funding, Mellen School District has on average transferred about \$400,000 annually from district general funds. This funding deficiency has a lasting impact on programming and services throughout the district.

We know that public education is an asset to our community and our economy. We hope you agree that investing in our children and public education system is an investment in our future.

Sincerely,  
Rhonda Elmhorst-Friemoth  
Superintendent