

# Stoughton Area School District

---

---

**Administrative and Educational Services Center**

320 North Street  
Stoughton, WI 53589-1733  
(608) 877-5000

March 16, 2015

Dear Governor Scott Walker and the Wisconsin Legislature:

The release of the proposed biennium budget has compelled us to contact you regarding our concerns about the negative impact it will have on all public schools in Wisconsin. Governor Walker indicated in his budget address on February 3<sup>rd</sup> that school revenues remained essentially flat in his proposal, but his plan actually imposes a \$150 cut per pupil in categorical aid in the first year of the biennium. In Stoughton, this reduction equates to nearly \$500,000 – the equivalent of reducing seven teachers. The second year proposes adding approximately \$165 per pupil in categorical aid, but the net impact over two years results in a cut of \$135 per student.

In addition to the reduced categorical aid, the proposed budget includes NO increase per student in school district revenue limits. Stoughton's revenue limit controls almost 90% of all district general fund income. Preventing revenue from increasing by, at a minimum, the rate of inflation will require districts to reduce staff and cut programs.

Providing even a minimum cost of living increase for employees will be difficult for districts to do. Research shows that a quality teacher in a classroom has the biggest impact on student achievement. Repressing wages over time is making it harder to recruit and retain high quality teachers. The desire to have the highest quality teachers in our classrooms creates much concern over the proposed competency-based teaching license. Passing a content assessment has nothing to do with the ability to actually teach children.

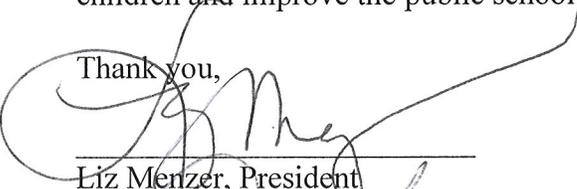
The governor is also proposing a \$211.2 million dollar increase in school levy credits. He has also proposed increasing general aid by \$108 million. Without a corresponding increase in school district revenue limits, this "school funding" is really property tax relief. All of these funds flow to taxpayers by reducing property tax bills and schools cannot spend any of it to address educational needs of children. We support the need for transparency and accountability in our schools. In 2013, Wisconsin's school report cards were listed among the nine best in the country by the Education Commission of the States. Changing school report cards to a politically charged letter grade system will not improve public understanding of how schools perform.

We want high standards for children and believe in one common assessment to measure student performance. Any accountability system consisting of multiple assessments will create confusion and will not allow for accurate comparisons. All schools receiving public tax dollars must be held accountable to the same standards using the same assessment.

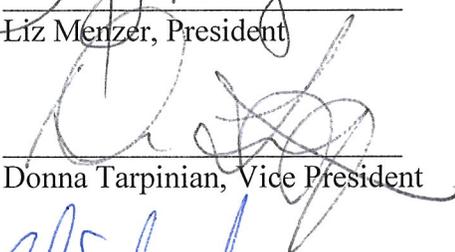
We do not support the proposal for unlimited expansion of voucher schools in Wisconsin. Expanding vouchers sends public tax dollars to private (for-profit or religious) schools. The accountability for private schools receiving these funds is not the same as public schools. There is no research that shows voucher schools academically outperform public schools. Siphoning additional money away from public schools to fund unaccountable private schools is fiscally irresponsible.

The Stoughton Area School District has always prided itself on being a low-spending district. Last April, our community recognized that an investment in public education is an investment in our communities, state, and nation's future. They overwhelmingly passed a recurring operational referendum. However, even with the additional revenue, our district is facing some difficult financial decisions. As the Board of Education, we take the responsibility of educating all of our students very seriously. We are asking that you work with us and all Wisconsin public schools to find a fiscally responsible way to educate all children and improve the public school system that this state has been proud of for so many years.

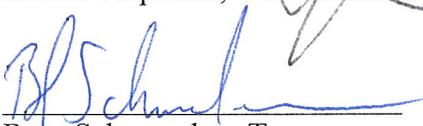
Thank you,



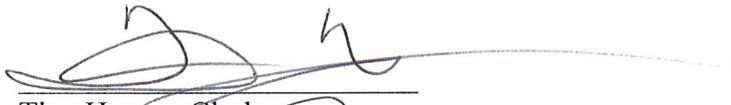
Liz Menzer, President



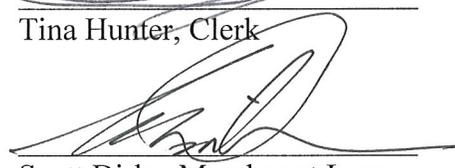
Donna Tarpinian, Vice President



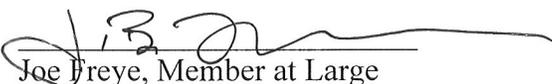
Brett Schumacher, Treasurer



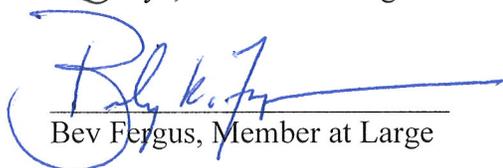
Tina Hunter, Clerk



Scott Dirks, Member at Large



Joe Freye, Member at Large



Bev Fergus, Member at Large



Wanda Grasse, Member at Large



Francis Sullivan, Member at Large



Tim Onsager, District Administrator



Erica Pickett, Director of Business Services