



SCHOOL DISTRICT of FALL CREEK

336 E. Hoover Ave. • Fall Creek, WI 54742 • (715) 877-2123

Monday, March 23, 2015

Dear Joint Finance Committee,

My name is Joe Sanfelippo and I am the Superintendent of the Fall Creek School District, home to some of the state's finest students and the best staff members I have ever worked with over an 18-year educational career. I have never testified before. Though I advocate when needed, I have always been of the mindset that we need to do what we can with what we have, and that our culture is not bound by budget. We worked within the parameters of Act 10. We eliminated a number of programs, adjusted salaries, worked through our staff taking home fewer dollars, and still continued to provide an environment where the 839 incredible kids in Fall Creek could learn and grow. The 113 staff members in our building have been beyond reproach over the 5 years that I have been in the district. They have not said no to any initiative or change in programming we have brought to them. They didn't complain. The loss of direct income clearly came at a cost, but they never let that transfer to their connections and relationships with students and families. I bring this to your attention because I don't know how much more I can ask them to give, without losing the culture of our building. Two things that concern us greatly in this proposal are the grading of schools and the loss of funding, but due to time constraints, I just want to focus on funding.

The proposed loss of categorical aide in the 15-16 school year obviously impacts us negatively. We could talk about how we will have to find \$120,000 to balance the budget in our system. We could talk about how the expansion of vouchers will impact us negatively, and open up a 2nd funding system in Wisconsin that we cannot afford. You have heard all of those things and I am sure you are well versed on the financial impact of the decisions you are going to make. I am more concerned that you know the emotional impact of continuing this historic run of making schools testify and advocate keeping the status quo in education. Somewhere along the line the narrative of schools has changed. In my opinion, it has become something people feel like they have to pay for as opposed to something they get to invest in.

Being a teacher is difficult work. We are tasked with providing a great education to kids who come to us with full stomachs, fresh clothes, and support at home to those who haven't eaten all weekend, in the same clothes, and don't have anyone at home to support what they do in school. If your experience as a student was not positive and you saw educators who were burned out or didn't resonate with you, I am truly sorry. The stories of schools years ago are not the same as they are today. Our staff works extremely hard to connect with kids. We don't just teach curriculum, we teach kids. When the direction of our districts turns to school staff having to defend the work being done every day, it takes away from the time we can spend with our students and doing the most important work there is...helping to shape the future and creating an environment where students can take risks, learn, grow, and go out and change the world. I encourage you to get into schools. No photographer, no agenda, no media...just you, a teacher, and 20-30 smiling faces looking to you for direction. That is where the narrative will change.

Our jobs are hard. Politics and school leadership hold many of the same long nights, public scrutiny, and small victories. I appreciate and respect those who are willing to stand up and serve, but I think the proposed budget does little to help our schools get better. It does not work for administrators trying to create an environment where staff can do their best work, but most importantly, it does not work for the 870,000 public school students across this great state. Thank you for your time...and Go Crickets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Sanfelippo", written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Joe Sanfelippo, PhD

Superintendent

Fall Creek School District