SCHOOL DISTRICT OF WESTFIELD

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To: Wisconsin Assembly Rural Task Force

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak about Westfield and other rural schools in the state.

I am John Eyerly, Superintendent of the School District of Westfield. Westfield is a school district of 1184 students, grades Pre-K through 12, covering nearly 300 square miles. Transportation and Technology are critical to successful rural schools.

Approximately seven (7) years ago the School District of Westfield started a biodiesel project with a local business that converted waste products into biodiesel fuel. This fuel was used to partially fuel our school buses and some was sold to area farmers and businesses.

Like with all innovation, we have had our ups and downs. The biodiesel program is on hold at the present time, one reason being that the warranty for our new fleet of busses will not support the biodiesel fuel.

The motivator for this initiative was that we are always seeking economies, and transportation represents a large portion of our budget. In fact, Westfield spends nearly $800,000 on transportation each year, which is 6.3% of our total Fund 10 budget.

Transportation is critical to an educational innovation in our region called Centers of Excellence involving an agreement between Wautoma Schools, Montello, and Westfield. This initiative enables students from each of the three schools to attend classes in an area of interest. The Center of Excellence for Wautoma is advanced welding, Montello is offering medical and health careers, and Westfield is offering building and construction trades. We expect that our course offerings will expand in the next three years.

This effort keeps local school districts serving students in the communities where they live, while maximizing inter-district cooperation to provide opportunities for students that will prepare them for their college or careers. To help rural schools with initiatives like this, we need the State's support, possibly through transportation categorical aid.

We also use technology to gain efficiency, for example, our three elementary schools offer Spanish to kindergarten students. Through technology, starting on December 1, our first grade students will also learn Spanish in a cooperative arrangement with the Arcadia School District, which is a few hours from Westfield. We are using technology to bring an Arcadia Spanish teacher into our kindergarten and first grade classrooms.

We need to invest into the infrastructure of rural schools to provide a level playing field.

The reality is that we want rural schools to provide equal opportunities that the schools in larger urban areas have in order to help students compete in a global society, but also to make our local communities stronger. If we have the proper infrastructure to support these initiatives we will keep schools open and students attending school in their home community.

I am asking for your support of rural schools to provide incentives for districts to take on initiatives such as these. These initiatives are fragile: We are doing them because they are the right thing to do, but we need a sustaining funding source so that we can continue to provide quality public schools for our youth.

Thank you for your time, service and willingness to study this important issue.

Sincerely,

John Eyerly
Superintendent