

Dear Rep. Swearingen:

Thank you for looking for solutions to problems facing rural schools. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. Having worked in rural districts including Rhinelander (teacher), Antigo (Director of Special Education and Pupil Services), Sauk Prairie (Assistant Supt., Curriculum and Instruction and Pupil Services), Northland Pines (District Administrator), and Bayfield (District Administrator - Retired) for almost forty years, I am keenly aware of the unique challenges that have been confronting rural schools, particularly since 1994.

Unfortunately, I will be out of state when the hearing is held in Rhinelander, so am submitting my thoughts and those of Supt. David Aslyn, Bayfield District Administrator and hope you will add them to the testimony you receive from area district administrators.

The three-tiered funding system is really hurting districts like Bayfield. The district had a 16% cut (\$60,000) in state aid in July 2012 and another 15% cut (\$50,000) in July 2013. With property valuation declining significantly, the mill rate has to go up to raise the same amount of local tax dollars from the previous year. While Bayfield's student enrollment has increased over the past few years, the district is down approximately 110 students over the past 15 years. Combine a declining enrollment, decreased property valuation, and state aid cuts and the district and local taxpayers are put in a very difficult position. Piled on top of this is the sequester at the federal level which immediately reduced and will continue to reduce the amount of Impact Aid districts serving high numbers of Native American students receive in lieu of property taxes. While the district can add the loss of federal revenue to the local property taxes, that action places yet another additional burden on local taxpayers.

Please consider placing some sort of moratorium on secondary, or at least the tertiary level.

It was good to see high cost transportation aid included in the state budget. The Bayfield district does not have a full understanding of how that aid will impact Bayfield. The population of the area is shrinking, but the geographical distances and associated costs of transportation are not going down. Therefore, we are confident that the high cost of transportation will continue to be a challenge in the future. The Bayfield district also has an extremely unique and high transportation cost associated with transporting students over water between Bayfield and Madeline Island. We do receive state aid to transport students on an ice sled (which is extremely expensive) when the lake freezes over. However, each year the time the lake is frozen seems to be decreasing and the district then incurs extremely high transportation costs to transport students on the local ferry. We do not receive any transportation aid to help defray this very expensive mode of transportation.

We would respectfully ask the legislature change the context of the statute that provides support for transportation over ice to include water in any form (liquid, solid, etc.). This

amendment would not be a huge burden as only two school districts in the state would be eligible to claim the aid. Yet such an amendment would greatly help reduce our unique transportation costs.

Again, thank you for addressing the issues confronting rural school districts. Your efforts to work with area administrators to find viable solutions is greatly appreciated. Please contact me at 617 646-9076 or Dr. David Aslyn at 715 779-3201 if you need additional information or clarification.

Sincerely,

Linda L. Kunelius
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