



School District of Osceola

Mark Luebker Superintendent of Schools

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Board of Education

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Brooke Kulzer, Director

Thank you members of the Joint Committee on Finance for offering me the opportunity to testify today regarding the 2019-21 biennial budget. My name is Brooke Kulzer, and I am School Board Member from the Osceola School District in the beautiful St Croix River Valley. Osceola School District has 1695 students K-12 and received a DPI State report card score for the district of 85.2, or "significantly exceeds expectations". Our Village prides itself on our amazing schools and exceptional students. And while we shine as a District that Exceeds Expectations, we quietly struggle financially.

Our school board, even when I was a student in the district, was always looking ahead. Our district was a low spending district when Wisconsin Act 16 implemented *revenue limits* beginning with the 1993-94 school year. They essentially were locked into that low spending ever since. The board did their jobs of managing their budget, solving financial problems, and making cuts. We have a skeleton support staff, almost all hired as part-time employees to avoid the additional cost of escalating health care costs. We have drastically reduced benefits for our staff and drastically reduced our Other Post Employment Benefits. We have cut and cut and cut.

The board tried to live within their means and identified that the district needed to go to Operational Referendum in 2017. Our referendum failed because of a torn community. We had citizens illegally stuffing mailboxes with false and inaccurate information. And shortly after that the WI legislature enacted 2017 Wisconsin Act 141 and our per pupil funding was frozen. We were punished for a failed referendum AFTER it failed. So the board cut \$850,000 worth of teachers, supplies and staff to make a balanced budget. And it was soon identified that we would need to go to operational referendum once again. This occurred again in April 2019 after many discussions with our tax payers, staff, and stakeholders. Our referendum once again failed, a community torn. We are beginning, once again, to cut another million from our Fund 10.

Our school has done a fantastic job of planning for the future. Our school has had amazing educators doing great work daily. But we won't be able to keep these educators, and keep our kids at the top of the state with their results without resources. We struggle to add much needed staff without knowing what our state funding will be for the fiscal year starting in just 3 months. We need a school resource officer to help build relationships with those struggling students. We need to offer professional development to ensure our staff are prepared to handle the ever changing mental health needs of our students. We struggle with families in mental health crises. These vulnerable families often lack health care resources to address their students' needs. As a result, the schools become the health care and mental health care providers for families. We DO NOT have the resources to handle these needs.

I am hopeful at the work that the Blue Ribbon Commission on School funding can achieve to equalize school funding across the state. It is time that the state re-evaluate the funding formula, and make it equitable for all students. For that is the basis of public education, educating ALL students.
Thank you for time.

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**Home of the
Chieftains**

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Osceola Middle School – 1029 Oak Ridge Drive – 715-294-4180
Osceola Intermediate School – 949 Education Avenue – 715-294-2800
Osceola Elementary School – 250 Tenth Avenue East – 715-294-3457
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