



Mequon-Thiensville School District
City of Mequon and Village of Thiensville

5000 W. Mequon Rd., Mequon, WI 53092
Phone: 262-238-8500, Fax: 262-238-8520
www.mtsd.k12.wi.us

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Demond A. Means, Ed.D., Superintendent
dmeans@mtsd.k12.wi.us

April 20, 2015

Dear Mequon-Thiensville School District Families and Community,

The Mequon-Thiensville School District is seeking the assistance of community members and, most importantly, parents/guardians, to advocate on behalf of our students to Governor Walker and our local state legislators. Governor Walker's proposed budget bill, released two months ago, jeopardizes the district's ability to continue to provide students with the educational experiences and opportunities that have allowed us to become the best K-12 school district in Wisconsin for two consecutive years.

The governor has proposed eliminating \$150 per student in categorical aid, which would create a \$520,000 budget shortfall in our district budget next school year. The recommendation to reduce funding to public schools on the heels of the governor's 2011-2013 budget, which inflicted the largest budget cuts to public schools in Wisconsin history, is very concerning. Worse yet, the governor's proposal does not increase the revenue cap — the mechanism that allows public schools to generate revenue for ongoing operational costs. The loss of any inflationary increase in the revenue limit allowed per pupil would also create a \$200,000 loss of revenue for the school district for next year.

Ever since revenue caps were imposed in the 1993-1994 school year, elected school boards and the communities they serve have had their ability to adjust the tax levy to meet community expectations for a high-quality educational experience stripped away. As a result, MTSD has faced a decade-long challenge to combat budget shortfalls, retain valuable programs and maintain our faculty, and many positions had to be cut due to these budget shortfalls. In short, the flawed state funding formula has made it difficult to operate schools that allow teachers and students to reach their full social, emotional and academic potential.

In addition to the potentially harmful provisions to the funding of public school districts, the governor's budget recommends phasing out the state's first parental choice program, Chapter 220. This is a voluntary desegregation program that reduces the burden of taxpayers by decreasing the overall tax levy. During the 2013-14 school year, the Mequon-Thiensville School District received \$870,000 in general state aid as a result of Chapter 220. The elimination of the program would result in taxes increasing approximately \$0.05/\$1000 of equalization valuation over the next five years. Moreover, it is an important program that has assisted in desegregating the entire Milwaukee metropolitan area — including Mequon-Thiensville.

The most concerning element of the governor's proposed budget is an expansion of the experimental and unproven voucher program. In other words, the proposal reduces opportunities for families that have chosen public schools in favor of investing in voucher schools that are not evaluated for quality like MTSD and other area public schools statewide.

If you are as concerned as we are about Governor Walker's budget proposal, there are action steps you can take, including:

1. Contacting the governor's office and sharing your support for restoring the \$150 per-student categorical aid and raising the revenue cap for both years of the 2015-2017 state budget.
2. Composing a letter to your local state legislators to express your support for restoring the \$150 per-student categorical aid and raising the revenue cap for the duration of the 2015-2017 state budget.
3. Composing a letter to Governor Walker and your local state legislators urging them to preserve the Chapter 220 program.

Although we are requesting advocacy at this point in the process, it is vital to point out that Governor Walker's budget proposal is just that — a proposal. The next step in the process is that the Committee on Joint Finance will convene soon to thoroughly vet the entire state budget. It is the responsibility of this committee to weigh the needs and concerns of all stakeholders across the state. Fortunately, State Senator Alberta Darling, who represents Mequon-Thiensville in the legislature, is the co-chair of this powerful committee. As you consider communicating with our local state legislators, please keep in mind that our local state senator has a direct impact on the final drafting of the state budget.

Noting that we are still early in the process, Governor Walker has indicated in public statements that he is willing to invest more into K-12 education if state revenue is favorable after April tax collections are received and accounted for. Thus, there is reason for guarded optimism.

Preserving a high-quality public school district is a responsibility that all of the educators in the Mequon-Thiensville School District take seriously. It is seldom that we ask for your help in advocating for our schools, but the current situation calls for your assistance. It is important to let our elected officials know that an investment in public education strengthens Wisconsin's economic future. Please join me in standing up for our children.

Respectfully,



Demond A. Means, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools