



CHEQUAMEGON SCHOOL DISTRICT

"The Home of the Screaming Eagles"

DISTRICT OFFICE
David G. Anderson
District Administrator

420 Ninth Street North
Park Falls, WI 54552

715.762.2474
715.762.5469 (fax)

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Representative Rob Swearingen
Room 19 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Representative Fred Clark
Room 122 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Re: Rural Schools Task Force

Dear Representatives Swearingen and Clark and Members of the Rural Schools Task Force:

Thank you for your interest and investigation of the conditions and challenges that rural schools in Wisconsin face. Slightly less than half the K-12 students in Wisconsin attend school in rural districts and these rural districts face significant challenges not faced by other districts. The Chequamegon District was formed because the citizens of Park Falls and Glidden recognized that the increasing challenges they both faced would make the continued existence of either district alone questionable at best. The consolidation that created the Chequamegon District in 2009 did make it easier for both communities to continue to provide quality instruction to our students.

As we leave the 5 year consolidation next year we will face some hard realities that once again will make it more and more challenging to provide an education that will produce students that are college and career ready. Among the challenges we will face are:

- Declining enrollment. When the district was created in 2009 one of the primary motivators was the declining student enrollment in both districts. When the two districts consolidated in 2009 the Park Falls district had dropped from 983 students in 1996 to 733 immediately prior to consolidation. With consolidation the enrollment came back up to 861 with the addition of Glidden students. However the downward trend has continued so that enrollment this year stands at 767 with declining enrollment expected to continue for the foreseeable future. As long as state aid to public schools is based strictly on a per capita basis, rural schools will continue to be at a disadvantage in providing a quality education to its students. We need declining enrollment relief.
- Transportation Costs. While the district has experienced some efficiencies of scale in entering into the consolidation, transportation is not one of them. The district's area, at over 740 square miles, makes us

one of the largest districts in the state. Transportation costs are significant and inescapable. Our costs are \$726.60 per student and we receive \$78.98 per student in transportation aid. We have 10 bus routes covering the district and some students spend 90 minutes on the bus twice a day. Any further increase in the size of the school district to achieve more efficiencies would not be practical.

- Student Poverty. The number of students living in poverty in our district has increased in the last four years. Currently, above 50% of our students are identified as living in poverty. Students who come from backgrounds of poverty can perform as well as any other student, however they have challenges that we need to address in order to have them perform at their best. However, poverty is a roadblock to things such as use of technology for learning at their home.
- Technology. We have dedicated significant resources to providing computers to each student from grades 3-12. Digital learning is becoming more and more ubiquitous as it should be if we are to prepare our students for the working lives they will live working in jobs that do not yet even exist. In order to maintain our work in this area and continue to grow in use of technology, we support the School Administrators Alliance proposals to create a state aid program that would support funding of technology initiatives. This will be especially important if we lose the affordability of bandwidth through Wiscnet. We also support a revenue limit exemption for school technology needs for the same reasons. Categorical aid providing incentives for rural schools to offer on line advanced placement courses and other courses that small rural schools find prohibitive to provide would be a positive move to put small rural schools on a more level playing field with larger suburban and urban districts.
- Recruitment and Retention of Quality Staff. Being a small district in a rural setting at the northwest corner of the state puts us at a significant disadvantage in attracting and retaining quality teaching staff. The creation of incentives, such as student loan forgiveness and funds for signing bonuses, would be very helpful in achieving this goal.
- Sparsity Aid. Although we are perhaps the district with the fewest number of students per square mile, we do not qualify for sparsity aid because we are slightly larger in student population than the student enrollment cutoff for qualifying for this aid. Raising or eliminating this artificial qualifier and eliminating the free and reduced lunch qualifier would help us to realize the aid that recognizes the additional costs incurred by a district due to the low density of student population. Those costs are still there for a district whether they are slightly above or below the enrollment cutoff.

These and other challenges make it difficult for us to provide the best possible education for our students. Thank you for your consideration in looking at ways we can address those challenges in the future..

Sincerely,



David G. Anderson
District Administrator