

My name is Rick Eloranta a school board member at Owen – Withee Public Schools. I have served for 12 years. In that time I have participated on DPI boards, the CESA 10 Board of Control, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, as president, and many other education related capacities. I have seen firsthand what tightening resources have done to Owen – Withee and schools like ours.

Owen – Withee is a rural district in the center of the state of about 530 students – down from 630 when I started.

Our free and reduced lunch has gone from about 40% to 57%.

We have only 3.3 students per square resulting in a high per pupil expenditure for transportation.

In the past 3 years we have cut 5 teaching positions and reduced the number of teachers aids.

Our Superintendent of Schools now serves as our Jr/Sr High Principal.

We also rely on fewer people to do the work required in custodial and food service.

Based on our best estimates we will receive \$82,000 less next year with the proposed state budget.

Even with those cuts we are asked to do more every year with fewer resources. We must implement the Common Core Standards, the new Educator Effectiveness program and a new accountability system. At our board meeting this week, teachers reported on their significant efforts to implement a Response To Intervention system. This important work just cannot be done with less resources

An easy financial measure would be to cut a program. Monday we approved the retirement of our long time band director. Since it is not a core subject we could drop band and fill the hole in our budget, but our board strongly supports a wide and rich curriculum and we will fill that position. Up to now we have preserved programs by shaving everywhere and we are now at the point of reducing opportunities for student. We were very fortunate to find a teacher who has dual certification and is able to head up the Ag department, be the adviser for our FFA program and provide 21<sup>st</sup> century training in Tech Ed. I think we all realize that we cannot rely on the rural education community being so fortunate in having such individuals available.

This year nearly \$50,000 of state aid destined for Owen-Withee was redirected to the voucher program. Expanding the use of vouchers will only reduce the choices for our students as we respond to tighter budgets. The School Boards of Clark County have been collaborating in an effort to bring best practices to our schools. Everything has been on the table – from consolidation to a jointly maintained charter school. There are real and significant hurdles no matter which way we turn, but the idea of an independently chartered school taking more money from the public system only exacerbates a difficult situation. I know it is easy to paint with a broad brush and somehow forget all our public schools do for our youth, our businesses and all of our futures. We need to reaffirm our commitment and investment in our public schools and the 870,000 students we serve.