



**Shorewood**  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Office of the Superintendent**

1701 E. Capitol Dr.

Shorewood, WI 53211

414.963.6901

[www.shorewoodschoools.org](http://www.shorewoodschoools.org)

April 24, 2019

Dear Members of the Joint Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Paru Shah and I am the School Board President of the Shorewood School District. With me today is a team that represents a broad representation of our community. Fifth and Sixth Grade Teacher and Shorewood Education Association President Amy Miller; Parent, Businessman and Student and Family Advocate Abe Goldberg, and School Superintendent Dr. Bryan Davis. We are here today to not only represent the students and parents of the Shorewood School District, but to advocate for support of the services needed by students and families across the state of Wisconsin. Our advocacy comes with two areas of focus: 1) Support for the per pupil increase of \$200/\$204 in the proposed 2019-2021 State of Wisconsin Budget, 2) Support for the increase in Special Education Funding Reimbursement from the current level of 24% to at least 60%. This funding is especially important as we attempt to increase our support for our students growing mental health needs.

**Amy Miller** - Our public schools either prepare and graduate productive, tax paying citizens who strengthen our communities or we exit students who continue to struggle as young adults because we cannot provide the services needed to support their mental health needs.

Over the course of my career, I have watched my fifth and sixth grade students come with more mental health challenges each year that prevent them from accessing the curriculum. In 2013, I lost a former student, Abby Goldberg to suicide, she had just turned 13. Wisconsin's youth suicide rate has doubled from 2007 to 2015. We struggle as a system to meet the mental health needs of our students and their families. To address these needs, it costs money we simply do not have.

**Abe Goldberg** - My name is Abe Goldberg. Our daughter Abby was the student Amy mentioned earlier that died by suicide at the age of 13. Abby the youngest of three children, was an A student, talented musician and a competitive swimmer. As board members and field advocates for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), my wife Beverly and I recently met with Governor Evers' office as well as Speaker Vos' office to advocate for mental health care reform in Wisconsin. As you may be aware, in Wisconsin, suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among youth ages 10-19. On behalf of AFSP we are offering our support to Speaker Vos New Task Force on Suicide Prevention, as well Governor Evers proposed increased budget for mental health care support in schools. Part of the work with the Speakers task force will be to look for resources to support local school districts for early detection and support for students struggling with mental health needs. Our requests for resources between increasing our per pupil and special education funding in our schools would be a strong start to addressing students and family's needs. Thank you!



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**Bryan Davis** - The dramatically shifting landscape in our special education and mental health responsibilities to students and families has had a direct result on us in Shorewood. The amount of resources diverted from our general operations to fund Special Education has grown from nearly \$2 million to almost \$2.7 million over the past eight years. To account for this cost, we have had to make reductions from other areas of the budget to stay in compliance with state and federal law. An increase in Special Education Categorical Aid to a level of at least 60% reimbursement is crucial for our District to continue servicing our Special Education students while not jeopardizing the supports in mental health and other educational opportunities our students need to be successful.

Times have changed and our funding for our schools, specifically for servicing our special education students and students with needs for mental health support, needs to accurately reflect our needs. I urge you to invest in our public schools now in two ways, support the \$200/\$204 per pupil increase AND provide at least 60% of the special education reimbursement costs. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Paru Shah

Amy Miller

Abe Goldberg

Bryan Davis