

To: House Education Committee
From: Danielle Corti, Board Chair, Oxbow Unified Union School District
Re: District Budget
Date: April 24, 2020

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I am testifying on the behalf of the Oxbow Unified Union School District. I would like to focus my testimony on four areas that I feel are essential to providing equality and stability within our community and across the state.

- 1- Access to food and services for children
- 2- Equity of education and supports
- 3- Employment impacts within our communities.
- 4- Community engagement and our commitment to the unification process.

First, I would like to address the food access for children. In our current budget we included Provision II for our district. At the time we felt it was a great opportunity to provide an equal playing field for all of the students. Poverty and lack of access creates significant obstacles for many of our families in our district. It is our concern that in the current economic situation that this program would not be supported. It was our goal to bring this program to our voters in order to start the conversation about how to best support our students. If we are not able to have a vote we would more than likely cut this from the budget. Even though we feel that it is at this time that it would be most beneficial to the students and families in our district. Having access to food would help to alleviate stress of food insecurity and some financial burdens for families. If we are required to operate under level funding from 2020 we would have to scrap the idea of doing Provision II. However if we are allowed to move forward with either the ability to work under 2020s budget +4% with the ability to have a vote or the ability to move forward with our current proposed budget this would allow us to provide what we consider to be an essential service to our communities.

Regarding equity of education and supports due to the fact that we operate under a state wide education fund we feel that it is imperative that as a district are we able to operate on a level playing field with the rest of the districts in the state. If we are not able to work with a budget that is comparable to other district budgets it puts our students at a grave disadvantage. If we are forced to work with a level funding budget the few positions that we added in our warned budget would need to be removed. These positions were math support, social worker and added Art instruction (all of these were adding time to existing positons not hiring full time). We designed our budget around addressing the needs of our communities. If we have to work with a level budget that requires a further reduction in force we would not only be ignoring what we see as current needs but we would be sending our students back to school in buildings that have very low morale and are understaffed. This would come at a time when services and supports are going to be of utmost importance. Our students, families and staff are going to need extra supports and services to help with the transition back to the new normal. Whatever that may look like.

This brings me to my third point if we do have to do a reduction in force this will have multi levels of impact in our communities. It will of course have a direct impact on the ability to

service our students and families. It will also have an immediate impact on the morale of the teachers and staff. It is also important to point out that reduction in force will have a more indirect impact on our communities. Our school district is one of the larger employers in our area. If we are forced to reduce our staff these members would no longer get health insurance and benefit coverage and neither would their spouses and family members who currently receive coverage under them. This is you know creates a snowball effect having multiple areas of our community dramatically impacted in a negative way. At this time we are relying heavily on our teachers and staff to provide extraordinarily meaningful connections with our students and families while creating a new platform to provide education. To have to turn around and make sweeping reductions would be extremely harmful to the environment that the students and staff are required to work in.

Lastly, I want to address the fact that as a board we have been working hard to embrace the unification process brought on by act 46. We are in the beginnings of learning how to share resources and work together to create a better more equal learning environment for all of the children in our area. We have worked each year to contain per pupil spending and budget in a responsible and thoughtful way. So having to make drastic cuts at this time would be extremely detrimental to the district and our communities. It's also concerning that at a time when we are working hard to gain community trust and encourage engagement we would not be able have a community vote. That in order to get the funding we feel is necessary to operate our district responsibly we would need to forfeit our community vote. Our ideal situation would be to be able to move forward with our current budget that we proposed and allow our community to vote on that budget at a future date.

In summary we would be supportive of:

- 1-Allowing districts to operate with the 2020 budget plus at least a 4% increase and allow a vote once a process has been established.
- 2- Allowing us to run with our currently warned budget as a provisional budget with ability to vote once a process has been established.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Thank you for all your work for our communities and state during these unbelievably uncertain times.

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