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To Gov. Scott Walker and the Wisconsin Legislature:

It is an honor to represent our excellent school districts in this great state of Wisconsin and by so doing we wish to send you a collective perspective about our vision of all public schools.

Together, our school districts serve to prepare students to be thoughtful, contributing members of society. We are proud of our traditions and bold about how we intend to improve our schools. We are grateful for the contributions of students, teachers, administrators, support staff, community members, business partners, parents, school board members and other citizens who have helped build strong foundations for learning in our communities. From this position of strength, we recognize that the most crucial resources we steward are the ongoing financial, emotional and human support that our communities provide to our school districts to inspire all students to reach their own personal and academic success.

We also believe that America's public education system is built on the belief that a nation dedicated to self government and the preservation of liberty will not endure without the intelligence and vigilance of the governed. America is unique in that its public schools make and deliver on the bold promise to freely educate all children regardless of wealth, religion, race, gender, ability or citizenship. We are committed to protecting this precious legacy. We believe that a strong public education is the most direct means of creating an informed citizenry necessary to sustain democracy. Public education gives individuals the skills they need to live the life they imagine and to realize their dreams. Public education is the cornerstone of healthy, engaged communities. It is essential to maintaining a thriving American economy capable of operating in a competitive global marketplace. It is the foundation upon which a free and open society rests. Strong public education is a springboard for our communities as they plan for a promising future.

As leaders of public schools, we believe in the power of a collective vision to mobilize individuals in our communities to effect positive change in their lives. We embrace continuous school improvement efforts to ensure that all students reach their full potential. To that end, we support state assessments for accountability and transparency, attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers and school leaders and creating a consistent equitable funding plan for Wisconsin.

We ask that you join us in partnership to address some of the significant challenges that we face in our schools and communities:

- Increasing poverty rates.
- Growing numbers of English Language Learners.

- Increasing transient and homeless populations.
- Expanding achievement gap for minority students and students with disabilities.
- Declining or flat student enrollment.
- Attracting and retaining highly qualified teaching and administrative staff.
- Increasing high transportation costs for rural areas.
- Aging school facilities with ongoing maintenance needs.
- Struggling economic regions in business and industry.

We do not support the proposed budget and we believe it needs to be adjusted to meet the needs of today's learners. Our school districts have been reducing and eliminating programs and resources for the past 10 years. We are burdened by the cumulative effects of budget cuts as demonstrated by our aging school facilities with deferred maintenance and improvements, while also understanding the importance of keeping pace with technology demands and providing necessary support services for students. Our districts are struggling to maintain our current educational and co-curricular programs, while recognizing that we need to expand educational opportunities and choices for students and families.

We know that building world-class public school districts takes time and great effort. The children and citizens of our communities deserve our best efforts and our state's full commitment. We respectfully request that educators and school leaders be a part of this important dialogue in Madison. It is imperative that we address these challenges together as we redefine excellence in education in our communities and across Wisconsin.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our collective perspective. We look forward to working with our governor and Legislature to assure the successful education of Wisconsin's children and youth, for it is both our highest priority and privilege to do so.

Sincerely,

*Crystal Ritzenthaler, Baraboo School District; Bryan Davis, Columbus School District; Kellie Manning, Fall River School District; David Dyb, Iola-Scandinavia School District; Charles Pursell, Lodi School District; Deirdre Wells, Marshfield School District; Christine Weymouth, Mauston School District; Larry Gierach, Necedah School District; Terry Reynolds, Pittsville School District; Pat Sullivan, Port Edwards School District; Charles Poches, Portage School District; Tom Benson, Reedsburg School District; Mark McGuire, Rio School District; Tom Wermuth, River Valley School District; Cliff Thompson, Sauk Prairie School District; Attila J. Weninger, Stevens Point Area Public School District; Jeff Kasuboski, Wautoma School District; John Eyerly, Westfield School District; and Terrance Slack, Wisconsin Dells School District*