You may have read that the state of Wisconsin biennial budget contains record investing in schools. This sounds great, but you need to know “the rest of the story.” As I’ve written about in the past, we have two main sources of funding for the school district, state aid and local property taxes. If we assume that our total budget remains the same, when one of these sources of revenue goes up, the other comes down. This is due to revenue caps that have been in place for over 20 years that limit the amount of revenue a district can receive per student based on their spending in 1993. Cornell was a very low spending school district in 1993, so we have been locked into a lower revenue limit ever since.

The budget that was approved by the assembly and senate did provide record investing toward schools, and every year should be a record as inflation continues to go up. The part that has not been highlighted is that the budget does not provide for an increase in the revenue cap. This means we can’t collect more money per student either of the next two years in state aid and local property taxes. So what does this “record investment in schools” mean? It means that since state aid is going up, local property taxes will be going down as we will not be allowed to increase our budget.

In compounding this problem, since revenue limits are based on the number of students, and fewer students attended school last year through the pandemic, our total revenue will go down. Of course the loss of students wasn’t significant enough at any grade level to reduce staff, so our budget will get squeezed even tighter. While your board has been able to balance the budget for many years, there will come a day when they will no longer be able to do this unless enrollments go up and/or the state increases the revenue limit to be more in line with what the average district receives in revenue per student.

This state budget for education is the worst one for the Cornell School District over the 19 years I have been here.