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The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) is a statewide, independent, membership-based organization of educators, school board members, students, parents, community leaders, researchers, citizens, and community activists whose lone goal is the comprehensive reform of Wisconsin's school-funding system. If you would like more information about the organization -- or on becoming part of WAES -- contact Tom Beebe at 920-650-0525 or [tbeebe@excellentschools.org](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org).

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### **Governor Doyle gets involved in school-funding reform discussion**

After his budget message (see next story), at a meeting with the Wisconsin State Journal editorial board, Governor Jim Doyle released a broad outline of a school-funding reform plan he wants to have before the Legislature in the fall (<http://www.madison.com/wsj/mad/top/439591>). "Where I'm heading on this is a system by which school districts are able to come out from under the caps but they can do it only with a pathway," said Doyle.

The Governor's pathway includes districts joining together for collective bargaining; making employees move to the state health insurance or cheaper plan; requiring districts to use best practices to increase student achievement; and providing compensation for teachers that better reflects the needs of individual schools such as those in rural districts that struggle to attract teachers for some subjects."

Most school-funding reform advocates, including WAES, have taken a wait-and-see attitude, praising the Governor for entering the school-funding discussion but needing more details to react. One thing is certain, WAES members and others interested in school-funding reform should celebrate a huge victory because we have been fighting to get to this point for years: The Governor, the Legislature, and education stakeholders are all talking about changing the way we fund public schools. Congratulations!

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### **Governor's budget helps schools keep their heads above water**

With bad economic news raging all over the state and nation, no one expected much to

cheer about in Governor Jim Doyle's budget address, Tuesday night. Despite the fact that there wasn't much good news, WAES thanked the Governor for doing what he could and pledged to continue to work for comprehensive school-funding reform.

To read the full reaction of WAES, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org>. Check your local media for reaction or go to The Wheeler Report (<http://www.thewheelerreport.com>) and WisPolitics.com (<http://www.wispolitics.com>) for a full range of coverage and reaction to the Governor's address (<http://thewheelerreport.com/releases/Feb09/feb17/0217doylebudgetspeech.pdf>).

WAES is a member of the School Finance Network (SFN at <http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>). The coalition's official reaction was delivered by Penny Larson, president of the Wisconsin PTA (<http://www.wisconsinpta.org/>), a WAES member. Larson said that the SFN "plan to change the way public schools are funded in Wisconsin offers a good platform for further discussion on an important statewide issue that seeks to preserve Wisconsin's tradition of providing a quality education to students."

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## **Funding reform effort gaining steam around the state**

Gloomy economic news and budget shortfalls are nothing new to Wisconsin's public schools that have lived with capped revenues for 15 years. For that reason -- and because thriving public schools can help lead the way out of economic recession -- members of the School Finance Network (SFN) continued to talk about funding reform.

Since the plan was rolled out at 10 locations around the state earlier this month, the coalition continues to answer critics, talk to editorial boards, and get ready for working with legislators. WAES member Kathy Zingsheim, a West Allis-West Milwaukee School District parent, recently answered critics (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/39337647.html>) who mischaracterized the plan in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Zingsheim said it is easy to be a naysayer and say no to everything, while it is much more difficult to look for solutions to serious problems. The SFN plan, she said, is a good answer for kids.

The next focus for SFN and WAES members is a hearing before the Assembly Education Committee

(<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/CommPages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Assembly>) at 1 p.m. on March 24. The session will be held in Room 413 North in the State Capitol. Committee chair Rep. Sindy Pope-Roberts (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=79>), Middleton, promised the hearing in comments ([http://www.excellentschools.org/events/SFN/pr\\_comments\\_mps.pdf](http://www.excellentschools.org/events/SFN/pr_comments_mps.pdf)) she delivered on behalf of the SFN reform plan before the Milwaukee Public Schools Board of Directors and at a network press conference. **WAES members should plan now to attend the hearing and, if asked, be ready to testify.**

To learn more about what you can do to be involved in the reform effort, go to the School Finance Network website at <http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>.

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## **WAES doing good work, but needs your financial support**

WAES is going forward with SFN to make sure that the school-funding reform crisis is addressed by our elected representatives in Madison. We are working closely with our new partners to make sure the Assembly Education Committee hears from folks all over the state when they meet on March 24. Additionally, WAES will lead the effort (<http://www.excellentschools.org/events/SFN/SFNrollout.htm>) to organize communities to work with their legislators to achieve our goal.

While WAES continues to work for the SFN plan, we are also working to make it better. The SFN plan is a compromise and that compromise got us where we are today ... a place we haven't been in a decade ... at the table and talking about change. WAES does think, however, the SFN plan can be made better and will continue to work for important improvements.

In order to keep doing its important work, including educational outreach to communities around the state, WAES needs your financial support. Check our membership page (<http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm>) and, if your district isn't a member, do what you can to bring them on board. If you belong to a union, group, or organization that isn't a WAES member, do what you can to get them to sign on. And, if you as an individual aren't a member, join now. Contact me or go to the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and click "Join WAES."

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## **Two new members join WAES; 11 renew memberships**

And, when you join WAES, you join an excellent core of organizations and individuals who are working toward the same goal ... reforming Wisconsin's school-finance system. Go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm> to see who you'll be "hanging around with."

Joining WAES since the last e-mail update were Jill Gaskell, from Blanchardville, and the New Auburn School District.

Those renewing their memberships were the Wisconsin Organization for Asian Americans; the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association; the Northern Tier Uniserv of WEAC; the Racine Area Retired Educators Association; the school districts of Stevens Point, Superior, and Washington Island; Donna Tarpinian, Kathy Zingsheim, Doug Lueck, and Carol Carstensen.

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## **HOPE plan making rounds of Legislature again this session**

WAES has always believed that the best way to lower property taxes is to ... well, lower property taxes and not limit critical and necessary revenues intended for public schools. In other words, just lower the property tax and increase the state's share of what is, after all, its constitutional obligation.

According to the Wisconsin Radio Network's website (<http://www.wrn.com/gestalt/go.cfm?objectid=29009BAD-5056-B82A-37CFC9DB349E2162>), Sen. Dave Hansen (Green Bay) will reintroduce the HOPE plan - the Homeowner Property Tax Exemption. It is a constitutional amendment that would exempt the first \$60,000 of a home's value from school-based property taxes.

The plan, known as SJR 7 (<http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/2009/data/SJR7hst.html>), is also being introduced in the Assembly by Rep. Jim Soletski (Green Bay). The proposal, as a constitutional amendment, would have to pass two consecutive sessions of the Legislature and then go to a statewide referendum.

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### **New study shows benefits to Wisconsin of combined reporting**

Speaking of changes in Wisconsin tax policy that reflect fairness, the Institute for Wisconsin's Future (IWF at <http://www.wisconsinfuture.org>) has released a new study showing how the adoption of combined reporting will benefit the state in multiple ways. Combined reporting closes tax law loopholes that allow very large, multi-state corporations to shift profits out of the Badger State.

IWF's study -- *Combined Reporting: How Closing Corporate Loopholes Benefits Wisconsin* -- shows a number of advantages to combined reporting. It could expand state revenue by more than \$200 million by mid-2011 ... funds that could help fund needed programs and services, including public schools. Also, the measure will level the playing field between local businesses that pay their share of taxes versus their large, multi-state corporate competitors who don't.

IWF is a non-profit research and public education organization based in Glendale. Its work is funded primarily by national philanthropies.

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### **Norman talks school-funding reform on Milwaukee Public Radio**

Speaking of IWF, research director Jack Norman has described Wisconsin's school-funding system as "mathematically elegant." He said it's like buying a used car that you figure will get you by for five years. The problem is that you are now into your 16th year with the same car that is now a wreck. That, he says, describes the state system.

Norman was talking with LaToya Dennis of WUWM Milwaukee Public Radio ([http://www.wuwm.com/programs/news/view\\_news.php?articleid=4222](http://www.wuwm.com/programs/news/view_news.php?articleid=4222)). He said there are two major problems with the system. The first is that state aid is based on a district's property wealth, which doesn't "tell the whole story about the people who live there." He described districts in northern Wisconsin that are property wealthy "because they have lakes that are high priced resort land, but the year round residents are actually low income." Those districts get little state aid and have to rely on higher property taxes for a quality education.

The second problem Norman talked about was revenue caps that limit the amount of money districts can raise and spend on kids. The problem, he explained, is that it creates a "built-in deficit." On average, school districts can increase their revenue by around three percent, but they've needed at least four percent to keep programming and services from year to year.

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## **School-funding reform news from around Wisconsin**

One more Wisconsin media outlet has joined the call for radically changing Wisconsin's school-funding system. In an editorial from Feb. 19 (<http://www.wiscnews.com/spe/news/439277>), *Sauk Prairie Eagle* editor Todd Krysiak says "it's time to place the QEO and revenue cap system on the scrap heap and return control of our public schools to those who are most familiar with their districts -- local school boards." Krysiak says we have to pay attention to the problem because "teaching positions, extra-curricular activities, and plenty of other school functions likely will be on the school board chopping blocks across the state in coming weeks."

Earlier this month, the type of news Krysiak was talking about made headlines in the *Wausau Daily Herald*: "Possible layoffs of 21 Merrill teachers could increase class sizes (<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20090206/WDH0101/90206075/1981>)."

About half of the layoffs are tied directly to the future of the SAGE program, that is designed to help children from poverty. Ultimately, the layoff notices hinge on the next state budget that was released earlier this week and doesn't promise much relief if any for public schools.

It appears likely that voters in the Paris school district will be asked, in April, to approve a referendum exceeding school-funding revenue limits to help the district close what is projected to be a \$450,000 budget shortfall for the 2009-10 school year (<http://www.kenoshanews.com/paris/index.php>). At a meeting last week, some residents suggested cutting non-mandated programs. Superintendent Roger Garhart said such action would save only \$36,700. In the past, school board members had used the district's fund balance to fill the gap, but the amount remaining is only about half of the projected deficit.

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## **Get involved in budget process at WCCF 2009 Advocacy Camp**

If you want to get intimately involved in the Wisconsin's budget process, the Wisconsin Council of Children and Families (WCCF at <http://www.wccf.org>) has an opportunity for you. The group's 2009 Advocacy Camp will be held March 17-18 at Grace Episcopal Church, 116 West Washington Avenue, in Madison.

This is interactive, hands-on training that will include numerous simulations, role-plays, small group work, and presentations from guest speakers. Training will cover an overview of the legislative and budget process; a presentation on how to prepare a campaign; tips for building a grassroots network; thoughts on how to deal with media; and training on how to communicate with and educate policymakers. You will be able to

put your new skills to work immediately by joining WCCF "Advocacy Day at the Capitol" on March 18.

The registration deadline is Feb. 27. To get involved go to  
[http://www.wccf.org/event\\_advocacy\\_camp\\_2009.php](http://www.wccf.org/event_advocacy_camp_2009.php).

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### **Help WAES correct e-mail update glitch**

Some of you receiving this e-mail update are frustrated by the way it arrives -- endlessly long lines that are patience-trying to read. Hopefully we can help each other out.

As of now, only a handful of subscribers are suffering with this glitch. If you receive these endless lines, let me know and I will send you a text version that seems to take care of the problem.

Also, if you know how to fix it, let me know at [tbeebe@excellentschools.org](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org). Thanks.

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**Help us better serve you by letting us know when you change your e-mail address. In that way we can stop sending the update to the old one and switch over to the new address as soon as possible.**

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### **School-funding reform calendar**

- March 9 -- Community meeting on the 2009-11 state budget, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Beloit Memorial High School (<http://www.sdb.k12.wi.us/memorial/>) cafeteria, 1225 4th Street, Beloit; for more information, contact Joe Fahey at 414-967-1682
- March 10 -- Lobby Day sponsored by the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association (<http://www.wsswa.org/>), 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., meeting at the Madison Masonic Center, 301 Wisconsin Avenue, and moving to the State Capitol
- March 12 -- Community meeting to discuss the 2009-11 state budget, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., Chase Bank community room, 4702 South Packard Avenue, Cudahy, sponsored by South Shore Citizens for a Prosperous Future; for more information, contact Joe Fahey at 414-967-1682
- March 16 -- School-funding reform discussion with the Dunn County Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net/>), noon, at the Moose Lodge 1584, 720 19th Avenue East, in Menomonie (<http://www.menomonie.com/>)
- March 17-18 -- 2009 Advocacy Camp, sponsored by the Wisconsin Council of Children and Families (WCCF at <http://www.wccf.org/>), Grace Episcopal Church (<http://www.graceec.org/>), 116 West Washington Avenue, Madison; register at [http://www.wccf.org/event\\_advocacy\\_camp\\_2009.php](http://www.wccf.org/event_advocacy_camp_2009.php)
- March 22 -- School-funding forum, as part of the Multiple ViewUUS Forum series, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at the Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church (<http://www.obuuc.org/>), 625 College Avenue, Racine (<http://www.cityofracine.org/>)
- March 24 -- Informational hearing of the Assembly Education Committee (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/CommPages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Assembly>) on the school-funding reform plan



of the School Finance Network (<http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>), 1 p.m. in Room 413 North of the State Capitol

- March 30 -- Discussion of the School Finance Network (SFN at <http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>) reform plan with the Central Wisconsin School Board Consortium, Stevens Point (<http://www.spacvb.com/>), 7 p.m. at the P.J. Jacobs Junior High School Cafeteria (<http://www.wisp.k12.wi.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=18&PHPSESID=97d66aee7a8153f1832f94b113cdf739>), 2400 Main Street
- April 16 -- School-funding reform discussion with members of the Richland Area Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net/>), 9:30 a.m. at the Country Kitchen Restaurant in the Ramada Inn ([http://www.ramada.com/Ramada/control/Booking/property\\_info?propertyId=11386&bra](http://www.ramada.com/Ramada/control/Booking/property_info?propertyId=11386&bra)), 1450 Veterans Drive, Richland Center (<http://www.richlandchamber.com/>)
- May 3-4 -- "Students leading the way to school-funding reform" sectional presentation, 9:10 a.m. on Monday, May 4, at the Senior High School State Conference ("Leadership -- Out of this World) of the Wisconsin Association of School Councils (<http://www.wasc.org/index.cfm>), Regency Suite Hotel and KI Convention Center ([http://www.hotel-sierra.com/locations/green\\_bay/default.aspx](http://www.hotel-sierra.com/locations/green_bay/default.aspx)), 333 Main Street, Green Bay (<http://www.greenbay.com/>)
- May 18 -- School-funding reform discussion with those attending the Citizens Advocacy Project, 11 a.m., Oakwood Village West ([http://www.oakwoodvillage.net/default.php?page=29#sec\\_89](http://www.oakwoodvillage.net/default.php?page=29#sec_89)), Madison, sponsored by Dane County Advocacy Network Education (for more information call 608-441-7897)

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*Please feel free to share your copy of the WAES school-funding update with anyone interested in this important public policy issue. Contact Tom Beebe at [tbeebe@excellentschools.org](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org) or 920-650-0525 for details.*

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"The moral test of a government is how it treats those who are at the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadow of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped," -- Hubert Humphrey, 197