

School-funding update

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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.

"Walk on the Child's Side" reunion event in Madison on June 16

The Beatles did it. The Beach Boys have done it, and so has Micky Dolan and the Monkees. Heck, even The Turtles did it. Now, there will be a reunion tour for the "Walk on the Child's Side," set for Madison on Tuesday, June 16.

On June 7, 1999, the first walk was sponsored by Price County Citizens Who CARE. Scores of people walked from Butternut to the steps of the Capitol calling for school-funding reform. Everything the group warned about 10 years ago is coming true today, including staff lay-offs, increasing class sizes, and cuts to programs and services. Still, state government has done little to correct what is fast becoming a crisis for many districts and children.

To find more details about the anniversary "Walk on the Child's Side" -- especially how you can get involved -- go to <http://www.excellentschools.org>.

April 21 hearing laid out funding reform plan for legislators

A hearing before the Assembly Education Committee (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/CommPages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Assembly>), April 21, was the latest indication that the school-funding reform movement has moved out of the shadows and into limelight in Wisconsin's Capitol.

The five-hour session

(http://www.sfnwisconsin.com/Assembly_Education_Committee_Hearing_April_2009_0073)

was called by committee chair Rep. SONDY POPE-ROBERTS

(<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=79>) of Middleton. During that time representatives of the School Finance Network (SFN at

<http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>) detailed for legislators a plan that solves the school-funding crisis for children all over the state. Highlighting the afternoon were folks from throughout Wisconsin—many of them members of WAES—who took time out of their busy days to talk about how the present school-funding system is limiting the opportunities of their children and the security of their communities.

You can see the full hearing on WisconsinEye
(http://www.wiseye.org/wisEye_programming/ARCHIVES-asm_committee09.html#).

WAES, IWF recognized as *Friends of Education* by WEAC

Recognizing the coalition's ability to bring "the grassroots" to the table and help "shape the school-funding debate," the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) named WAES a *Friend of Education* at its awards banquet in LaCrosse, April 27 (http://weac.org/news_and_publications/09-04-28/Education_advocates_honored_at_2009_WEAC_award_ceremony.aspx).

According to presenter Amy Miles Johnson, the award honors a "lifetime commitment to public education and school employees." WAES was credited with "helping keep the education voices in the state together in a unified call for school-funding reform."

The co-recipient of the *Friend of Education Award* was the Institute for Wisconsin's Future (IWF at <http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org>). In her comments, Johnson recognized IWF's ability to bring "people and organizations together to work for effective, compassionate public policies related to excellent schools, quality public services, a fair tax system, and family friendly initiatives." Accepting the plaque were WAES executive director Tom Beebe, IWF executive director Karen Royster, and IWF director of research Jack Norman.

Resignation, possible dissolution result from school-funding woes

Different kinds of school districts are affected in different ways by the state's school-funding system ... different ways but all bad. Recently, two very small districts in southeastern Wisconsin are under the gun and, in one, the school board president has resigned and, in the other, there is talk of dissolving the school district.

Following the defeat of a referendum to exceed revenue caps, the Salem School District Board of Education voted to move forward with a series of budget cuts for the next school year, including issuing final lay-off notices to 13 full-time teachers, reducing extra-curricular programming, increasing class sizes, and reducing programs in the arts, band, and physical education. Following the vote, Board President Patricia Merrill thanked everyone for their help and then resigned and "urged parents to work with the board and the school to help children in the district thrive despite the cuts" (http://www.kenoshanews2.com/home/cuts_hit_salem_school_4860558.html).

Down the road, the Paris School Board was dealing with similar problems and an equally damaging crisis. Based on current projections, the board heard, there will not be enough

money to operate the district by the 2010-11 school year. Although the board "hopes to come up with the additional funding to keep Paris afloat," including another referendum, members also talked about dissolving the district as early as July (http://www.kenoshanews2.com/news/paris_eyes_dissolving_district_4771263.html).

WEAC-WASDA study finds continuing cuts among districts

"The evidence is overwhelming. Schools are trying everything they can to live within the unrealistic confines of revenue controls, but Wisconsin's children are still losing educational opportunities," said Miles Turner, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) in a statement accompanying the most recent study of the impact of the formula on state schools.

WASDA and the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) compile the study annually (http://www.weac.org/Libraries/PDF/Revenue_caps_paper_07-08.sflb.ashx).

The most recent study continues to show that schools are forced to cut back on academic opportunities because they already have reduced in or eliminated other areas. Among the findings are that technical education and vocational classes are disappearing, and more than half of the districts responding said they will cut programs such as art, music, and foreign language over the next three years.

This year's study contains 39 new questions about steps districts have taken to reduce expenditures and try to save programs. Some of the results show that 94% have changed health care in some fashion; and 86% are combining jobs within districts. These types of cost-saving strategies have not been previously documented, and it is doubtful that policy makers or the public are aware what districts are doing in order to remain solvent.*****

Funding facts and figures impact real people, too

While the WEAC-WASDA study gives the facts and figures about the ill effects of the state's school-funding system, headlines in newspapers throughout Wisconsin tell the story in terms of children and their communities. Those headlines include:

- Faced with increasing expenses and a state-imposed revenue cap, the Prairie Farm School District plans to use cuts in staffing levels in order to balance its budget this fall ...
http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20307196&BRD=1132&PAG=461&dept_id=157660&rft=6.
- Meeting for the first time Monday, the new Ashland School Board promptly tackled tough business by approving a plan to trim \$121,576 from next year's budget ...
<http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2009/04/28/news/doc49f71f45476f0736657934.txt>.
- More than 100 parents, students, and residents filled the Burlington High School auditorium to listen to district officials explain more than \$840,000 in cuts ...

http://www.journaltimes.com/articles/2009/04/27/local_news/doc49f673b6baece883118594.txt.

- Trying to head off a projected \$300,000 deficit next year, the Plum City School board issued six lay-off notices ...
<http://www.piercecountyherald.com/articles/index.cfm?id=19928§ion=Education>
- The Bloomer School District has eliminated two sports teams and several teacher's aides to help balance the 2009-10 budget that showed a \$244,000 deficit ...
http://www.leadertelegram.com/story-news_local.asp?id=BJS8LPK8IQU.
- The Columbus School Board heard that almost \$305,000 worth of expenses will be cut from next school year's budget, including two complete lay-offs and several staff reassignments and realignments ... <http://www.wiscnews.com/bdc/news/447600>.

School district consolidation discussions need to be complete

As the economy deteriorates and revenue limits continue to ratchet down on Wisconsin's public schools, consolidation will be a concept talked about often in the halls of the Capitol. There is probably no way to avoid that discussion, but it needs to be held with all parties at the table and include all elements of the discussion.

There is a great deal of research that questions the amount of cost savings in the consolidation of small, rural school districts, especially those that serve a small number of pupils over a wide area. Any savings in consolidating administrators and administrative functions is gobbled up by increased transportation costs. The largest savings are in closing buildings, but that has its own ill effects on communities that lose their schools. Questions have also been raised about consolidation's negative effect on families, students, and their ability to learn.

Some of the best research on consolidation has been done by the Rural School and Community Trust (<http://www.ruraledu.org>). A recent article in its publication *Rural Policy Matters* talks about rural South Carolinians helping their districts to actually rethink consolidation (<http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2113>). Calvin Morris, a resident of Wadmalaw Island, told his neighbors that consolidation is the death knell of many rural communities.

New members join WAES, many renew and fight on

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."

The newest members of the coalition are Roxanne Starks, Joel Green, Three Rivers United Educators, and the TriWauk Uniserv Council. Renewing their memberships since the last e-mail update were Erin Green, the Lakewood Uniserv Council, Pecatonica PTA, the Southwest Education Association, the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC),

and the school districts of Port Edwards, Rhinelander, Goodman-Armstrong Creek, Birchwood, Cuba City, Phillips, and Middleton-Cross Plains.

These individuals and organizations have come together to show state government the school-funding crisis is a community-wide tragedy in the making. You can join them by joining WAES. Go to the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and click "Join WAES."

Join WAES and spread reform message statewide

When you, your school district, or your organization join WAES, your dues support an effort that takes the message of school-funding reform to groups all over Wisconsin. Since 2004, we have done 173 presentations that have reached 8,224 people. And, that's not all, WAES has been part of media events, produced much needed research, sponsored rallies, built coalitions, worked with legislators, and done just about everything possible to push its children- and community-centered agenda to the front of the list.

WAES needs you to do two things right now. First, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org> and sign up for a presentation. Wisconsin won't have reform that helps all children and all communities until people around the state come together and demand change. That starts when you learn about the present system, how it is hurting students and their schools, how to change the system to something better, and how we can work together to make change happen. All of that is wrapped in the package you get by booking a free presentation.

The second thing is to show your support for that educational effort. In other words, WAES needs you to join the coalition as a dues-paying member. 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. Your dues are tax deductible. Contact me or go to the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and click "Join WAES."

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. Thanks.

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.

School-funding reform calendar

- May 16 -- 2009 NAACP State Conference Education Summit, "Global Education in the 21st Century," 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Milwaukee Branch NAACP (<http://www.naacp-milwaukee.com/>) office, 2745 North Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, Milwaukee; for more information or to register for this event, call 414-562-1000
- 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), Madison, sponsored by Dane County Advocacy Network Education (for more information call 608-441-7897)
- June 10 -- School-funding reform discussion with students in doctoral school administrator class, 10 a.m., DC Everest School District (<http://www.dce.k12.wi.us/>) office, 6300 Alderson Street, Weston
- June 16 -- "Walk on the Child's Side" reunion tour, starts at 11 a.m. at the clock tower at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Memorial Library Mall (for more information, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org>)

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 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, 1976