



Wisconsin Rural Challenge, Inc.
7087 Highway 39
Hollandale, WI 53544
608-967-2322
ricky-r@mhtc.net

January 23, 2007

Governor Jim Doyle
P.O. Box 7863
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Governor Doyle:

The Wisconsin Rural Challenge is a partner in the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools. The WRC represents rural schools and communities. We are deeply worried about the future of rural schools, especially the manner in which schools are funded in our state. Unless we do something now it will get even worse, and we hope you will stand up for our children as you have in the past.

As you know, many rural schools are facing critical funding shortfalls and some have even faced closure. In southwest Wisconsin a number of districts no longer have administrators and principals – one person must cover the operation of the multi-million dollar operation and be responsible for all the students as well.

Wisconsin needs a school funding mechanism that does not pit neighbor against neighbor and parents against those on fixed incomes. Wisconsin needs a school funding system that does not create second class citizens of students in schools where enrollment is declining.

If you are not ready to propose an overhaul to our school finance system in the upcoming biennial budget, then we urge you to include the following provisions in your budget proposal, which are based on the reform plan developed by WAES:

- Transportation—In order to keep up with the rising cost of transportation, Wisconsin needs an increase over the biennium of \$97.7 million.
- Bilingual—In order to keep up with the rising number of children in Wisconsin schools who come from non-English speaking homes, Wisconsin needs an increase over the biennium of \$54.6 million.
- Special education—Due to the tremendous underfunding of special education at both the state and federal level, Wisconsin needs an increase of \$898.7 million over the biennium

Interconnecting students, community and the environment

- SAGE PLUS— In order to meet its originally state purpose, SAGE needs an increase of \$380.3 million over the biennium. WAES calls this SAGE PLUS because the WAES proposal would fund SAGE along the lines of the DPI budget, but then include additional funding of \$300 per year, in all districts, for all subsidized-lunch students.
- Sparsity— In this case, the WAES plan calls for categorical aid increases over the two years of \$26.5 million which is the same as recommended by DPI.

These emergency funding increases are necessary this year but do not solve the fundamental fiscal problems of school districts—fiscal problems that are causing educational crises. The WRC urges you to initiate comprehensive reform of the school-funding system in the 2007-09 legislative session. As a WAES partner, the WRC is more than willing to work with you and the Legislature, and other stakeholders to secure short-term stopgap aid increases as well as overall finance system reform.

As a partner in WAES, the Wisconsin Rural Challenge is committed to fighting for increased categorical aid to address the critical short-term needs in all school districts. At the same time, we urge you to work with us, other education stakeholders, and the Legislature to begin comprehensive reform of the school-funding system in 2007.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Rolfsmeyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Rick Rolfsmeyer
Executive director