

DATE: November 6, 2003

TO: Distinguished Members of the Governor’s Task Force on Educational Excellence

FROM: Winnie Doxsie
1708 H. Hall Ave. Appleton, WI 54911 - 920-739-7593 - doxcie@athenet.net

RE: Comments for Listening Session

MY CREDENTIALS

I have spent the last 12 years volunteering on the Wisconsin PTA (WI PTA) State Board of Directors. I served as President of WI PTA from 1999 – 2001. In my capacity as President I became very involved in the effort to raise awareness of the negative impacts that revenue limits were, and are, having on our schools. I also have been vocal about WI PTA’s position that the current funding system and revenue limits need to be changed. I am now retired and am speaking to you today as a concerned citizen. I remain passionate about the need to create a new and adequate funding system in Wisconsin that will provide a quality educational opportunity for *all the children in this state.*

BACKGROUND

In the fall of 2000 I represented Wisconsin PTA, as a member of the coalition Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES). Former Superintendent Bert Grover and I were asked to be the consistent panelists (listeners) as WAES sponsored six (6) hearings around the state to raise awareness about the problems related to revenue limits and the current funding system. The following table highlights the 6 hearings and three major points I gleaned from my notes for each location.

Location	Numbers	Key concerns
Janesville	? attended 23 testified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We can see that there will be major problems coming, change the system now. ▪ We are losing programs that make a difference ▪ Fixed costs are outpacing the small % increase allowed under the revenue limits.
Appleton	Est. 125 attended 28 testified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Districts that were frugal before revenue limits are being punished now. ▪ Teachers expressed concern about their ability to continue “make do” with increasingly scarce resources. ▪ How long can we maintain the high quality programs we offer and the community expects with limited resources?
Rhineland	Est. 75 attended 24 testified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programs have already been cut (as early as 1995) – Athletics, Gifted and Talented, Summer School, field trips, access to library and more. ▪ Concerned about the ability to attract and keep qualified teachers. They can make \$10,000 by making the short

		<p>drive into Upper Michigan to work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declining enrollment is costing districts – costs to operate the district don't shrink in proportion to student losses. (Take one student out of a class, all the fixed costs are still there but there is less money.)
Superior	Est. 600 attended 83 testified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Superior area is economically depressed and has been very supportive by passing a large referendum for the schools. Because of declining enrollment and other factors they are still facing cuts in programs they value. There is a real problem with equity of opportunity for the students in that region. Kids who live in the “northwoods” lack opportunities that will allow them to compete. Schools are centers of communities, closing schools won't help anything. How many hours can we expect kids to ride on a bus? <p>This hearing lasted 4 hours – which demonstrates the extent of that concern in that region – not just Superior but people from places like Spooner and Ashland came – many over an hour away.</p>
West Allis	Est. 250 attended 49 testified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a limited “pie” and the mandated costs, especially for Special Education, are taking increasing larger piece of that “pie”. There aren't enough funds for the special needs program or regular ed. Going to referendum to cover costs to maintain programs is unrealistic. PTAs and the community traditionally supplemented educational programs, now they are being asked to cover costs of programs and items that are basic needs. (Paper, books, teachers salaries)
Stevens Point	Est. 75 32 testified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need strong schools to attract quality employees for the community. There is a concern about “brain drain”. The state has set the standards and now districts have to cut programs that will help achieve them. Referendums are difficult – several failed in Point by narrow margins, programs are being cut.

I have literally 2 inches of written testimony and notes about the concerns raised at the 6 hearings. The above comments don't reflect just those from the hearing location, but from a surrounding area as well. It was difficult filter down to this limited list of problems because the extent of the challenges facing districts then was overwhelming.

MY CONCERNS TODAY

All of the information above was collected in October/November 2000. Imagine what is happening in the school districts of Wisconsin now. Districts like Appleton, my home district, were not facing the serious cuts in 2000. Because we were growing and Appleton seems to be very good at securing grants this is the first year that the cuts being made are causing serious concern among parents. (This doesn't mean cuts weren't made.) (Several district leaders I spoke with around the state, in 2000, were not willing or at liberty to talk about their inability to "make ends meet") Appleton is currently looking at cutting programs and teaching positions that are considered critical parts of our educational program – not extras. This is what Superior and other districts were doing in 2000 and earlier!

MAKE REAL CHANGE PLEASE

Because of my PTA background – advocating for ALL children – I hope to impress on you the need to find a new system for providing educational opportunities for *every child* in this state. If a child happens to be born in the right geographic location he/she will have access to a number of educational opportunities. If not he or she may lack the basic experiences needed to compete for scholarships, jobs or the post secondary opportunities that will help them become the productive citizens we need in the future.

My understanding of the complicated funding system and the politics of educational funding convinces me that there is no way to "fix" the current complicated system. You have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of every child in Wisconsin by recommending a true change. My recommendation would be an adequacy model. Let's decide what we need for every child and find a way to get it to them.

Thank you for your commitment to this process and your hard work on behalf of the children of Wisconsin.