



# Project ABC

## Advocating on Behalf of Children

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Good Afternoon. My name is Ellen Figueira and I am here today to present testimony on behalf of Project ABC. Project ABC is a citizen's group in Waukesha formed to advocate on behalf of children and public education. Project ABC has hosted public meetings, held summer computer camps for children, sponsored school board candidate forums and lobbied both local and state officials on behalf of our children.

The current school aid funding formula is crippling our schools. In Waukesha, our district has cut more than six million dollars in programs, including summer school, middle school athletics, the gifted and talented program (twice), elementary extracurricular activities, high school classes, at-risk programs, technology and on-going building maintenance. This, from a district that successfully passed a large referendum in 2001. Waukesha proved only two short years ago that it valued schools and believed local taxes on schools were well spent. An impressive 64 percent of the community voted yes on the referendum to support schools.

Sadly, the combination of revenue caps and Madison balancing its budget on the backs of our children has resulted in cuts for next year. Because of the way we fund schools in this State, the referendum simply put off cuts for a couple of years. This spring, our board will begin discussion of cuts ranging from 400,000 to 2,000,000 dollars.

When schools are squeezed too hard, SAT scores suffer, dropout rates increase, and standardized test scores decline. In Waukesha, award-winning programs like marching band, fine arts, and our National Champion Academic Decathlon team will descend into mediocrity. Frustrated learners, succeeding today with additional help, will be mainstreamed back into even larger classes with little support.

Our school funding process is broke. It does not serve our children, our families or our taxpayers. The formula is unfair and punishing even to well-managed school districts. Something is definitely wrong when the state-mandated revenue limits force almost every school district to make cuts every year in valuable programs.

We need a funding system that focuses on children's needs first and foremost. Project ABC implores you to look for ways to fund schools adequately and to lessen the dependence on property taxes. School budget decisions should be made by local leaders, based on the needs and desires of the local community. We as parents should not be fighting every year to keep our music, art and sports programs, to hold class sizes low, and to just save proven programs. This is no way to educate a village!