

December 11, 2003

I am Dianne Lang, a third grade teacher in Appleton and President of the 1150 member Appleton Education Association.

Wisconsin's school funding system, compounded by the state imposed revenue controls, has left Appleton in a precarious position, at best, for the past ten years. Last spring, we faced a \$3 million reduction in the operating budget of the Appleton Area School District for the upcoming school year. For the 2003-2004 school year, site budgets were reduced, and the replacement cycle of textbooks was changed from every 5 to every 10 years. But the majority of the reduction was made through the attrition of staff, including reductions in the number of counselors and media specialists, and an increase in class size in grades 4-12 from 25 to 27 to 1.

A colleague of mine, referring to Appleton, recently stated, "...the current funding formula wounded and battered a district that was already spending below the state average. Over the years, the wound remained infected and irritated, was never treated properly, and now has turned into a major hemorrhage."

This past Monday, December 8th, the Appleton Board of Education continued to deal with this festering wound. They were forced to make another very painful budget reduction for the 2004-2005 school year, an additional \$2.5 million in cuts, making a total reduction of \$5.5 million over two years from the budget of a productive, quality district that spends significantly below the state average. Recommended reductions included cuts in administrative positions, clerical and educational assistant reductions, cuts in our highly successful SAGE program, further reductions in elementary media specialists and guidance counselors, reductions in elementary reading specialists, talented and gifted teachers, and police school liaison officers, attrition of special education teachers, elimination of the elementary foreign language program, and further attrition of classroom teachers increasing class size for middle and high schools to 27.5 or 28 to 1.

Although several of the above recommended reductions were salvaged for one more year through alternative funding sources and grants, and suggestions, involvement, and input from staff, students, and community members, our Board approved a deficit reduction plan of \$2,490,000 for the 2004-05 budget.

We can no longer afford nor allow winners and losers in this state when it comes to the education of our children. Every kid deserves a Great School, our state Constitution guarantees every child an equitable education, and the state is obligated to see that there is adequate funding for that to happen. But unless the current school funding formula is changed, we in Appleton, along with all other districts spending below the state average, will face the same scenario, continue to be penalized, and fall further behind the higher spending districts. Each year, as the cuts deepen, programs, services, class size, and, ultimately, the quality of education we can deliver to and provide for our children will be further eroded. We owe our children, their future, and the future of our community more than that.

Thank you very much for your time.

President
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