

Intro: Ken Volante, Executive Assistant for Labor Relations for Madison Teachers Inc. MTI represents teachers, substitute teachers, educational assistants, clerical and technical employees, and school security assistants in Madison, WI.

I would like to thank the Governor's Task Force on Educational Excellence for the opportunity to speak.

The Madison Metropolitan School District has been forced to cut over **\$25 million** dollars and **250 positions** from educational programs over the last decade. Last year alone, Madison suffered **\$3 million** in cuts and only a **narrowly successful \$12.3 million** referendum helped to stave off another **\$3 million** in cuts. Crucial programs have been eliminated. Class sizes have increased. Educational opportunities have been limited.

Funding for the educational system in the state of Wisconsin is incredibly stressed. Students have to make-do with fewer resources and teachers struggle with a multitude of duties. Teachers are overburdened with a massive amount of testing based on narrow technical efficiency. The increased access to educational opportunity for students with special needs has run square into a climate of dwindling resources for their needs and the needs of the student population as a whole.

Teachers continue to look into their own pockets to keep the system afloat. I have spoken to a newly-hired teacher that spent \$600.00 in student fees for their own children and another \$500.00 for the children in their classroom. *Think about this - \$1,100* in fees and supplies for enrollment in *public* schools. Tax deductions, specific to teachers, that allow for the deduction of this educational material, codify this contradiction.

Teachers face increasing stress as they know they must teach all students broad-based knowledge and skills that students truly need to survive and prosper in the world but are forced to limit the breadth and scope of their teaching to achieve tangible, *quantitative* statistics. Burdensome federal and state testing requirements impose a structural pressure to a teacher's ability to provide students with what they need. While teachers continue to pull off this herculean task, it continues to take its toll - day to day, month to month, and year to year. But what is the cost?

The costs are not always borne out by the important economic figures to *adequately* fund schools. They are also borne out in immeasurable lost opportunity and possibility. The possibility of a *quality* education committed to financially and politically is the vital component for a health democracy. There is an extricable historical tie between public education, an educated populace, and the vitality of a democracy.

When this country was founded, the very idea of "public education" was met with ridicule and attack. This was based on a rigid class system that recognized the inherent danger of an educated populace. While attacks on public schools, teachers and the underperforming students have become couched in euphemism, the antagonism towards equal opportunity remain.

Harsh federal and state legislation threaten educational opportunity and therefore democracy. The effect is two-fold. First, revenue limits handicap the very resources that Wisconsin municipalities can *choose* to pay for a quality education. Second, the rigid caps serve to threaten the quality of education for all students - threatening the promise of an educated electorate. Thinly-veiled attacks have made it clear that public schools are fertile targets for ridicule and attack.

When the main business group in the state publicly lauds the elimination of student resources on its website, when legislators actively seek to starve the public sector and the public trust, when finite resources meet a burgeoning student need - those who believe truly believe in public schools are forced to make a demand.

It is this demand and its corresponding opportunity that stand before the task force. The pleas and demands you have heard and will continue to hear from the public are *real*. They demand that you show courage to *adequately* fund education for all students. In this economic and political climate, such action will help to maintain Wisconsin Public Schools as a bulwark for the common good. It is time to move away from attacks against public schools and teachers and take immediate action to re-claim Wisconsin schools for all Wisconsin's children. Thank you.