

Testimony before Governor's Task Force—December 11, 2003

I am Kathy Zingsheim, a taxpayer from the city of New Berlin and West Allis-West Milwaukee. I am also a parent of two recently graduated children from our public school system. My involvement began in 1987, at a time of tax revolts. At that time, school curriculum was rich in academics, fine arts, vocational/technical and Advanced Placement opportunities. We had neighborhood schools.

But that was soon to change. I saw first hand the results of million dollar cuts needed to balance the 3.8% salary and benefit packages with the 2.9% coming in to fund education. And this was happening as our state economy was strong. The education-funding gap grew yearly. So as an alarmed parent, I joined PTA as they speak for the needs of students who cannot speak for themselves in the election process. We spoke for kids at school board meetings and to the legislature on a normal basis about what was happening. Our district closed two schools, foreign language in elementary school, time for art education and administrative staff was cut plus class sizes increased. My big "AHA" moment came while sitting in a state Senators office, the head of joint finance at the time. A staff member said, "Education should be priority. It IS the moral issue to work on...however we get more calls about crime and prisons, so that is going to be our priority." And over the past ten years – it was. The prisons were built...without referendums I might add.

So, after watching the sweeping changes, QEO, revenue caps and 2/3's AVERAGE funding, I decided to try and serve my community as a school board member. Here is

where I could really advocate for the educational needs of kids. But soon I understood the folly of the words “local control”. Local control means you get to decide where the annual \$1 million dollar cuts will be. OK, NOW what.

This is where the opportunity came to meet with other people concerned about the negative impact revenue limits were having on our schools. By this time, class sizes were increasing again, librarians, physical education, music, art, sports teams, gifted and talented programs were all reduced and administration was eliminating positions. At this meeting, four core principles were discussed and agreed upon. I also heard the most logical plan for funding for the first time. It was based on “adequacy; the same model the Wisconsin Supreme Court turned to as a standard in the Vincent v. Voight decision of 2000. This group emerged as the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools – a volunteer coalition soon to be known as WAES. I learned that “adequacy” funds schools by looking at the actual cost of staffing, facilities, equipment and other things needed to meet academic goals and standards set by local, state and federal government. Then adequacy establishes the resources needed to meet the standards. It calculates the cost of these resources by utilizing a costing–out study. How logical and business-like.

Through WAES and a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, I was recently able to take part in a meeting in Washington D.C. of the National School Funding Network. People came together from across the U.S. to talk about research, data, and what is happening in the nation regarding school funding. I am here to tell you, there is data out there and there are people just like yourselves, who are working to get better funding systems in place for

public education. Cost outs have been completed or are in progress in 29 states. State courts have ordered 5 states to develop new funding mechanisms and asked for a costing-out as a first step. Fourteen other states have initiated the cost-out process themselves. Adequacy has been cited in many states as the answer. I believe this is the step this task force needs to take before you move further. Most businesses use the costing out and adequacy approach to their own budget process. It just makes sense.

Working in WAES has been my last best hope. WAES, now has 60 organizations working for only one goal – to fix a school funding system that is no longer working and is actually hurting children. 16 school districts from the largest to smallest and Northern-most to southern most, 14 teacher organizations, a wide range of civic and faith based organizations and yes even retired citizen groups - all signed on to the core principles of WAES that state SCHOOLS:

- need adequate funding
- should be funded on a foundation level adjusted for the specific needs of students
- need additional revenue that should come from some form of state taxes – not property taxes
- should have local control of funds and be accountable for improved student achievement

I am here to tell you WAES will gladly assist this task force's effort in any way possible. Your time is of such value... inspect the research already done across the nation. In yesterday's *Milwaukee JournalSentinel* was an article in which local parents were

warring in a school board meeting over which to finance, fine arts or foreign language. The state doesn't hear from parents because they are busy fighting each other for the resources that are left. This needs to end. This is why people across Wisconsin take time off work to go to WAES meetings in Steven's Point or Appleton or Madison. The only goal WAES has is to reform Wisconsin's school funding system – not for change sake, but because it is our moral and constitutional responsibility to guarantee every child the opportunity to the bright future that comes from educational excellence.

Thank You,

Kathy Zingsheim

12765 W. Verona Dr. New Berlin, WI 53151

262-789-1415

kzing@wi.rr.com