

# School-funding update, Week of Nov. 1, 2010

- **One thing didn't change last Tuesday: The need for school-funding reform**
- **Funding reform revolution might be starting in Nekoosa**
- **We still need "A Penny for Kids;" three groups pass resolution**
- **Revenue strapped schools cutting back on educationally vital programs**
- **Poverty is on the increase in Wisconsin**
- **WAES welcomes new member, but coalition needs your support**
- **Novel approaches to funding reform in Chicago, across Florida**
- **Texas school board group proposes school-finance reform plan**
- **School-funding reform calendar**

The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) is a statewide, independent, membership-based organization of educators, school board members, students, parents, community leaders, researchers, citizens, and community activists whose lone goal is the comprehensive reform of Wisconsin's school-funding system. If you would like more information about the organization -- or on becoming part of WAES -- contact Tom Beebe at 920-650-0525 or [tbeebe@excellentschools.org](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org)

.\*\*\*\*\*

## **One thing didn't change last Tuesday: the need for school-funding reform**

Whether you saw it coming or not ... or whether it made you happy or not ... the results of last Tuesday's elections significantly changed the landscape of Wisconsin politics

(<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/106589258.html>). Not only did Republican Scott Walker capture the Governor's mansion, but Republicans also took control of both the Assembly and the Senate (<http://thewheelerreport.com/releases/November10/Nov3/2011XGR.pdf>).

One thing that hasn't changed is that our children's opportunities to succeed are still being snatched from them at the very time we should be investing more in their education. Wisconsin's 17-year-old school-funding system has resulted in a decline in the state's share of quality schools, fewer teachers, larger class sizes, cuts to programs and services, and rising property taxes.

When they were last in control, Republicans did nothing to fix this critical problem. Democrats controlled the governor's office and the Legislature for several years and did nothing. Now, the pendulum has swung back again. It is up to the people of Wisconsin -- Republican, Democrat, or independent -- to finally hold someone accountable for doing the right thing for kids. It's time for politicians to understand that governing is a whole lot different than winning elections. If you want a good place to start, check out the WAES website at <http://www.apennyforkids.org> and the website of "A Penny for Kids" at <http://www.apennyforkids.org>.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Funding reform revolution might be starting in Nekoosa**

The school-funding reform revolution may have started late in October in, of all places, Nekoosa. Some school board members -- understanding that the state's funding system has forced them into "cutting hundreds of thousands of dollars annually from their district's budget -- said enough is enough and urged the full board stop making cuts (<http://www.excellentschools.org>).

Steve Bechard said board members are fed up and have "lost confidence that state elected officials will change" the funding system. "Our school district is four or six years from dissolving and going bankrupt," Bechard said. Every year we make these reductions, we let (the politicians) off the hook. How long are we going to do that?"

The revolutionaries introduced a rough outline of a plan that would have Nekoosa and other districts stop making cuts children's opportunities and put pressure on state officials to actually do their job. "If that means that we're all going to collectively run our school districts into the ground (in order to actually educate kids), then so be it," Bechard said. That will be a tsunami; that will force them to fix it. Every time we cut, we continue to erode our children's education."

\*\*\*\*\*

## **We still need "A Penny for Kids;" three groups pass resolution**

As stated earlier, a change in the character of the Legislature does absolutely nothing to change the crisis in school funding. For that reason, WAES will continue to push for comprehensive school-funding reform to change the way we finance our children's futures and for "A Penny for Kids" (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>), a one-cent increase in the sales tax to put back into our classrooms the revenue cut by the last state budget.

Since the last e-mail newsletter, four organizations have approved resolutions supporting "A Penny for Kids": AFT-Wisconsin, Northern Tier Uniserv, Madison Teachers Inc., and the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association. They join the school districts of Middleton, Madison, and Milwaukee and the WEAC-Fox Valley Uniserv.

You need to do your part, too. First of all, encourage your school district, teachers' union, or other organization to consider the resolution. Have them contact me and WAES will send one their way. There is also something you can do as an individual. Go to the "A Penny for Kids" website at <http://www.apennyforkids.org> and sign the online petition favoring the sales tax increase. Then, pass the link along to others so they can sign and read through the website to find out what you can do next, including talking with your legislators.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Revenue strapped schools cutting back on educationally vital programs**

Too many people see the school-funding crisis in the abstract ... as a discussion about formulas, numbers, and political decisions. It is actually about our kids losing the opportunities they need to get the quality education that will allow them to succeed in the future. That is a problem we better solve sooner rather than later.

For example, a recent article in *The King's Page*, the student newspaper of Rufus King High School in Milwaukee, talked about budget cuts causing "the school to eliminate two programs and offer fewer electives ([http://my.hsj.org/Schools/Newspaper/tabid/100/view/frontpage/schoolid/2049/articleid/373465/newspaperid/2035/Budget\\_cuts\\_lead\\_to\\_larger\\_class\\_sizes\\_and\\_fewer\\_electives\\_MPS\\_policies\\_have\\_negative\\_results\\_at\\_Rufus\\_King\\_International\\_High\\_School\\_Campus.aspx](http://my.hsj.org/Schools/Newspaper/tabid/100/view/frontpage/schoolid/2049/articleid/373465/newspaperid/2035/Budget_cuts_lead_to_larger_class_sizes_and_fewer_electives_MPS_policies_have_negative_results_at_Rufus_King_International_High_School_Campus.aspx)). In other words, at the very time we want better educated high school graduates the funding system is reducing our investment in that quality education. At King, positions were lost in French, business, and English; the amount of materials for students and teachers was slashed; photography was cut from the curriculum; and the music and art department budgets were cut back.

The same story, sadly, is being told in the state's smallest school districts. In the Marathon School District, a town that boasts Wisconsin's oldest trade ties with China, "was forced to cut its (five-year-old) Chinese-language program, a victim of cuts in the state education budget." Again, at a time we should be increasing our investment in education, especially in foreign language instruction, our schools are being forced to cut back because of a finance system that just doesn't work (<http://www.jsonline.com/business/105580973.html>).

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Poverty is on the increase in Wisconsin**

Wisconsin's Constitution guarantees every child in the state the opportunity to a free and appropriate quality public education that will give them the opportunities to succeed in the future. In a decision called *Vincent v Voight*, the state Supreme Court interpreted that to include children with special education needs, those learning English, and those from poverty.

It only makes sense, because poverty costs taxpayers money and the best way out of poverty is education. That's why the state school-funding system includes categorical aid to put additional revenue into education children from low-income households. The problem is that these programs -- along with other opportunities for all children -- are being cut because of the funding system. And, this is happening at a time that poverty in Wisconsin is on the rise.

According to the University of Wisconsin-Extension, recent census data shows that 12 percent of state residents lived in poverty during 2009, up slightly over 2008 and continuing a steady increase since 2000. Families with the most vulnerability are those with children under 18 ([http://www.uwex.edu/news/read/2010/10/Poverty\\_rising\\_in\\_Wisconsin](http://www.uwex.edu/news/read/2010/10/Poverty_rising_in_Wisconsin)). Once again, at the very time we should be making a larger investment in our public schools -- in order to secure futures and reduce public spending in the long run by reducing poverty now -- we are actually making cuts to the very programs and services that could make a difference.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **WAES welcomes new member, but coalition needs your support**

The newest member of the coalition is the LaCrosse Education Association (<http://www.weac.org/LaCrosseEA/>). Renewing their memberships since the last newsletter are the Madison Area Retired Educators Association, the Triwauk Uniserv Council, the Lakewood Uniserv Council (<http://www.weac.org/luc/>), and the Racine Education Association (<http://www.rea-reaa.org/>).

"A Penny for Kids" (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>), the Wisconsin Adequacy Plan (<http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/CostOutSummary.pdf>), and educational opportunities throughout the state about a school-funding system that works for kids, schools, and communities ([http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/Host\\_presentation.htm](http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/Host_presentation.htm)) are only part of what you get with a membership in the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES at <http://www.excellentschools.org>).

To keep it all going, though, we need your help. If you or your organization want to join WAES -- or renew your membership -- contact WAES (see below) or go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm>.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Novel approaches to funding reform in Chicago, across Florida**

We all know that school-funding problems are spreading across the country, not just in Wisconsin. What's interesting is that new and innovative approaches to highlighting the crisis are also spreading.

In Chicago, dozens of parents came together day after day in the Lower West Side to sit in an old school field house to try to save it from demolition ([http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-09-25/news/ct-met-whittier-moms-20100925\\_1\\_field-house-cps-moms](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-09-25/news/ct-met-whittier-moms-20100925_1_field-house-cps-moms)). The hope of the parents ... whose children attend Whittier Elementary School, to have the unsafe structure rebuilt into a school library. The district says the building must come down "to expand the play area with synthetic field grass. But the Whittier mothers don't want fake grass. They want books."

In Florida, it's about Milk Part Rallies. The Children's Movement of Florida (<http://www.childrensmovementflorida.org/>) organized the events across the state. Modeling themselves after the Tea Party movement, "a group of influential Floridians has launched a political campaign to increase public and private investment in children," according to a story in the *Miami Herald*. Traveling around the state in their iconic blue bus, organizers believe they will have reached 15,000 Floridians once the rallies are completed.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Texas school board group proposes school-finance reform plan

So, what state is the latest to try and fix its broken school-funding system by trying to "increase equity among districts, primarily by providing more money to poorer ones"? If your guess was forward-looking Wisconsin you would be wrong. How about Texas?

The Texas Association of School Boards has taken the lead on the project that would cost state taxpayers \$1.5 billion over two years (<http://www.star-telegram.com/2010/09/24/2493845/texas-school-boards-group-presents.html#ixzz10XdzfYon>). Although the group admits the plan doesn't address all the inequities of school finance, it does start the process of reform. The big change would be that money would be distributed based on a district's enrollment weighted for poverty. It appears the proposal would increase each district's per-student funding by at least \$30 and no more than \$200.

In comments reminiscent of those heard in Wisconsin, the group's spokesperson said they presented the plan now because many districts are dipping into savings and cutting staff and programs as they struggle under the current system.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Help us better serve you by letting us know when you change your e-mail address. In that way we can stop sending the update to the old one and switch over to the new address as soon as possible.**

\*\*\*\*\*

## School-funding reform calendar

- Nov. 8 -- Wisconsin Association of School Councils Region III Fall Conference at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel (<http://www.radisson.com/appleton-hotel-wi-54911/wiapprad>), 333 West College Avenue, Appleton (details to be announced)
- Nov. 10 -- Dane County School Board Consortium (details to be announced)
- Nov. 11 -- Wisconsin Association of School Councils Region IV Fall Conference at Brookfield Suites (<http://www.brookfieldsuiteshotel.com/>), Brookfield (details to be announced)
- Nov. 17 -- District II Fall Meeting of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://wrea.net/>), Romy's Holiday Inn, Kelly Lake (near Suring), all day (postponed from Oct. 26)

\*\*\*\*\*

*Please feel free to share your copy of the WAES school-funding update with anyone interested in this important public policy issue. Contact Tom Beebe at [tbeebe@excellentschools.org](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org) or 920-650-0525 for details.*