

School-funding update for the week of January 25, 2010

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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.

Talk to your legislators, public about "A Penny for Kids"

If you haven't signed the petition urging the Wisconsin Legislature to approve a penny increase in the sales tax -- "[A Penny for Kids](#)" -- to meet the crisis created in our public schools by the last state budget, do it now. Once that is done, however, you've just started. There is more to do if we are going to get the job done.

Click on the button that says "You can help (the direct route is <http://www.apennyforkids.org/you-can-help.html>)." One of the items is to let others know about the campaign. You can forward an e-mail, join the "[A Penny for Kids](#)" Twitter page, or join the Facebook group. Next, it's time to contact your legislator. Kids, schools, and communities win when enough lawmakers back the sales tax increase to make it law. Each and every one of them is important. You can find out how to contact them and what to say on the website.

It is also important for us to build public support for "[A Penny for Kids](#)." The website has plenty of hints for that, too, including a complete list of newspaper contacts so you can write and send a letter to the editor. Even that's not all, make sure to talk about the sales tax increase and school-funding reform in your community. Contact WAES to bring a presentation to town, call news talk radio shows, and let your school board know what is happening. Our effort now will lead to victory in the future.

"A Penny for Kids" getting some welcome support

"A Penny for Kids" is starting to find its way onto websites and into the public discussion around the state.

Monday night, Jan. 11, both the Madison Metropolitan School District (<http://boeweb.madison.k12.wi.us/>) and Madison Teachers, Inc. (<http://www.madisonteachers.org/>) formally endorsed the effort to increase the state sales tax one penny in order to meet the crisis in school funding and to control the increase in property taxes. WAES member Advancing Madison Public Schools (AMPS) talked about both efforts in a blog entitled "Some leadership in Madison on 'A Penny for Kids'" (<http://madisonamps.org/2010/01/13/some-leadership-in-madison-on-penny-for-kids/>).

A new group has formed called Support West Bend Schools. They have started a website to broker information concerning the district with "an initial and primary focus on funding and the financial issues." On the homepage of the group's website -- <http://supportwestbendschools.com/> -- is a link to "A Penny for Kids." Thanks to the West Bend group and if anyone else is promoting this campaign, let me know.

Some voters say "raise taxes, don't cut any more programs"

The conversation on school-funding reform around the state is changing. A couple of months ago, those attending some annual district meetings were voting down budgets and asking administrators and board members to sharpen their pencils and find more cuts. Now, at least in a couple of districts, voters are saying enough is enough and asking for an end to cuts to programs and services.

Earlier this month, the Neenah school board faced a huge crowd after earlier announcing nearly \$3 million in budget cuts (<http://www.wbay.com/Global/story.asp?S=11776510>). The standing-room-only crowd was trying to persuade the school district not to make drastic cuts. On the other side of the table, board members said there's just no money because of a drop in state funding.

In Oshkosh, the message to the school board, according to *The Oshkosh Northwestern*, was "Raise taxes. Don't cut the budget any more (<http://www.thenorthwestern.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/201001060418/OSH0105/100105160>)." A crowd of 150 people weighed in on budget cuts that could be as high as \$5 million. "I think we need to speak up because I think (the school board) may not realize how much support there is for paying more for education," said Jean Erdman, a University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh professor who had three children graduate from the district.

School-funding reform featured on WisconsinEye

One of the under appreciated resources for those who follow how government works in this state is WisconsinEye (<http://www.wisconsineye.com/>). It offers video and audio on everything from the legislative process to oral arguments before the Supreme Court to features on any number of public policy topics.

Senior producer Steve Walters, former writer for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, hosts a regular program called "Newsmakers," and two of his recent programs dealt with school-funding reform.

Both programs originated on Dec. 22. The first featured Walters and in a round table discussion with Miles Turner of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators; Madison schools superintendent Dan Nerad; former Department of Administration head Mark Burgher, who chaired the Governor's task force on school-funding reform; Chris Patritto, Hurley schools superintendent; and former superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction Elizabeth Burmaster (<http://www.excellentschools.org/events/WisconsinEye.htm>). The second show dealt with the ill effects of the state's present school-funding system on the 17 school districts in CESA 12 and featured CESA 12 administrator Ken Kasinski (<http://www.excellentschools.org/events/WisconsinEye.htm>).

Details of Kansas lawsuit sound familiar in Wisconsin

Wisconsin isn't the only state where the inadequacy of school aid is causing problems for kids, schools, and communities. Funding for state school districts has been reduced over the past year as Kansas, like Wisconsin, has grappled with the economic slowdown. Unlike in the Badger State, folks in the Sunflower State are talking lawsuit.

The Associated Press reported Jan. 7, 2010, that a group called Schools for Fair Funding is heading back to court with a request to reopen a lawsuit about public school funding (http://cjonline.com/news/state/2010-01-07/school_districts_to_reopen_lawsuit). The Kansas Supreme Court ruled in 2006 that the state's system for financing schools was unconstitutional and sent it to the Legislature for remedy. Nothing has happened except aid was cut.

John Robb, a spokesman for the group and an attorney, said school districts across the state hoped to avoid further litigation by pressuring legislators to act to restore funds. Lawmakers haven't acted, so the court is "lesser of two evils." "It's either use the court to enforce the constitution," Robb said, "or hurt kids with further cuts."

Solve MPS funding problems with a new formula, ACLU says

The sides have been drawn on the proposed takeover of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS at <http://mpsportal.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/portal/server.pt>). Much has been said and much has been written, but at the time of this writing, nothing has been solved. One group, however, in taking a stand against the governance change also made a statement about the heart of school-funding reform.

American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin (ACLU at <http://www.aclu-wi.org/>) said it expects to see leadership in the city and around the state to "address the core issues we all face."

Executive Director Chris Amuty said (<http://thewheelerreport.com/releases/jan10/jan6/0106acluschools.pdf>), "The school funding formula adopted by the Legislature in 1992 is a shambles and needs to be replaced. Public schools need the resources to provide an adequate education to their students. Different districts have different needs," Ahmuty said. He said all involved in the MPS governance debate must recognize "the needs of districts statewide, just as legislators must now recognize the urgent needs of MPS, not for control, but for support from all segments of the public and all parts of Wisconsin."

Membership list is growing, but WAES needs your support

WAES is doing good work. It is part of an ever-growing statewide effort to change the way we fund public schools, and it is the leader of "A Penny for Kids (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>)," a campaign to stop the fiscal and educational crisis created by the last state budget. Without your help, however, this work won't get done.

Not only does WAES need you as an individual or your organization to join the coalition (<http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm>), but we need your financial support. WAES is a non-profit organization that is funded by its members. Your dues are tax deductible. School districts or teachers groups should contact Tom Beebe (920-650-0525 or tbeebe@excellentschools.org) for more information and for the dues structure. Other groups and individuals can go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm> to join, including paying your dues via PayPal.

Since the last update, the School District of Mineral Point (<http://www.mp.k12.wi.us/>) and Susan Hauri of Richland Center joined WAES, and the Rock Valley Education Professionals-Retired renewed its membership.

Property tax increases drive few elderly from their homes

A new study from a University of Wisconsin-Madison researcher and economists at the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) say few elderly have been driven from their homes by property tax increases. At the same time, the researchers point out that the state's property taxes can indeed cause economic hardship and could be made fairer.

"When pushing for limits on property tax increases, politicians and policymakers often use anecdotal evidence to argue that high or rising property taxes force homeowners, especially the elderly, to sell their homes." The study (<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers/reschovsky2009-026.pdf>) -- authored by economist Andrew Reschovsky, a professor in the LaFollette School of Public Affairs, and DOR economists Rebecca Boldt and Bradley Caruth -- says the taxes can mean economic hardship but property "taxes aren't driving them out (of their homes)."

Reschovsky, Boldt, and Caruth did say in another study this fall that current property tax relief policies are not well targeted to residents who are most in need of relief from high or rising taxes. While property taxes can cause severe economic hardship for some, they said, others have seen low or falling property taxes (<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers/reschovsky2009-006.pdf>).

WCCF analysis shows, again, Wisconsin isn't a tax, spending hell

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF at <http://www.wccf.org>) continues to do good work, including a recent analysis of Census Bureau data that debunks, again, the idea that the Badger State has a large

number of government employees and a large public sector payroll (http://www.wccf.org/pdf/public_sector_job_rankings_11-2009.pdf). Among the findings is the eye-opener that only nine other states "had a leaner public sector than Wisconsin."

Another service of WCCF is a publication called "Revenue Matters." It is available as a free, e-mail subscription. In the October 15, 2009, edition, there is another startling article (http://www.wccf.org/tax_newsletter.php) that points out that Wisconsin has fallen to 25th in total state and local spending per capita, down from 14th highest in 2000 and 5.8 percent below the national average. Once again, the data proves that our state, despite what some say, is neither a tax nor spending hell.

WCCF doesn't just collect and analyze data. It also, much like WAES, trains advocates to work for sound public policy. April 14-15 the group's annual Advocacy Camp will be held at Bethel Lutheran Church in Madison. For more information. To register, check at the website at <http://www.wccf.org>.

Help WAES correct e-mail update glitch

Some of you receiving this e-mail update are frustrated by the way it arrives -- endlessly long lines that are patience-trying to read. Hopefully we can help each other out.

As of now, only a handful of subscribers are suffering with this glitch. If you receive these endless lines, let me know and I will send you a text version that seems to take care of the problem.

Also, if you know how to fix it, let me know at tbeebe@excellentschools.org. Thanks.

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

- Jan. 28 -- School-funding forum sponsored by the Dane County Grass Roots Network; 7-8:30 p.m. in the Middleton Fire House (<http://www.mifd.net/>) Lecture Room, 7600 University Avenue, Middleton
- Feb. 3 -- School-funding reform discussion at the German Immersion School (http://www2.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/german_imm/), 3778 North 82nd Street, Milwaukee, 6:30 p.m., sponsored by the German Immersion School PTA
- Feb. 11 -- School-funding reform discussion with students in the Sauk County Institute of Leadership (<http://www.scilprogram.org/>), 8:45 a.m., at the University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County campus (<http://www.baraboo.uwc.edu/>)
- Feb. 11 -- School-funding reform discussion sponsored by the Menomonee Falls PTA/PTSA, 7 p.m. at the Menomonee Falls High School Library (<http://www.sdmf.k12.wi.us/mfhs/>), W142 N9810 Merrimac Drive
- Feb. 28 -- School-funding reform discussion -- sponsored by the South Side Sunday Group -- at 2 p.m. (potluck at 1 p.m.) at the Oak Creek Public Library (<http://www.mcfls.org/ocpl/>), 8620 South Howell Avenue
- March 1 -- LaCrosse Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net/>) sponsors a discussion on school-funding reform (details when they become available)
- March 9 -- School-funding reform discussion with students in the Education Leadership and Policy Analysis class (<http://www.education.wisc.edu/elpa/>) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, 7:15 p.m., Room 212, Education Science Building, 1025 West Johnson Street, Madison
- April 26 -- School-funding reform discussion with the Racine Rotary Club West at noon; more details as they become available
- May 10 -- School-funding reform discussion with the Stevens Point Area Retired Teachers Association (<http://www.wrea.net/>), 12:30 p.m., at the Sky Club (<http://skyclubdining.com/>) in Plover
