

School-funding update for the week of Feb. 15, 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.

WAES moves into fund-raising effort

The cause of school-funding reform has come a long, long way in the last couple of years. The members of WAES, its friends, and others have worked very hard to make sure reform is on the radar of as many people as possible, including legislators, public officials, and candidates for office ranging from local school boards to the governor's office.

Whether you are a member of WAES or not, make sure you sign the petition to raise Wisconsin's already low sales tax one-penny to meet, head-on, the crisis created for our kids and their classrooms by the last state budget. Sign the petition at "[A Penny for Kids](http://www.apennyforkids.org)" (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>) and then make sure you pass it along. You can make a difference.

To make sure that work continues until every child in the state has quality educational opportunities, WAES needs you ... your time, effort, and your financial support. Our coalition is now in the fund-raising mode and we are counting on you to make sure this good work continues. When you receive your membership renewal, please return it as soon as possible. We will also be soliciting new member organizations, so if your group, teachers' union, or school district isn't part of WAES, make sure it is on the look-out for a membership packet that should be arriving soon. If you want to find out more about us and what we do ... and how to join ... go to the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> or contact Tom Beebe at tbeebe@excellentschools.org or call 920-650-0525.

WAES's fund-raising efforts are off to a good start. New members since the last newsletter are David and Karen Tuten from Fort Atkinson, Donelle Johnson from Neshkoro, and the Paris YES Committee (<http://www.attendparisschool.org/>). Renewals have been received from the Neshkoro School Visioning Committee and the school districts of Phelps (<http://www.phelps.k12.wi.us/>), Sturgeon Bay (<http://www.sturgeonbayschools.org/>), Southwestern (<http://www.swsd.k12.wi.us/>), Cadott (<http://www.cadott.k12.wi.us/>), and Platteville (<http://www.platteville.k12.wi.us/>).

School districts throughout the state continue to cut programs, services

If anyone still wonders why WAES and others work for school-funding reform, all you have to do is look at the day's headlines. School districts all over the state continue to cut programs and services, reduce staff, increase class sizes, and raise property taxes. If you want to keep up with what's going on all over the state, make sure you check in often at the WAES website at <http://www.excellentsschools.org>.

People in Oshkosh get it

(<http://www.thenorthwestern.com/article/20100210/OSH0105/2100403/1987/Oshkosh-teacher-cuts-would-affect-language-technology-and-business-courses>). World languages, technology, and business courses in the district's two high schools are on a list of 110 courses that could be cut before the next school year ... cuts that could impact about 2,000 students. This will be the result of a proposed cut of 35 teachers -- a savings of almost \$2 million.

Other evidence can be found at:

- 11 MPS SAGE schools could be lost ... <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/83219632.html>
- Port Edwards schools could cut staff ... <http://www.wisconsinrapidtribune.com/article/20100210/WRT0101/2100682/1982/Port-Edwards-schools-could-cut-staff-numbers>
- Ashland School District fights \$317,000 deficit ... <http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2010/02/01/news/doc4b678df987e8b108669033.txt>
- Kimberly schools forecast deficits ... <http://www.postcrescent.com/article/20100209/APC0101/2090478/1003/APC01>
- Brodhead looks to referendum to save staff, extra-curriculars ... <http://www.gazettextra.com/news/2010/feb/08/brodhead-school-voters-face-referendum-maintain-st/>
- Spencer board sets referendum to avoid deficit, program cuts ... <http://www.marshfieldnewsherald.com/article/20100209/MNH0101/2090441/1732/MNH01/Spencer-School-Board-sets-referendum-to-avoid-deficit-program-cuts>

State budget puts school districts into a lose-lose situation

The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WTA at <http://www.wistax.org/>) calls it surprising that 98 school districts ... less than a tenth of those in Wisconsin ... didn't raise property taxes as much as they were allowed under state law. We know districts have struggled, said WTA research director Dale Napp, "so it was somewhat surprising to see districts weren't using all their revenue authority this year."

Napp said (<http://www.thenorthwestern.com/article/20100208/OSH0105/2080406/1987/Financial-turmoil-for-school-budget>) it stems from a shake-up among districts following the passage of a state budget. This was a budget that, for the first time in history, cut aid to public schools leading to even more cuts in programs and services. In addition, local property tax are increasing just to maintain what has become, over the years because of the state's school-funding formula, shrinking quality and quantity of education. "When you talk to residents about the cuts being made to your school programs," Napp said, "and then ask for a 10-percent or higher increase in the school levy, there is a disconnect there, and that's hard to take in."

It might be suggested, however, that the disconnect is at the state, not the local level where school boards have been forced by the Legislature and the Governor to gut schools and still consider raising property taxes. All 425 school districts in Wisconsin understand that their elected officials put them in a lose-lose situation, and some of them -- perhaps the 98 cited by WTA -- just couldn't raise property taxes anymore. It is a safe bet that all of them now better understand the phrase, "damned if you do and damned if you don't."

Wisconsin Advanced Placement test takers beat national average

Despite the problems thrown their way by the state's school-funding formula and cutbacks forced by the latest state budget, Wisconsin's public schools continue to be among the best in the country.

A recent story in the online version of the *Janesville Gazette* (<http://www.gazettextra.com/weblogs/latest-news/2010/feb/10/wis-exceeds-national-average-high-school-test/>) says the percentage of Wisconsin high school students who received grades high enough on Advanced Placement tests to receive college credit exceeds the national average. The national average was 15.9 percent in 2009. In Wisconsin it was 17.3.

The number of students taking at least one test also increased, from 19.2 percent in 2004 to 25.3 percent in 2009. That was, however, below the national average of 26.5 percent.

Grassroots festival will feature panel on school-funding reform

Federal Race to the Top policy and school-funding reform in general will be on the agenda, Feb. 20, at The Wisconsin River Valley Grassroots Festival (<http://www.wrvfest.com>).

A break-out session will be held from 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. on school funding. It is billed as a panel discussion, and WAES will be represented.

The festival, sponsored by the Dane County Grassroots Network (<http://www.danegrassroots.com/about/>) will begin with registration at 8:30 a.m. at Wisconsin Heights High School (<http://www.wisheights.k12.wi.us/HS/index.asp>). Break-out sessions will be held throughout the day. A 12:15 p.m. lunch will feature The Raging Grannies (<http://raginggrannies.org/>) and a presentation by 2nd District Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (<http://tammybaldwin.house.gov/>). Following an afternoon of session, a mixer and dinner will be held beginning at 4:30 p.m. at The Old Feed Mill (<http://www.oldfeedmill.com/>), 114 Cramer Street, in Mazomanie.

Support for schools works its way up publics' agenda

The School Finance Network (SFN at <http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>) has been out and about in Wisconsin spreading the word about school-funding reform, including taking the message to the state via television.

An editorial by WISC Channel 3000's Neil Heinen (<http://www.channel3000.com/localvideo/index.html?v=26908>) talks about making "the health and welfare of our public schools" part of the state's agenda in 2010. Heinen asks if our public schools are sustainable based on what we ask of our schools and our willingness to pay for what we want. His editorial grew out of comments by Julie Underwood, dean of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Education and SFN facilitator (<http://www.education.wisc.edu/>).

Heinen followed up with another editorial (http://www.channel3000.com/forums/index.html?q=http%3A//forums.ibsys.com/ViewTopics.cfm%3Fsitekey%3Dc3k%26Forum%3D111%26treets%3Dc3k%26tml%3Dc3kedit%26ts%3DT%26mi%3Dc3kedit_1_010102122010) saying "we were prompted to put the public schools -- or as we refer to them the 'publics' ' schools -- on our editorial agenda in part because (Underwood) challenged us to consider whether or not public education in Wisconsin is sustainable. The evidence is growing that it is not."

School-funding reform remedies proceed in Ohio, Washington

School-funding reform is a matter of concern around the country, not just in Wisconsin. Two states recently in the news were Ohio and Washington.

The Ohio School Funding Advisory Council has begun meeting to make recommendations for schools on various aspects of the funding system, enacted last year (<http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2396>). A new "evidence-based" funding plan is intended to support educational methods that are supported by research. It must be fully phased in by 2019 and replaces the Ohio funding system found unconstitutional by the state's supreme court in four separate decisions.

Recently, A King County (Washington) Superior Court judge rules that the state's funding system is failing to meet its duty "to provide state funding for public schools that is ample, stable, and dependable (http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2010987058_schoollawsuit05m.html)." The judge, as judges in most states have, left it up to the Legislature "to decide how much more money schools should receive, and when."

Oregonians vote in tax increases to protect schools, other services

In January, Oregon voters bucked decades of anti-tax and anti-government sentiment -- not only in their own state but across the country -- as they voted to raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy to prevent further cuts to public schools and other state services

(http://blog.oregonlive.com/politics_impact/print.html?entry=/2010/01/voters_pass_tax_measures_by_bi.html).

The statewide referenda passed easily, 54 to 46 percent, and were welcomed by educators and legislative leaders who were facing an estimated \$727 million shortfall in the current two-year budget cycle.

"We're absolutely ecstatic," said Hanna Vandering, a physical education teacher from Beaverton and vice-president of the state teachers' union. "What Oregonians said today is they believe in public education and vital services."

IWF, others to host forum on local revenue challenges

One of the reasons that it is harder and harder to maintain public sector programs and services -- including those in public schools -- is because of growing state revenue shortfalls. Less state money means fewer state services and the cost of many of those that remain is being pushed onto the backs of local property taxpayers.

The Institute for Wisconsin's Future (IWF at <http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org>) points out that a growing volume of property tax exemptions for various large property owners have shifted taxes onto owners of homes and small businesses. IWF is working with local officials, union leaders, and researchers to convene a discussion of solutions to these challenges. The conference is Feb. 19 in Madison. If you are interested, and a local government leader, contact Joe Fahey at 414-967-1682.

To read more about this event and other activities, you can subscribe to the IWF e-newsletter -- *Fair and Adequate* -- at http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org/pubs_pages/fair_adequate.html.

Cutting dropouts is good thing for Milwaukee and the U.S.

Looking for another reason to make sure our public schools are adequately funded? How about this: The economic benefits from halving the dropout rate would be a boon to businesses in the nation's largest cities (http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/EconMSA).

That was the result of a recent report by the Alliance for Excellent Education that looked at the nation's 50 largest cities, including Milwaukee. Using a sophisticated economic model, the Alliance looked at what would happen -- if dropouts were reduced -- in terms of individual earnings, home and auto sales, job and economic growth, spending and investment, tax revenue, and human capital. For Milwaukee

(<http://www.all4ed.org/files/Milwaukee.pdf>), the study predicted a \$41-million increase in earnings, increased home sales of \$100 million and auto sales of \$3 million, and a \$7 million increase in tax revenue.

The full report can be downloaded at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/EconBeneCityCardBooklet011210.pdf>.

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

- Feb. 16 -- School-funding reform discussion with members of the National-Louis University School Finance Class, 4:30 p.m., Kennedy Elementary School (<http://www.janesville.k12.wi.us/Default.aspx?alias=www.janesville.k12.wi.us/ken>), 3901 Randolph Road, Janesville
- Feb. 20 -- Discussion of school-funding at The Wisconsin River Valley Grassroots Festival (<http://www.wrvfest.com>) being held at Wisconsin Heights High School (<http://www.wisheights.k12.wi.us/HS/index.asp>); festival starts at 8:30 and the school-funding discussion is scheduled from 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.
- 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
- March 10 -- School-funding reform discussion, 6:30 p.m., at the Superior Middle School Cafetorium (<http://www.superior.k12.wi.us/superiormiddle/index.php>), 3626 Hammond Avenue, sponsored by the Four Corners PTA (more details as they become available)
- March 15 -- School-funding reform community discussion in Plymouth (more details as the become available)
- March 18 -- School-funding reform presentation in West Bend, 6:30 to 9 p.m. in the City Council Chambers of the West Bend City Hall, 1115 South Main Street
- 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

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 or 920-650-0525 for details.