



Wisconsin Alliance  
for Excellent Schools

## School-funding update

Week of February 28, 2008

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

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### Appleton, Kaukauna deal with school budget cuts

Two more school districts popped into the news last week as they were forced to deal with the consequences of a school-funding system that no longer works. Appleton was in the unenviable position of issuing more than 30 lay-off notices, while Kaukauna decided to dip into the district's fund balance rather than make more program cuts.

Because of the looming deadline to give notice, the Appleton School Board voted, Feb. 25, to issue 34 preliminary lay-offs affecting 25.5 full-time positions (<http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080226/APC0101/802260603/1979>). In December, the board approved \$3.2 million in spending cuts and \$800,000 in new revenues to cover a \$4 million budget shortfall anticipated next school year. According to Superintendent Lee Allinger, " ... (I)t is important to remember these (staff members) are good people, valued by the students they serve every day."

In Kaukauna, the board decided that enough is enough, offering no new cuts to close what remains of a projected \$1.6 million shortfall

(<http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080226/APC0101/802260638/1979>).

Instead, the district will rely on increased student enrollment, a depleting \$3 million fund balance, and a modified salary schedule to make up the remaining \$183,000.

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### School-funding referenda are piling up around the state

When legislators passed the present school-funding law back in the early 1990s, they included an escape valve for school districts to raise extra revenue if needed. Over the years, however, referenda have actually become part of the budgeting process rather than an extraordinary option. About half of all referenda pass, and even those districts that succeed find that the "extra" resources eventually run out because of the "going-out-of-business" design of Wisconsin's school-funding formula.

During the most-recent election, Feb. 19, 14 referenda were held -- six passed and eight failed. There will be at least 58 more votes taken on April . Last year, 100 districts went to referenda for what was supposed to be an extraordinary event. This time around, the losing districts echoed the thoughts of Auburndale Superintendent Gerald Eichman, who said, "It's going to get exponentially worse each

year after (next) because of the increasing costs." In Wausaukee, even referendum opponents knew were to put the blame ... on a state formula that puts districts all over the state in fiscal and educational crises.

If you want to read more about referenda that were held, Feb. 19, and those scheduled this spring, go to <http://madisonamps.org/>, a web site run by Advocates for Madison Public Schools, a member of WAES.

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## **Groups support Governor for protecting services**

Groups and individuals from around the state sent a letter (<http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/Feb08/feb21/0221ifwletter.pdf>) to Governor Jim Doyle, Feb. 20, praising him for his "call to protect the broad network of services crucial to our constituents by securing sufficient state revenue to minimize budget cuts."

The letter, signed by WAES, referred to the Governor's proposals to maintain Wisconsin's estate tax and to enact a small tax on hospitals that would, thereby, increase federal aid, a move supported by the Wisconsin Hospital Association. Additionally, signers of the letter spoke out in favor of "combined reporting and other mechanisms (that will) ensure that ... multi-state and multi-national corporations (that pay little or no income tax in the state) pay their share of the cost for strong and healthy communities."

Doyle's actions and the letter were prompted by the state's \$650 million budget shortfall. While "some political leaders have reacted with a mindless call for across-the-board reductions in state and local programs," the letter praises the Governor for showing "foresight and constructive leadership by calling for actions that maintain state revenue." For a more in-depth look at the state's projected budget deficit and what you can do about it, go to the website of the Wisconsin Council of Children and Families at <http://capwiz.com/wccf/issues/alert/?alertid=11051286>. To join this effort, go to <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/Feb08/feb21/0221ifwrevenue.pdf> for contact information.

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## **Just an opinion: Is virtual school funding getting too much attention?**

Does anyone think the funding formula for virtual schools is getting wee bit too much attention, at least vis a vis the way the funding formula has treated brick-and-mortar schools for the last 15 years?

No one on either side of the aisle or in either house of the Legislature, in the executive branch, or in the education community -- certainly not WAES -- wants to deny anyone the right to the opportunity for a quality education. On the other hand, all the attention paid to making sure there is funding for the 3,500 children served via online curriculum has me asking more questions than I'm getting answers for. If Wisconsin paid this much attention to the fiscal plight of the state's other 874,633 kids, funding reform would have been a reality a long, long time ago.

We've had bills. We've had hearings ... more than one ... called on a moments notice. We've had compromises. We've had threatened vetoes. We've had press releases from activists and legislators, and we've had marches on the Capitol. Why, even the chair of the Assembly Education Reform Committee has weighed in. Yes, the same Rep. Donald Pridemore (<http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=99>) who has said he will not hold a hearing on a plan to solve the larger funding problem.

My goodness, now we even had a bill scheduled for consideration in the Assembly. Consider this:

School-funding reform legislation for the vast majority of Wisconsin children, including very specific plans, has been on the table for 15 years. Nothing ever, ever made it to either house of the Legislature. This plan -- Assembly Bill 870 -- was introduced on Feb. 22, reported out of committee on Feb. 26, and was debated on the floor on Feb. 28, all within one week.

Go figure. Judging by the time frame and the vitriol of the debate, I'm guessing it is about much more than children and their education.

If you want to read more:

1. *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* editorial ... <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=720762>
2. Press release from the Wisconsin Parents Association (homeschoolers) ... <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/feb08/feb22/0222homeschools.pdf>
3. Wisconsin Coalition of Virtual School Families ... <http://www.wivirtualschoolfamilies.org/news/newsletter.cfm?ID=745>
4. Wisconsin Education Association Council ... <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/feb08/feb22/0222weaccolumn.pdf> and <http://www.weac.org/Capitol/2007-08/feb08/virtualbell.htm>
5. Rep. Pridemore ... <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/feb08/feb22/0222pridemoreweac.pdf> and <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/feb08/feb22/0222pridemoreweac.pdf>
6. *Journal-Sentinel* story on the compromise ... <http://www.jsonline.com/watch/?watch=1&date=2/19/2008&id=35834>
7. Rep. Brett Davis, chair of the Assembly Education Committee ... <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/feb08/feb22/0222davisvirtual.pdf> and <http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/feb08/feb22/0222davisedspeakers.pdf>

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## School-funding reform calendar

- March 26 -- Tax-fairness and school-funding reform presentation at the accounting seminar of the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (<http://www.wasbo.com/>), noon at Chula Vista (<http://www.chulavistaresort.com/>) in Wisconsin Dells
- April 1 -- School-funding reform discussion with the Whitewater Kiwanis Club, noon, at Novak's Restaurant, 111 West Whitewater Street
- April 18 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of the finance class of the education leadership course offered through Edgewood College (<http://www.edgewood.edu/>), 9:30 a.m. in 306 Predolin Hall, 1000 Edgewood College Drive, Madison
- May 7 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of a community meeting, at 7 p.m., in the Benton School District

*Please feel free to share your copy of the WAES school-funding update with anyone interested in school-finance reform. Contact Tom Beebe ([tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org](mailto:tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org)) at 414-384-9094 for details.*