

# School-funding update, Week of Feb. 28, 2011

- **Breaking news:** Gov. Walker admits to crushing school aid cuts
- **Parents converging on Greenfield, March 5, to fight school cuts**
- **We can work together to stop billion-dollar aid cuts**
- **It makes no sense: More aid cuts on top of 18 years of cuts**
- **Why can't we all have great schools, Journal Sentinel writer asks**
- **WAES members working hard for school-funding reform**
- **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)

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## **Breaking news:** Gov. Walker admits to crushing school aid cuts

No one knows better than Scott Walker that Wisconsin's school-funding system as been taking opportunities out of the hands of kids for well over 15 years. He is a former legislator who knows how the system works. Why then would now-Governor Walker take it a step further and plan to cut up to another \$1 billion from school aid and ratchet down revenue limits even tighter?

We don't know the answer to those questions, but we do know that he plans to do just that when his budget is unveiled on Tuesday, March 1.

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* writer Amy Hetzner reported Feb. 27

(<http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/117008863.html>) that Walker told WISN-TV's Mike Gousha that there will be over \$1 billion in cuts for local municipalities, "most of which is in the schools." The Governor gave no justification for such crippling cuts and said only that the flexibility he is trying to give school districts in forcing their teachers to pay more for insurance and pensions should make it easier. Many school district officials, however, are saying that Gov. Walker's math just doesn't add up.

The proposed aid cut will be only the first shoe to drop. Most expect the second shoe to be a tightening of revenue limits or school districts' ability to raise local property taxes to make up for decreases in state aid. Again, the tightened limits come on the heels of almost two decades of the state paying a declining share of the cost of quality educational opportunities. According to Professor Andrew Reschovsky of the LaFollette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, "Facing lower revenue limits, many school districts will be forced to eliminate programs and increase class sizes. I would predict that many districts will find it hard to avoid substantial teacher and staff lay-offs

(<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers/reschovsky2011-003.pdf>)."

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## **Parents converging on Greenfield, March 5, to fight school cuts**

When the Governor unveils his budget -- expected to further take opportunities away from our children, schools, and communities -- parents can't be flailing around looking for answers. Moms and dads from communities all over Wisconsin have to be ready to act or accept a state budget that will cripple public schools and slash the quality and quantity of education of their children.

WAES is trying to do its part by working with people around the state to get ready to fight back. Our answer is that there is a better way, and that way is "A Penny for Kids (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>)," a one-cent increase in the sales tax to stop the cuts we expect to see. More importantly, however, we need to talk to each other about how to deal with what could be a \$1 billion cut in school aid.

**March 5, parent advocates from all over southeastern Wisconsin will meet in Greenfield to start the discussion. Their will be brief presentations from folks in area school districts and then a discussion of how to deal with the state budget's adverse effects on schools. The session will begin at 1 p.m. and be held in the Greenfield School District (<http://www.greenfield.k12.wi.us/>) administration building at 4850 South 60th Street.**

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## **We can work together to stop billion-dollar aid cuts**

Some parents, students, and community members around Wisconsin were 100-percent behind teachers who left their classrooms last week to make a statement about their rights and about the future of public education.

Others are understandably confused and upset. "How," they ask, "can good teachers abandon their children for their union rights?"

What gets lost in all of this is the common denominator that should bring us all together: Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker has signaled up to a billion dollars in cuts to public school aid — a brutal move that will decimate programs and services that all of our children need for successful futures.

That is something that should bring us all together to send a loud and clear message from every community in the state. Go to <http://www.excellentschools.org> to find out what you can do.

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## **It makes no sense: More aid cuts on top of 18 years of cuts**

I can't possibly imagine there is still anyone anywhere in Wisconsin that hasn't seen the harm being done to the children, schools, and communities of Wisconsin by the state's school-funding formula and recent cuts in school aids. That knowledge makes it almost impossible to imagine why Governor Scott Walker would want to cut yet another billion dollars from our kids.

For example, the *Phillips Bee* (<http://www.phillipswi.com/>) recently reported -- in a story entitled "Budget repair bill could spell doom for poorer school districts" -- a new twist on Gov. Walker's proposal, quoting a Phillips school administrator as saying the changes will mean "the wealthy districts will be able to attract the best teachers and offer them better packages." School board member Dave Flessert agreed, saying "we would have to be very careful how we make cuts or we will end up with a crappy education system ([http://www.excellentschools.org/news/doom\\_poor\\_small\\_schools.pdf](http://www.excellentschools.org/news/doom_poor_small_schools.pdf))."

In a second story, also by Eric Knudson, the *Bee* reported that the school district had finally met its budget goal by slashing \$662,800 from the next school year, including eliminating financial consulting services, reducing office support, teacher and custodian attrition, eliminating the Employee Assistance Program, reducing classroom supplies, eliminating a late bus route, and reducing extra-curricular activities. Then, Gov. Walker slammed the door on the Phillips School District "as news developed that the state's new budget could contain unprecedented cuts to state aid that could force the district to come up with an additional \$440,000 in budget cuts ([http://www.excellentschools.org/news/phillips\\_budget\\_cuts.pdf](http://www.excellentschools.org/news/phillips_budget_cuts.pdf))."

Do we all get it now? If not, keep reading:

- Greenfield school district could be headed for bankruptcy ... <http://www.greenfieldnow.com/news/114614789.html>
- D.C. Everest school board issues lay-off notices ... <http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20110223/WDH0101/102230640/D-C-Everest-School-Board-issues-layoff-notices>
- Manitowoc teachers get preliminary lay-off notices ... <http://www.htrnews.com/article/20110223/MAN0101/102230851/Teachers-to-get-preliminary-layoff-notices>
- Menasha board OK's teacher lay-off notices ... <http://www.postcrescent.com/article/20110222/APC0101/102220413/Menasha-board-OKs-teacher-layoff-notices>
- Thanks to Gov. Walker, hole in Janesville school budget gets wider ... <http://www.gazettextra.com/news/2011/feb/20/janesville-school-budget-hole-grows-wider/>
- Tomorrow River school board hears about staffing cuts ... <http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/article/20110216/SPJ0101/102160701/Tomorrow-River-School-District-School-Board-propose-staff-cuts>
- Independence referendum fails; cuts loom ... [http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/article\\_03626fce-3991-11e0-a1a1-001cc4c03286.html](http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/article_03626fce-3991-11e0-a1a1-001cc4c03286.html)
- Question in Wauwatosa: Spanish teachers or librarians ... <http://www.fox6now.com/news/witi-01242011-tosa-libarians,0,1291169.story>
- Nekoosa school board cuts nine jobs ... <http://www.wisconsinrapidtribune.com/article/20110209/WRT0101/102090863/Nekoosa-School-Board-approves-cutting-nine-jobs-in-district>
- Nicolet school board decides it needs a referendum to hike revenue ... <http://www.glendalenow.com/news/115115224.html>
- Oshkosh looking to cut \$26.6 million in next five years ... <http://www.thenorthwestern.com/article/20110203/OSH0105/102030459/Oshkosh-schools-may-need-to-cut-26-6-million-in-next-five-years>

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## Why can't we all have great schools, Journal Sentinel writer asks

Veteran education writer Alan Borsuk notes in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* that "even with increases in how much employees pay for benefits, if spending per student drops as much as appears likely, schools throughout the state will be squeezed in ways Wisconsin hasn't seen since maybe the Depression of the 1930s. The school qualities we all want will be weakened."

Borsuk, now a senior fellow in law and public policy at Marquette University Law School, was writing about what kind of schools we want our children to attend. He asks, doesn't "every reasonable, responsible parent want these things?"

"But here we are," Borsuk says. And the fact in real life is that schools that have the traits (we want) are ebbing." He ends with a plea for Gov. Walker and others: "This isn't about partisanship. It's about building up the schools we actually all want. It's about finding realistic ways to give children and communities what they need. Statewide, we did when it I was a kid. Why aren't we capable of it now (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/116544173.html>)?"

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## WAES members working hard for school-funding reform

If you want to belong to an organization that is doing the work on the ground in communities around the state to bring people together around adequate revenue and school-funding reform, WAES is where you need to be. Please join with us to make sure this important work carries on.

Renewing their memberships since the last newsletter are: the school districts of Sturgeon Bay (<http://www.sturbay.k12.wi.us/>), Phillips (<http://www.phillips.k12.wi.us/>), Pepin (<http://home.centurytel.net/pepinschools>), New Auburn (<http://www.newauburn.k12.wi.us/>), Reedsville (<http://www.reedsville.k12.wi.us/>), and Lakeland (<http://www.reedsville.k12.wi.us/>); the Rock Valley Education Professionals (<http://www.weac.org/rvep/>); the Wisconsin School Social Workers' Association (<http://www.wsswa.org/>); and Sally Overholt, Stevens Point, Connie Molbeck, Racine.

Please join these groups and the other members of WAES in communities throughout Wisconsin. We need your help. If you or your organization want to join -- or renew your membership -- contact WAES (see below) or go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm>.

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**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.**

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## School-funding reform calendar

- Sept. 15 -- School-funding reform discussion with the members of the Beloit Area Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net/>), 8:30 a.m. at the River of Life Church (<http://www.theriveroflifeumc.org/>), 511 Public Avenue, Beloit

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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.

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Thomas S. Beebe, Outreach Specialist  
Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools  
315 Maple Street  
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538