



Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

School-funding update

Week of March 18, 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.

Another state budget deficit slows funding reform effort

It never seems to go away -- Wisconsin's never-ending budget shortfalls. These crises are especially troubling to our communities, children, schools, and school districts because decreasing aid is always a consideration to close budget gaps and the furor surrounding the deficits distracts from the growing problems with the state's school-funding system and efforts to reform it.

To come to grips with the ins and outs of the most recent crisis, go to <http://www.wsaa.org/reportviewer.aspx?caprptid=172> for updates and reports from groups and individuals around the state. The Wisconsin Council of Children and Families also has a wonderful budget resource at http://www.wccf.org/budget_resources_deficit2007-09.php.

As of today, the Governor has offered his solution to the deficit (<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=726615>) and the Assembly its version (<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=727811>). The Assembly plan does include a provision, called an "accounting trick" by the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, that would push \$125 million in school aid payments in July of 2009 -- just after the fiscal year ends. "That accounting gimmick pushes that part of the budget problem into future years." The Senate, as of March 18, has a hearing of the Committee on Finance scheduled for 10 a.m., March 19, at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (<http://www.thewheelerreport.com/releases/Mar08/mar17/0317millerhearing.pdf>).

Ashland, Manitowoc school districts face cuts to fill budget holes

It's happening all over the state in what has become an annual rite of spring. Just like prom and graduation, school district boards are preparing to hear about budget deficits and to figure out how to fill shortfalls without further eroding the education of children. This week, Manitowoc and Ashland are unfortunate enough to be in the spotlight.

Feb. 26, the Manitowoc School Board took its first look at a list of potential reductions, marking the start of plugging a potential \$1.3 million hole in the 2008-09 budget (<http://www.htrnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2008803120307>). Among the options the district is looking at are reductions in the fund balance, insurance, department head time, energy conservation, technology advocates, one high school custodian, the general maintenance/supply budget, one position at the MSC, staff travel and development, curriculum writing, one substitute caller position, administrative out-of-state travel, and the athletic budget.

Budget realities are also setting in in the Ashland School District where the board is looking at a projected deficit of \$260,000 for 2008-09 (<http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2008/03/11/news/doc47d69ac025113927708444.txt>; requires free registration). Superintendent Peggy Smith said nothing has been identified for cuts yet, but that she'll "be bringing to (the board) a number of cost-saving scenarios." Since the 2003-04 school year, the district has made cuts of over \$1.2 million in order to meet the state's revenue limit mandate.

Teachers talk about funding cuts on new WEAC video

While not the only group affected by Wisconsin's ill-conceived school-funding formula, teachers are among the first to feel the effects of a system that is both unfair and underfunded.

WEAC, the state's teachers' union, has collected the voices of several members from around the state on its website (<http://www.weac.org/News/2007-08/feb08/revcapmap.htm>). The video is called "Revenue caps 'ripping community apart.'" Teachers in the video were talking during WEAC's annual winter conference in Appleton.

Janeen LaBorde, a Merrill science teacher, commented on her communities rejection of a \$2.9 million referendum that will result, school administration says, in the reduction of 12 positions. Not only is it "ripping the community apart," LaBorde says, but "ultimately the kids are the ones who are suffering."

Sen. Schultz acknowledges hope for school-funding reform

Key Republican State Senator Dale Schultz has acknowledged on his website (http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen17/news/Press/2008/teachers_schoolfunding.asp) that there might be a chance for school-funding reform in Wisconsin.

Sen. Schultz, who lives in Richland Center and represents the 17th District, was commenting on Governor Jim Doyle's state-of-the-state address in February (http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/journal_media_detail.asp?locid=19&prid=3122). According to the Senator, any attempt to close the deficit in the state budget should not come "on the backs of school districts." He also said that when the Governor talked about a different way of paying teachers, it was "a signal that (he) may now be ready to enter the discussion of retooling our school funding formula."

WAES, like Sen. Schultz said, will "look forward to working with (the Governor) ... "

41 referenda set; administrators leaving; AJR35 voted down

Despite the encouraging words from Sen. Schultz, the school-funding crisis in Wisconsin continues to take its toll on students, communities, and educators.

According to a recent story in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, 41 school districts will go to referendum, April 1, asking property taxpayers for more money to operate their communities' schools (<http://www.madison.com/wsj/home/local/277164>). The revenue isn't to build buildings, either, it is to "fix roofs, update textbooks, upgrade computers, and, in some cases, just to keep the upkeep," just a few of the problems created by the state's school-funding system. The upcoming votes are on the heels of 14 referenda held during the February election (of which only six passed).

The *State Journal* also reported, recently, on the increasing number of mainly baby-boomer-age district administrators retiring. The paper interviewed four Madison-area superintendents. All three cited frustration with revenue shortfalls and the state's unfair and inadequate method of funding public schools as contributing to their decisions (<http://www.madison.com/wsj/home/local/277388>).

And, with all this bad news from around the state, lawmakers still refuse to bring school-funding reform to the floor for discussion. As part of the late-night deliberations in the Assembly around the hole in the state budget, an attempt was made to bring Assembly Joint Resolution 35 (known as the Pope-Roberts/Breske resolution) out of committee and to the floor for discussion. The motion failed along party lines (<http://nxt.legis.state.wi.us/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates&fn=default.htm&vid=WI:Default&d=billhist&jd=top>). AJR35, backed by WAES, only asks the Legislature (contact your Representatives at <http://waml.legis.state.wi.us/>) to do its job and begin a discussion of fixing the problem it helped to create.

School-funding reform covered on Eau Claire area public radio

Kerry Jacobson, superintendent of the Osseo-Fairchild School District, and Tim Sivertson, president of the Elk Mound School District and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, talked about school-funding reform, March 11, on Wisconsin Public Radio station WHWC, 88.3 in Eau Claire..

The two, along with Tom Beebe, executive director of WAES, were guests on The West Side, hosted by WHWC news director Mary Jo Wagner.

You can hear the hour-long program by going to <http://www.wpr.org/regions/eau/>.

School librarians on the budget chopping block in Colorado, too

According to an article on the *azcentral.com* website, Arizona's inadequate school-funding system is claiming more victims, school librarians from across the state -- much like what is happening in Wisconsin.

Like most other states, Arizona has no dedicated funding for school libraries and no law requiring school libraries to exist. The fate of libraries and librarians is up to local school districts to protect, and that often means cuts in other programs and services (<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0311libraryfade0311.html>).

"Almost any district at any time facing a funding crisis can say, 'Here's an easy fix,'" said Sara Kelly Johns, president of the American Association of School Librarians (<http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslindex.cfm>). "They're looking at what programs are mandated instead of what programs are effective."

WAES needs your support now more than ever

WAES is now an independent, non-profit organization. Other than its tax status and its dues-paying membership base, nothing has changed -- WAES is still a leaders in the school-funding reform effort.

WAES needs your support to make sure reform becomes a reality as soon as possible. As more and more school districts move to the brink of fiscal and educational crisis, the coalition's work is more important than ever.

You can help by joining WAES today. Go to

http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/membership_statement.pdf to join as an individual member. Send your membership statement and dues to Tom Beebe, Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, 315 Maple Street, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538. To get the dues structure for organizations -- or for more information -- contact Tom at 920-650-0525 or tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org.

Organizations from around the state are WAES members

Organizations that are dues-paying members of WAES include:

- Organizations -- abcmadison; Community and Schools Together (Madison); Dane County SOS Senior Council; Disability Rights Wisconsin; Institute for Wisconsin's Future; Japanese American Citizen League-Wisconsin Chapter; Project ABC (Waukesha); RVReferendum.org (Spring Green); Wisconsin Organization of Asian Americans; WISDOM; Wisconsin Association for Talented and Gifted; Wisconsin School Social Workers Association.
- Parent organizations: Pecatonica PTA; Wisconsin PTA.
- Teacher groups: Fond du Lac Retired Educators Association; Madison Area Retired Educators Association; Rock Valley United Teachers-Retired; Wisconsin Retired Educators Association; AFT-Wisconsin; Capital Area Uniserv-North; Cedar Lake United Educators; Green Bay Education Association; Kenosha Education Association; Lakewood Uniserv Council; Madison Teachers Inc.; Milwaukee Teachers Education Association; Northern Tier Uniserv; Southern Lakes United Educators; WEAC Council No. 10; WEAC-Fox Valley Uniserv.
- Individuals: Ellen Lindgren; Ruth Sproull; Erin Green; John Simonson; John Eyster; Carol Carstensen; Virginia Wyss; John Smart; Sally Overholt; Winnie Doxsie; John LaCourt; Kathy Zingsheim; Marjorie Passman; Beth Moss; Donna Tarpinian; Charles Fitzgerald; Pat Kerhin; Trish O'Neil; Jill Ellinwood; Gayle Gonsior; Janet Kane; Connie Molbeck.

School Districts: Barron; Benton; Birchwood; Columbus; Cuba City; Florence County; Glidden; Hurley; Laona; Middleton-Cross Plains; Pepin; Platteville; Rhinelander; Port Edwards; Shell Lake; Southwestern; Stevens Point; Sturgeon Bay; Superior; Wabeno; Washington Island.

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

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 12 -- WISDOM (<http://www.gamaliel.org/Wisdom/default.htm>) Leadership Assembly, "Faith and Our Common Destiny," 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Cross Lutheran Church (http://www.lutheransonline.com/servlet/lo_ProcServ/dbpage=page&mode=display&gid=20052653588835682201111555), 1821 North 16th Street, Milwaukee
- April 19 -- 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
- April 19 -- School-funding reform workshop as part of the Northern Leadership Conference of the Wisconsin-AFT (<http://www.aft-wisconsin.org/index.php>) at the Barkers Island Inn and Conference Center in Superior (<http://www.barkersislandinn.com/>)
- April 21 -- School-funding reform presentation for a membership meeting of the Winnebago Land Uniserv (<http://www.weac.org/WinnebagoLand/>), 5:30 p.m., 325 Trowbridge Drive, Fond du Lac
- April 25 -- School-funding reform workshop at the Wisconsin PTA Convention (<http://www.wisconsinpta.org/>), 10 a.m., at the Regency Suites in Green Bay (<http://www.regencygb.com/index.php>)
- May 7 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of a community meeting, at 7 p.m., in the Benton School District
- June 20 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of the finance class of the education leadership course offered through Edgewood College (<http://www.edgewood.edu/>), 10 a.m., DC Everest School District office (<http://www.dce.k12.wi.us/>)
- Nov. 13 -- School-funding reform presentation at the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association Fall Conference (<http://www.wsswa.org/>) at the Heidel House near Green Lake (<http://www.heidelhouse.com/>)

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) at 920-650-0525 for details.