

School-funding update, Week of March 21, 2011

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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

Parent organizing meetings set in Dane County and Milwaukee

Parents in Dane County and Milwaukee Public Schools have scheduled events to update the public on Governor Scott Walkers' devastating cuts to their children's educational opportunities and to plan what they can do, together, to form advocacy groups and work for a better way. The events follow closely on the heels of a similar meeting in Greenfield, March 5, that saw over 400 people come together to plan the next step.

March 27, members of the Dane County School Board Consortium and WAES (<http://www.excellentschools.org>) will host a community meeting -- "The Future of Public Education and A Call to Action" -- at the Monona Grove High School Commons (<http://www.mononagrove.org/mghs/>), 4400 Monona Drive, Monona. The hoped-for outcomes of the event, which runs from 3 to 4:40 p.m., include an increased understanding of school funding in Wisconsin, alternatives to cuts in funding, and formation of community advocacy groups. For more information, call 608-217-5938 or go to http://www.excellentschools.org/events/2011/budget/dane_county_flier.pdf.

The session in Milwaukee is sponsored by I Love My Public School (<http://ilovemypublicschool.com/>), Milwaukee Families for School Funding (<http://familiesforfunding.org/>), and WAES. Billed as "organized by parents and for parents," the event will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. on March 30 at the MPS Central Office (<http://www.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/>), 5225 West Vliet Street. Child care and food for children will be provided. For questions go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/events/2011/budget/March30%20flyer.pdf> or e-mail ilovemypublicschool@gmail.com.

Schools, communities struggling to deal with budget cuts

The *Wausau Daily Herald* did a great job of restating the obvious when it said in a March 5 story that the Governor's two-years worth of devastating cuts to public education would mean "changes are coming to Wisconsin's schools (<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20110305/WDH0101/103050468/Five-ways-the-state-budget-could-change-schools>)."

Writer Keith Uhlig analyzed the 2011-13 budget's impact on children noting that class sizes will increase, programs will be limited, experienced teachers will leave, special programs will be reduced, and third graders will find their reading skills scrutinized. It's hard to see where any of this helps kids or their communities, and

even claims that school districts will be given the tools to face reduced revenue seem exaggerated, at best. Jerry Rosso, superintendent at Mosinee, said, "We don't have the tools to balance the budget. The employee contributions won't get us to the level of deductions that will be forced on us."

It's not just the schools in the Wausau area that are scrambling to make sense -- both economically and educationally -- of the Governor's budget:

- Budget cuts slash deep into Wisconsin Rapids curriculum
<http://www.wisconsinrapidstribune.com/article/20110322/WRT0101/103220503/Cuts-curriculum-budget-Wisconsin-Rapids-School-District-run-deep?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|FRONTPAGE>
- Green Bay area schools struggle with Walker's "help"
<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/article/20110321/GPG0101/103210505/Green-Bay-area-schools-struggle-new-tax-plan?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|FRONTPAGE>
- Governor's mythical math doesn't match ours, LaCrosse says
http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/article_3cd50d3e-52aa-11e0-8763-001cc4c03286.html
- Despite Governor's tools, Chippewa Falls eyes steep cuts
http://chippewa.com/news/local/article_4fbc36ae-5113-11e0-9757-001cc4c03286.html
- Walker's plans get less than enthusiastic reviews in Fond du Lac area
<http://www.fdlreporter.com/article/20110318/FON0101/110317119/Local-school-administrators-give-Walker-plan-mixed-reviews?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|FRONTPAGE>
- Manitowoc area districts grapple with funding formula
<http://www.htrnews.com/article/20110318/MAN0101/103180645/Schools-grapple-funding-formula?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|FRONTPAGE>
- Governor's "help" means millions of dollars more in cuts in Racine County
http://www.journaltimes.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/article_db504b42-5091-11e0-a3c0-001cc4c03286.html

"There's A Better Way Toolkit" now available to the public

Governor Scott Walkers budget, coming on the heels of 18 years of damage caused by a school-funding system that took opportunities out of the hands of children, has been called everything from draconian to devastating. Parents, students, educators, and just plain folks by the hundreds of thousands have marched and protested throughout Wisconsin. The time has come, however, to ask two questions: Is there a better way and what comes next?

WAES has offered the better way ... well, actually, state schools' Superintendent Tony Evers and WAES have. Evers, several months ago, announced "Fair Funding for Our Future (<http://www.fairfundingforourfuture.org>)," a realistic and ready first step that provides solutions that are good for education and public policy as well as politically viable. To work well, the plan needs a state revenue source, and WAES has offered "A Penny for Kids (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>)," a one-cent increase in the sales tax.

There is a better way, and people around the state agree. The problem is convincing our elected officials in Madison who have been more interested in punishing their opponents and playing political games than they have been in giving children the opportunities to learn they need to be the good citizens we need tomorrow.

March 5, at a meeting attended by more than 400 people in Greenfield, groups came together and shared their experiences, their organizational capabilities, and their experience in fighting for school-funding reform. Go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/events/2011/budget/toolkit.htm> to share those results in the "There Must Be A Better Way Toolkit."

"There's A Better Way" T-shirts now available from WAES

Why not wear your school-funding reform attitude on your sleeve, literally, with a "There Must Be A Better Way" T-shirt? Let your friends, co-workers, neighbors, and relatives know what they can do to help guarantee all of our children have the opportunities they need to learn in school and succeed in the future.

The shirt comes in light blue and in various sizes, both for adults and children. On the front, in bold letters, is the statement we know to be true in the face of the devastating cuts to schools offered by State Government: "There's A Better Way." And, on the back, is the now well-known "A Penny for Kids" logo, along with the campaigns web address at <http://www.apennyforkids.org>.

You can get you T-shirt or shirts for \$10.00 a piece (plus postage). To order yours is go to the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and click on the "Order Now" button. We aren't accepting credit card or PayPal orders, but you can fill out the order blank and send it in.

WAES members working hard to protect opportunities for kids

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.

Linda Brown, of Greenfield, is the newest member of the coalition. Renewing their memberships since the last newsletter are Bay Lakes United Educators (<http://www.weac.org/blue/>) and the Dane County SOS Senior Council. The other members of WAES can be found at <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm>.

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>.

New organizations offer the chance to be involved

School Funding Reform for Wisconsin (<http://www.reformwi.org/>) is a volunteer, grassroots effort that recently came together in Stevens Point. Their focus is to bring attention to the need to change the way we fund K-12 education, and their mission is to advocate for adequate and equitable funding. When you visit Reform's website, don't forget to sign their resolution at <http://www.reformwi.org/how-you-can-help.html>.

Milwaukee Families for School Funding (<http://familiesforfunding.org/>) is a grassroots organization of parents and other community members alarmed by the accelerating education funding crisis that imperils the future of our children in the Milwaukee Public Schools. The group also has a petition, produces many of its materials in Spanish, and provides those who want to stay involved the opportunity to receive e-mail updates (just go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/familiesforschoolfunding>).

Another Milwaukee group that recently came together is *I Love My Public School* (<http://ilovemypublicschool.com/>). The parents organization came together to fight for the rights of all children to a quality public education and to fight against the devastating impact of the most recent state budget on children and communities. The website contains a very good list of things advocates can do, including talking to legislators, visiting with neighbors, and sponsoring funding reform events in schools.

Don't forget students when thinking about MPS's future

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel contributor Alan Borsuk says it is time for the "big talkers" who constantly berate Milwaukee Public Schools to put up or shut up, because recent proposals to "save" the city's largest school district have put it "at the brink of a momentous functional breakdown (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/117472378.html>)."

"Well, MPS is coming apart," Borsuk said. "The looming cut of \$75 million in state aid for next year, proposed by Governor Scott Walker ..., is first on the list of reasons why things have come to pass. It's not the only the reason for the impending collapse, he said, but too many policymakers seem to be "forgetting somewhere in here that we want to improve outcomes for Milwaukee kids."

He ends his commentary by calling for "compassion for the needs of children, with commitment to the future of the Milwaukee area, and with a maximum sense of practicality ... that (requires) smart, fast, tough, and visionary action."

Borsuk is a senior fellow in law and public policy at Marquette University Law School (<http://www.marquette.edu>).

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

- March 27 -- Community meeting on "The Future of Public Education and A Call to Action"; 3 to 4:30 p.m. in the Monona Grove High School Commons (<http://www.mononagrove.org/mghs/>), 4400 Monona Drive, Monona; sponsored by members of the Dane County School Board Consortium and WAES; call 608-217-5938 for more information or see story above
- March 30 -- "Help Save Our Schools," a district-wide public meeting organized by parents and for parents of Milwaukee Public Schools; 6 to 8 p.m. at the MPS Central Office Auditorium (<http://www.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/>), 5225 West Vliet Street (parking behind the building); sponsored by I Love My Public School (<http://ilovemypublicschool.com/>), Milwaukee Families for School Funding (<http://familiesforfunding.org/>), and WAES (<http://www.excellentschools.org/>); for more information contact ilovemypublicschool@gmail.com or see story above
- April 13 -- Lobby Day sponsored by the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association (<http://www.naswwi.org/lobby-day-april-13-2011/>) at the Madison Masonic Center and the State Capitol; for more information, call Laurel Schmidt at 866-462-7994 or 608-257-6334 or e-mail naswwiintern@tds.net
- 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

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.

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