

## **School-funding update for the week of May 24, 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](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org).

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### **"A Penny for Kids" -- It's head-scratching time in Wisconsin**

Voters in Arizona and legislators in Kansas have decided to increase their sales tax one-penny in order to head off dangerous cuts to their public schools. Many voters in Wisconsin are asking for the same thing -- ["A Penny for Kids"](#) -- but more are needed. Even more important, folks in the Badger State need someone in State Government to step forward, do the right thing, and put a sales-tax increase on the legislative agenda.

Voting Tuesday, Arizona approved a temporary sales tax increase, championed by a Republican Governor, in order to avert sharp cuts in education (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/20/us/20arizona.html>). Much like Wisconsin, Arizona is a low sales tax state, so the increase will only be to 6.6 percent and raise more than \$900 million in the first year alone. Speaking to the voters of her state, Governor Jan Brewer said, "Doing the right thing almost always means doing the hard thing, and today, you did the hard thing."

Equally conservative Kansas took a different path to the same outcome. Democratic Governor Mark Parkinson, with help from a Republican-controlled Legislature, raised the sales tax from 5.3 to 6.3 percent "to avoid cuts in aid to public schools," according to an article in *The Wichita Eagle* (<http://www.kansas.com/2010/05/16/1316304/analysis-gov-key-figure-in-kan.html>). The increase will raise \$314 million during the next fiscal year. Topeka Democrat and Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley said, "It really was about protecting what we have."

Thousands of voters in Wisconsin have already signed up for a small increase in the sales tax (["A Penny for Kids"](#)) to keep our schools strong. We need many more people to sign, however. If you haven't, do it now. Then, pass it along (<http://www.apennyforkids.org>) to your neighbors, friends, and co-workers. This is too important to ignore.

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## Sales tax hike mentioned in Representatives survey

["A Penny for Kids"](#) -- a penny increase in the sales tax -- is not the final, long-term answer to the school-funding problems Wisconsin faces. It is, however, critically needed to meet, head-on, the revenue crisis created when the Legislature cut aid to schools in the last state budget. And, judging by reports from several regions, we are making progress.

Rep. Mark Pocan, who represents Madison's 78th Assembly District, included the campaign in his recent end-of-the-session survey (<http://www.excellentschools.org>). Rep. Pocan asked his constituents how to meet "the revenue crisis" in schools, including increasing the sales tax under ["A Penny for Kids."](#)

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## Funding crises deepen for Wisconsin school districts

And, for anyone who thinks Wisconsin's public schools don't need the help, they need to look no further than their local newspapers:

- New Berlin crowd horrified by possible staff, program cuts.  
<http://www.newberlinnow.com/news/94801459.html>
- The 2010-11 budget proposal for Milwaukee Public Schools has some "ominous predictions," including eliminating 682 jobs (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/92454009.html>). Also, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported, May 10, that MPS has 84 licensed counselors to serve 82,096 students, a counselor-to-student ratio of almost 1-to-1,000 ... well above recommendations of 1-to-250 (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/93357104.html>).
- Unless something changes in Stevens Point, 36 teachers will lose their jobs next school year (<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/article/20100511/SPJ0101/5110646/1983>). And, that's not all. Superintendent Steven Johnson has resigned, in part because of the state's school-funding system and the problems and divisions created in Stevens Point (<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/article/20100512/SPJ0101/5120713/1983&located=rss>). And, it is happening elsewhere. *The Wisconsin Rapids Tribune* reports that three superintendents -- Stevens Point, Rapids, and Wausau -- resigned for reasons that include the turmoil created by budget and staff cuts (<http://www.wisconsinrapidstribune.com/article/20100516/CWS0101/305160111/1982/WRT04/Budget--teacher-cuts-create-turmoil-for-districts-in-area>).
- School budgets get trimmed and more cuts likely in Barron.  
[http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20425924&BRD=1132&PAG=461&dept\\_id=157660&rfi=6](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=20425924&BRD=1132&PAG=461&dept_id=157660&rfi=6).
- Durand school board non-renews administrators.  
<http://www.wqow.com/Global/story.asp?S=12192466>.
- River Falls passes \$366,600 budget reduction package.  
<http://m.riverfallsjournal.com/article.cfm?id=94640>.

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## Some things we'd like to hear Wisconsin's new Governor say

If he could make it happen, longtime *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* education writer Alan Borsuk says he would like to see the next Governor of Wisconsin deliver a speech calling on legislators to stop posturing and playing politics and "start dealing with the real issues" because "things are too serious," especially with school funding (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/92600099.html>).

Borsuk says he'd like to see the next Governor get serious about education reform in the speech, "especially for paying for education." "If the school funding system in your hometown isn't financially broken, it's under huge stress and it's going to be broken soon," the *Journal Sentinel* writer said.

Citing the usual problems -- too little money and escalating costs; special problems like the economy; and the funding cliff that comes when the federal stimulus money "runs out," Borsuk says he'd like the next Governor and Legislature to "think and act as if we're creating a funding system from scratch. We can't let school quality keep eroding. And we can't go on acting as if things aren't breaking down. There have got to be new ways."

All we can say is amen to that and welcome to the WAES line of reasoning.

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## **WEAC, WREA pass resolutions pushing school-funding reform**

Two members of WAES -- WEAC (<http://www.weac.org>) and the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net>)-- recently moved school-funding reform up on their priority list by passing resolutions at meetings of their governing bodies.

The April 29 issue of the "*On NTU*," the newsletter of the Northern Tier Uniserv headquartered in Rhinelander and Hayward, reported that NTU school-funding reformers presented, worked for, and helped pass a new business item calling on WEAC to "help organize and coordinate a statewide grassroots action among educators, school board members, parents, students, and reform advocates" to coincide with the 2001-13 legislative session. The full resolution can be found at <http://www.ntu1.com/april29.pdf>.

A resolution was also brought forward -- and passed by members of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (WREA). The text isn't online, but it says that "WREA encourages its members and units to take an active role in supporting Wisconsin's public schools and in making school-funding reform a top priority."

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## **One WAES member honored, another joins radio discussion**

Teri Hanson, WAES member from Phillips, was recently named by WEAC as a recipient of the Tenia Jenkins Award. This honor recognizes an individual's significant contribution to activism among WEAC members for the benefit of students and members. Teri was a co-founder of Price County Citizens Who CARE and co-organizer of five "Walks on the Child's Side (<http://madisonamps.org/2009/05/28/back-in-stride-walk-on-the-childs-side-update/>)." She is also president of the Phillips Education Association and NTU.

WAES member TJ Mertz -- along with Joe Quick from the Madison Metropolitan School District and north-side Madison public school activist Rebecca Kemble were guests on WORT radio's (<http://www.wort-fm.org>) "A Public Affair." You can hear the program at [http://archive.wort-fm.org/mp3/wort\\_100519\\_120401apawed.mp3](http://archive.wort-fm.org/mp3/wort_100519_120401apawed.mp3).

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## **WAES has work to do and needs your help to do it**

There is work to do ... "[A Penny for Kids](#)" is moving forward; campaign season is upon us; and school-funding problems for kids, school districts, and communities around the state just continue to deepen.

If there ever was a time to join WAES, now is it (<http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm>).

Since the last newsletter, the Stevens Point Area Retired Teachers' Association has joined the coalition. Renewals have been received from the Wisconsin Association of Talented and Gifted (<http://watg.org/>) and the Fond du Lac Retired Educators' Association; the school districts of Madison (<http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/>), Washburn (<http://www.washburn.k12.wi.us/>), Wabeno (<http://www.wabeno.k12.wi.us/>), and Athens (<http://www.athens.k12.wi.us/default.aspx>); and Jill Gaskell and Steve Demler of Blanchardville, Paul Kusuda of Madison, Susan Hauri of Richland Center, Donna Tarpinian of Stoughton, Fred and Cheryl Andrist of Rhinelander, Trish O'Neil of Columbus, John Simonson of Mineral Point, Connie Molbeck of Racine, and Carol Carstensen of Madison.

WAES has come a long, long way and had an impact on the progress of school-funding reform in Wisconsin. Despite that progress, we have a long way to go. The success of the coalition is dependent on the membership and we need each and every one of you, your organizations, and your school districts to succeed. Please think about joining the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools today (<http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm>).

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### **Marshall school board member tells it like it is**

Jeff Ziegler is a member of the Marshall School District (<http://www.marshall.k12.wi.us/>) Board. He gets it and understands what is behind "the signs of spring in Wisconsin" that he talked about in a recent opinion column in *The Cap Times* ([http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/article\\_216d1122-fac1-5afd-9509-f1d2e2f088ef.html](http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/article_216d1122-fac1-5afd-9509-f1d2e2f088ef.html)).

In Wisconsin, Ziegler says, spring is all about "green grass, longer days, road construction, and school budget cuts." He explains that the Governor and legislators, back in the early 1992, made all sorts of promises and now all they can agree on "is legislation that absolves them of the responsibility to keep their promises and do their jobs."

"This failure to act means that this year's graduating class will leave our public schools never having known a time when schools were not forced to cut budgets every year," Ziegler said. "Is this the civics lesson our elected officials want our students to take away from their experience in our schools?"

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### **Rural group's work is primer on school-finance reform**

The Rural School and Community Trust (<http://www.ruraledu.org>) has started a special series on Rural School Finance News. In April of 2010, the group's newsletter -- *Rural Policy Matters* -- published the first article, "Characteristics of Strong Rural School Finance Systems" ([http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2467&utm\\_source=Rural+Trust+Constituent+List&utm\\_campaign=f75717932c-RPM\\_April\\_20100430&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2467&utm_source=Rural+Trust+Constituent+List&utm_campaign=f75717932c-RPM_April_20100430&utm_medium=email))."

Despite the rural focus, the document reads like a primer for the school-funding reform discussion in Wisconsin and other states. Remembering that our system went into effect and has been tweaked, prodded, and pushed around for over 15 years, the Network article says, "School finance systems age quickly ... A formula that has been in place for 15 years is considered old. Even so, many states have not overhauled their basic formulas in decades." Welcome to the Badger State.

The article goes on to talk about the contents of a system in regard to the unique position of rural schools, including securing a stable and fair source of revenue; understanding the relationship between property wealth and student resources; and taking into account the needs of students with unique challenges.

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## **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](mailto:tbeebe@excellentschools.org). Thanks.

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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**

- June 11 -- School-funding reform discussion with the Portage County Business Council (<http://www.portagecountybiz.com/>), 7:30 a.m., 5501 Vern Holmes Drive, Stevens Point
- June 19 -- School-funding reform discussion with the members of the Edgewood College Doctoral Program, held at the administration building of the DC Everest School District (<http://www.dce.k12.wi.us/index.html>), 6300 Alderson Street, Weston

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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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