



Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

School-funding update

Week of May 5, 2008

- **WAES needs your support now more than ever**
- **WAES closing in on the 100-member mark**
- **Reps. Hilgenberg, Garthwaite step out on school-funding reform**
- **Head Start makes a difference ... even keeps people out of jail**
- **Food and fuel drive cost of school districts, too**
- **Cuts endanger programs in Appleton, Waupun, and Door County**
- **More school districts forced to talk about consolidation**
- **California schools need private money just to cover the basics**
- **A good quote for the week**
- **School-funding reform calendar**

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.

WAES needs your support now more than ever

Once again, we see that the school-funding news from around Wisconsin is bad for school districts, bad for schools, bad for children ... and bad for our communities. And, it seems obvious that the news will only get worse unless students, parents, educators, business owners, taxpayers, and the rest of us come together to demand changes in the school-funding system.

That is the sole purpose of WAES, and we need your help in getting the job done.

WAES is now an independent, dues-supported, non-profit organization. It 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.

If you haven't joined already, you can help by becoming a WAES member 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.

You can make a difference.

WAES closing in on the 100-member mark

WAES now numbers 91 organizations and individuals. Those that have become dues-paying members of WAES since the last update include:

- Teacher groups: Racine Educational Assistants Association and the Racine Education Association.
- Individuals: Bruce and Kathy MacIntyre, Andy Scott, and David Tojek.
- School Districts: Phillips, Reedsville, and Phelps.

Reps. Hilgenberg, Garthwaite step out on school-funding reform

It is rare for a Wisconsin legislator to give more than lip-service to the idea of school-funding reform. As a matter of fact, the number of lawmakers publicly backing comprehensive change can be counted on the fingers of two hands ... maybe just one. Every once in a while, however, someone speaks out, and this time it is Rep. Steve Hilgenberg of Dodgeville

(<http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=51>)

and Rep. Phil Garthwaite of Dickeyville

(<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=49>).

According to a column in *The Monroe Times*, "we have to re-evaluate how we fund public schools (<http://themonroetimes.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubSectionID=41&ArticleID=2736&TM=28951.09>). The pair talked about a "statement of principles" that includes: the opportunity for excellence for every child; equitable distribution of resources for all children; a reduction in the reliance on the property tax; restoration of local control to school boards; and assurance that a proposal is politically feasible and affordable.

Reps. Garthwaite and Hilgenberg released the principles after visiting schools and meeting with administrators in CESA 3 (<http://www.cesa3.k12.wi.us/>).

Head Start makes a difference ... even keeps people out of jail

According to a weblog in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, "well-funded Head Start and childcare programs can prevent as many as 1,050 children each year from becoming future criminals in Wisconsin (<http://www.jsonline.com/watch/?watch=1&date=4/22/2008&id=38650>)."

State law enforcement leaders including the Milwaukee chief of police and sheriffs from Milwaukee and Racine counties -- and educational leaders including Milwaukee Public School Superintendent William Andrekopolous -- released the results at a news conference calling for full funding of Head Start programs.

Researchers also found that at-risk children who don't receive early childhood programs -- like Head Start -- are five times more likely to commit crimes later in life than those who do.

The research cited was announced by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national, bipartisan, nonprofit, anti-crime organization of more than 3,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and other law enforcement leaders from around the country (<http://www.fightcrime.org>). The group is headquartered in Washington, D.C.

Food and fuel drive cost of school districts, too

Like households and businesses around the country and state, school districts are finding that drastic increases in food and fuel are stretching their budgets, too.

A recent story in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* (<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=741555>) noted that "the unpredictable economics of ... raw ingredients are causing chaos behind" lunch counters in most suburban and city schools. The result could be a 10- to 50-cent increase in the price charged to students. A similar story (<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2008805010630>) ran in the *Green Bay Press Gazette*, where "rising food costs ... have local school districts considering whether to charge more for lunch next year." Districts are reimbursed by the federal government for the costs of meals, but, according to the School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin (<http://www.sna-wi.org/>), "the average public school lunch income (in 2005) was \$2.14 while the cost to produce it averaged \$2.26."

Not only is fuel a major component driving up food costs, but it is also driving up transportation and heating/cooling costs for school districts. A story in the Eau Claire Leader Telegram (<http://www.leadertelegram.com/story-news.asp?id=BGBT5RJJBHV>) talked about record prices for gasoline and diesel fuel prices that have gone up from an average of \$2.99 a year ago to a current average of \$4.12 a gallon. For example, the Bloomer School District (<http://www.bloomer.k12.wi.us/>) spent \$55,000 on diesel fuel for buses from September 2006 to March 2007. This school year, as of mid-April, it already has spent \$68,000.

Cuts endanger programs in Appleton, Waupun, and Door County

There's good news and bad news in the Appleton School District. The good news is that the school board was able to recall 21 of the 34 teachers it was forced to lay off earlier because of budget cuts (<http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080429/APC0101/804290516/1979>). Recent retirements and resignations allowed the action. The bad news is for the other 13 staff who remain without jobs, the first time in more than a decade the district has taken such a drastic action. The lay-offs stem from at least \$2 million in personnel cuts to help offset an anticipated \$4 million budget shortfall caused by the state's school-funding system.

Waupun also faces a large deficit and members are taking their time trying to fill the void (<http://www.fdlreporter.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080429/FON0101/804290568/1985>). The board is wrestling with list of \$660,000 in cuts, but delayed a final decision until after three community workshops over the next two weeks. Board President Cathy Loomans said she felt like the district had "cut off fingers and toes the last several years trying to meet our budget." By setting up the workshops, Loomans said the district could "determine what direction we're going as a district, we can stop cutting things that bite into the integrity of our district."

A unique and effective program in Door County also finds itself in trouble -- as do the at-risk children enrolled in it -- because of budget cuts. The students in Challenge are making progress, but "in a strict economic decision (the 2007-08 budget for eight children was \$278,000)," the program has "become less cost effective

(<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080430/ADV01/80429239/0/ADV>). It is run by Door County and county school districts.

More school districts forced to talk about consolidation

Wisconsin's school-funding system has led to staff lay-offs, increased class sizes, and program and service cuts in virtually every school district in the state. For many, all the cuts that can be made, have been, and they are being forced into even more drastic measures, including referenda. For many, that's only the start. If they fail to gain voter approval for the revenue necessary to run schools, many districts begin traveling down the road of consolidation with neighboring districts or dissolution.

Three districts in the northwestern part of the state -- Ladysmith-Hawkins, Bruce, and Weyerhaeuser - - have scheduled a meeting for June 4 to discuss consolidation (http://www.leadertelegram.com/story-news_local.asp?id=BGDKIE7TC15). The meeting is scheduled the day after Weyerhaeuser voters go to the polls on another revenue-raising referendum. A \$1.875 million plan was defeated April 1, the same day voters in Bruce rejected a \$1.5 million referendum. Defining well the problem with the state's school-funding system, Weyerhaeuser Superintendent Chris Nelson said that whatever happens, his district will keep looking at consolidation. "Our issues don't go away if the referendum is approved," he said.

In central Wisconsin, "cash-hungry" Wisconsin Heights, according to the *Wisconsin State Journal*, is now "among a growing number of area school systems considering consolidation to deal with financial pressures (<http://www.madison.com/archives/read.php?ref=/wsj/2008/04/28/0804280105.php>). After a failed referendum, the district faces growing budget shortfalls in the future. Heights, which has lost a fifth of its students in five years, shares borders with the school districts of Middleton-Cross Plains, Barneveld, and River Valley. Other area districts talking about consolidation or even dissolution are Rio, Montello, and Weston.

California schools need private money just to cover the basics

If Wisconsin residents want to see what happens to public education in the wake of a school-funding system that no longer works for children, they might want to catch up with what's going on in California (<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-foundations20apr20,1,2829757.story>).

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed a budget that would cut \$4.8 billion in education funding this year and next, resulting in potential lay-off notices for 20,000 teachers, librarians, nurses, and others. In addition to increasing class sizes, school districts across California are considering closing buildings, eliminating advanced courses, and doing away with extra-curricular activities, something that should sound very familiar to folks in the Badger State. "We never really imagined the magnitude of the problem -- the budget cuts -- would be this great," one parent said.

To fill in the gap, many districts -- specifically the wealthier ones -- have started foundations. For example, families in South Orange county are being urged to donate \$400 per student to save the jobs of 266 teachers in the Capistrano Unified School District. In the Bay Area, parents launched a campaign featuring children standing in trash cans; the theme is "Public Education Is Too Valuable to Waste." And, a Dollar-A-Day campaign has been launched by Davis School Foundation, near Sacramento, urging citizens to donate \$365 per child, grandchild, or student acquaintance.

A good quote for the week

Waupun Area School Board President Cathy Loomans, quoted in a story above, expressed the frustration and anger with Wisconsin lawmakers many voters are feeling ... especially those who know the need for school-funding reform. Loomans said, "Having state lawmakers jumping on board to change the funding formula is probably not what we should be betting on. Instead, we need to be concentrating on keeping our own house in order and doing what we can with the tax dollars we're given and seeing how long we can ride it out."

She's right, but isn't that a sad comment on the times and the state of a Legislature that refuses to address a serious problem confronting our children and our communities..

School-funding reform calendar

- May 7 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of a community meeting, at 7 p.m., in the Benton School District (<http://www.benton.k12.wi.us/>), 41 Alma Street
- May 12 -- School-funding reform presentation for the Elkhorn School District Board of Education, 7 p.m., Jackson Elementary School Library (<http://www.elkhorn.k12.wi.us/SchoolsInformation/JacksonElementaryHomePage/tabid/60/Default.aspx>), 13 North Jackson Street
- May 28 -- 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
- 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/>), 6300 Alderson Street, Weston
- Nov. 14 -- 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/>)