

# School-funding update

## for the week of June 8, 2009

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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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### **Legislators invited to Walk on the Child's Side**

If you haven't done it already, now is the time to make your late-spring, early-summer vacation plans to come to Madison for the June 16 *Walk on the Child's Side* march from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Library Mall to the State Capitol. It is your chance to tell legislators -- again -- that it is long past time for them to fix the school-funding crisis in the state. For more information, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org>.

After some comments on the steps of the Capitol, walkers will have a chance to talk to their legislators (they have been invited to the *Walk*, which starts at 11 a.m., and to the rally at noon. All of them have been invited to the *Walk*, but it is up to you to make sure they attend ... or at least make themselves available after noon for some honest discussion. Also invited are the members of Governor Jim Doyle's Task Force on Academic Excellence (<http://edexcellence.wisconsin.gov/section.asp?linkid=1334&locid=149>). Although their report remains on the shelf, it did call for significant reforms and extra revenue for public schools, including a call for an increase in the state sales tax.

The 10th anniversary Walk on the Child's Side is co-sponsored by Northern Tier Uniserv, Price County Citizens Who CARE, and WAES.

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### **Legislature considering bad budget for public schools**

Although some folks are trying to put a positive spin on the 2009-11 budget sent by the Joint Finance Committee to the Legislature last week, most experts agree that is like trying to put lipstick on a pig. No matter how you look at it, the budget now moving into the hands of the Assembly is bad for most if not all schools and disastrous for many.

On top of the 3.1-percent reduction in state education aid, the per-pupil revenue limit for next year is now set at \$200 per student, \$75 less per-student than last year. In addition, schools are also going to see a reduction of 2.5 percent in categorical aids -- this includes things like transportation aid, SAGE, and ELL programs. The status quo budgets of the last several years -- which, despite nominal increases, have seen

state aid becoming a smaller share of educational costs -- have resulted in annual staff lay-offs, increases in class sizes, and cuts in programs and services. We can only guess what real dollar cuts will do to education. (You can get reactions to and analysis of the budget by going to the websites of education stakeholder groups like the Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance (<http://www.wsaa.org>); the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (<http://www.wasb.org>); and the Wisconsin Education Association Council (<http://www.weac.org>).

You need to speak out by contacting your legislators (<http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx>) and asking them, in the 2009-11 budget, to protect public schools, school children, and communities. No matter what they do, however, it will only be a stop gap or a BandAid at best. We still need comprehensive school-funding reform and that makes the June 16 *Walk on the Child's Side* ([http://www.excellentchools.org/events/Walk\\_June16/walk.htm](http://www.excellentchools.org/events/Walk_June16/walk.htm)) an important event for you to attend.

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## **School districts, statewide, look for more cuts in their budgets**

School districts all over Wisconsin are already struggling to figure out how to deal with anticipated cuts in programs and services they'll have to make when the Legislature finally passes what is expected to be a disastrous budget for public education ... and this is on top of the cuts virtually everyone of them faced just to keep pace with current law.

The Waupun School District is estimating it will lose about \$450,000 in state aid, and this comes on the heels of the defeat of a \$4.9 million referendum earlier this year that resulted in trimming 10 teachers, 12 support staff, and one administrator (<http://www.fdlreporter.com/article/20090603/FON0101/906030354/1985>). Similar news is coming out of the Manitowoc School District where the community is trying to cut an additional \$700,000 from its 2009-10 school year budget -- a move that would bring total reductions to \$2.3 million (<http://www.htrnews.com/article/20090603/MAN0101/906030413/1984>). The district cut \$1.6 million from its budget as of May 12, including reducing secondary teaching positions and eliminating library aides.

Similar news is coming out of Wisconsin Rapids. The school board found out last week that it must come up with more than \$500,000 in additional cuts, after already trimming the district's \$60 million budget by \$1.8 million earlier this spring (<http://www.wisconsinrapidstribune.com/article/20090530/WRT0101/905300505/1982>). In Iola-Scandinavia, Superintendent Joe Price said it was like seeing a train coming down the tunnel as his board comes to grips with an anticipated aid increase of \$163,000 turning into an increase of only \$5,000 (<http://www.stevenspointjournal.com/article/20090530/SPJ0101/905300496/1983>), and DC Everest School District board members, May 26. approved a \$1.5 million reduction to its operating budget "while it awaits word about how much funding it might receive from the state" in the 2009-11 budget (<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20090529/WDH0101/905290678>).

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## **Maybe it's time to make some noise for school-funding reform**

On those days when no one is listening to you -- when your tales of woe you about Wisconsin's school-funding system go unheeded -- you might have to think creatively about delivering your message. For example, how about going into the streets and making some noise.

That was the tact taken by folks in Oregon who believe that "unless the Legislature and the Governor raise significant additional revenue, there will be terrible cuts to schools -- as well as other vital public services

like health care and senior services

([http://blog.oregonlive.com/themombeat/2009/05/parents\\_urged\\_to\\_make\\_noise\\_fo.html](http://blog.oregonlive.com/themombeat/2009/05/parents_urged_to_make_noise_fo.html)). That should sound familiar to most people in Wisconsin.

Mike Rosen, past chair of the Oregon chapter of Stand for Children

(<http://www.stand.org/Page.aspx?pid=226>), decided to take matters into his own hands. Explaining that the community has a responsibility to demand sensible action from lawmakers, Rosen called folks into the streets between 10:30 and 10:45 a.m. on May 15, "to take a break from work, go out into the street, and just make some noise. Bring a pot, pan, whistle, horn, or any noise-making device ... to make noise for needed basic services." Now that's the way to get some attention.

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## **John Smart asks Governor, Legislature to "Save our schools!"**

When it comes to speaking up about the need for school-funding reform for schools throughout his home area of Park Falls ... and schools all over the state ... WAES board member and former school board member John Smart does it often and elegantly. His most recent column appeared in *The Ashland Daily Press* (<http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2009/06/03/opinions/doc4a26835444c89356028210.txt>).

Smart begins his column saying he's writing to the Legislature and Governor Doyle about the effect on children and schools of the budget the Joint Finance Committee sent to the Assembly. Noting that it will cut public school revenue, he explains that "we must fully support our schools as the surest method to grow the economy out of this economic hole. Who could possibly think that we can solve these very serious problems with a less-than-well-educated work force."

He points out that there "are ways and there are means" to adequately fund public schools and other vital services. Smart points to the work of the Institute for Wisconsin's Future (<http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org>) as a good place to start, and he urges the Legislature to take a look at their research and public policy recommendations as a good place to start the discussion.

Smart did an excellent job, Monday morning, June 8, talking about this and other school-funding issues on the Joy Cardin Show on Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR). You can hear the program by going to [http://www.wpr.org/webcasting/audioarchives\\_display.cfm?Code=jca](http://www.wpr.org/webcasting/audioarchives_display.cfm?Code=jca).

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## **WAES membership keeps the reform message before the public**

The main function of WAES is to talk about school-funding reform in communities throughout the state. You can learn more about the coalition at <http://www.excellentschools.org/> and you can sign up to receive community education outreach at <http://www.excellentschools.org/calendar/SchoolFundingWorkshop.htm> and to receive this e-mail update at <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/signup.htm>.

All of this, however, requires a group effort by all of the members of WAES (<http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm>). We need you to do your part to make sure the coalition can continue its work, especially in light of the Legislature's inability or lack of desire to fix the school-funding formula. If you want to join WAES, contact Tom Beebe (contact information below) or go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm>.

Since the last newsletter, the Milwaukee City Council PTA/PTSA has joined WAES. Those renewing their memberships were Kim Suhr, John Smart, and the Athens School District.

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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 16 -- "Walk on the Child's Side" reunion tour, starts at 11 a.m. at the clock tower at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Memorial Library Mall (for more information, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org>)
- June 20 -- School-funding reform discussion with students in doctoral school administrator class, 10 a.m., DC Everest School District (<http://www.dce.k12.wi.us/>) office, 6300 Alderson Street, Weston
- Sept. 15 -- School-funding reform discussion with the Marathon county Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net>), 10 a.m. at the Rose Garden (<http://www.therosegardenwausau.com/>) in Wausau (<http://www.ci.wausau.wi.us/>)
- Oct. 8 -- Community school-funding reform discussion in Hartford sponsored by the Hartford AAUW; more details as they become available

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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.*