

School-funding update for the week of August 16, 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.

Campaign season offers hope for school-funding reform

It's that time again ... the political campaign season. We all have the opportunity to go to the polls on Nov. 2, 2010, to elect a new governor, 99 Representatives, and 17 Senators. Adding to the importance of the upcoming ballot is that over 20 legislators have announced their retirement and the balance of power is at stake.

We also have a chance, perhaps, to begin the turn-around of 17 years of a school-funding system that has caused harm to kids, school districts, and communities. In Wisconsin, how we fund public education is in the law. To change the system, we need to change the law and that has every thing to do with who is serving in the Legislature and in the governor's mansion.

In other words, we need elected officials -- Republican or Democrat, conservative, liberal, or progressive -- who understand the funding system and how to change it. You need to become a knowledgeable voter and you need to hold candidates accountable for what they say and do. To find out how you can be that kind of a citizen, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org>.

Ask your community school board to endorse ["A Penny for Kids"](#)

WAES's effort to increase the sales tax by one-penny in order to address the revenue crisis in our public schools -- ["A Penny for Kids"](#) -- has garnered the support of thousands of Wisconsin citizens. When enough of us have signed the petition (at <http://www.apennyforkids.org>), it should be the encouragement needed to give our elected officials the necessary backbone to address the needs of our children.

If you haven't signed the petition, do it now. If you have signed it, send the ["A Penny for Kids"](#) link to others, spread it through social networking sites such as Facebook, and spend some time on the website to see what else you can do to make a difference.

The newest effort is to follow the lead of the school districts of Madison, Middleton-Cross Plains, and Milwaukee. The school board in each district considered, discussed, and OK'd a resolution in support of "[A Penny for Kids](#)." There are, however, 425 school districts in Wisconsin and we need all of them to get on board. You elected the members of your school boards, and now it's time to ask them to step up to the plate and do the right thing. Have them contact me at 920-650-0525 (or tbeebe@excellentschools.org) and ask for a sample resolution. Even better, you can contact me, get the resolution, take it to your board, and ask them to join this important effort.

WAES needs your support to fight for school-funding reform

No matter who wins the upcoming elections, the character of the Legislature will change, there will be a new governor, and the plight of Wisconsin's school districts will continue to grow. In other words, the need for the work of WAES will be more important now than ever. It is up to you as individuals, your school districts, teachers' groups, and other organizations to make sure this effort continues by supporting the coalition with your time, talent, and membership dues.

To join WAES, contact Tom Beebe (see below) or go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/join.htm>. Your dues are tax deductible and you can pay them online with PayPal. If you have received your membership renewal, please return it -- and your check -- as soon as possible. If it has been misplaced or you didn't receive it, contact WAES immediately. Your support keeps this effort moving forward.

Since the last e-mail update, those renewing their membership in WAES are: Pat Kerhin of West Allis, Sara Companik of Menasha, Kim Suhr of Wales, the school districts of Pepin, Florence County, and Hurley, and Community and Schools Together (CAST) of Madison.

Two new media stories tout "[A Penny for Kids](#)"

While most politicians and candidates for public office are running away from both the revenue crisis and funding flaws in our public schools, "A Penny for Kids" continues to capture the imagination of the media and the public throughout Wisconsin. Two good stories were published in the last month, both in community media in the Milwaukee area.

The Bayview Compass (<http://bayviewcompass.com/>) hit the nail squarely on the head in a story entitled "Plugging the school funding leak." Author Jay Bullock called "A Penny for Kids" an "immediate source of relief" for the states cash-strapped schools. He also talks about the rise of Milwaukee Families for School Funding, a grassroots organization pressuring legislators to adopt a penny-increase in the sales tax and long-term, comprehensive school-funding reform (<http://bayviewcompass.com/archives/4584>).

A second article appeared in *Third Coast Digest*, an online publication at <http://thirdcoastdigest.com/>. "Brother, can you spare a penny?" was written by Patti Wenzel, one-time editor of the *Phillips Bee* (<http://www.phillipswi.com/>) and a long-time proponent of funding reform. Patti does a great job (<http://thirdcoastdigest.com/2010/08/brother-can-you-spare-a-penny/>) tracing the history of the state's unsustainable system, describing the need for comprehensive reform, and explaining the need for the short-term relief offered by "[A Penny for Kids](#)."

School libraries, librarians are canary in the coal mine of funding crisis

Public school libraries have become the symbol for everything that has gone wrong with Wisconsin's school-funding system. More and more districts have been forced to lay-off librarians in order to work within the state's draconian revenue cap system. Sadly, this comes at a time when librarians ... and their link to tomorrow's technology ... are even more important.

This plight has resulted in pair of creative responses. Jake Berg, a junior at Waukesha West High School, produced, directed, and filmed an eight-minute video called "The Library is Closed (<http://www.excellentschools.org/events/WaukeshaLibrary2010.htm>)."

It is must viewing for everyone, especially legislators who can't find seem to find a good reason for addressing Wisconsin's school-funding crisis. Students at Fratney Street School in Milwaukee also decided to take things into their own hands. They formed "Save Our Librarians!," an organization -- with a website at <http://saveourlibrarians.org/> -- that proclaims loudly and proudly, "Libraries and librarians are essential." The club was formed "to save not only our library (at Fratney), but libraries in public schools all across the U.S."

An array of vital community services, including libraries at the school and community level, will be the subject of a session called "Standing Up for Wisconsin Communities" that will be held on Friday, Sept. 17, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the Holiday Inn Stevens Point Conference Center (<http://www.holidayinn.com/hotels/us/en/stevens-point/steaa/hoteldetail>), 1001 Amber Avenue, Stevens Point. It will be sponsored by the Institute for Wisconsin's Future. Sessions will deal with saving libraries and other vital community services. For more information, an agenda, or to register (the cost is \$25) contact Karen Royster (kroyster@wisconsinfuture.org) at 414-967-1682.

Steve Walters pulls back the curtain on how the Legislature works

School-funding reform in Wisconsin has been a long, hard battle. Part of the fight has been against a complicated and complex system, but an equally daunting task has been to take on the political reality under The Dome. Longtime state government reporter and commentator Steve Walters recently tried to explain that reality for WisPolitics.com (<http://wisopinion.com/index.html?mdl=article.mdl&article=28292>).

He talked about the 52 public hearings that were held in the final month of the session "on bills that never became law," talking about the frustration of folks who come to Madison to testify for something they believe in only to see it fade away without a vote ever being taken. "Why does this always happen?" Walters asked. His answer: The rules on how the Wisconsin Legislature operates.

For example, there is Rule 2 that says legislative leaders sometimes schedule "show" public hearings to please some constituents or fellow legislators, "knowing it will never get a committee vote." Sound familiar? Or, how about Rule 5: "Getting a public hearing scheduled is one way lawmakers ... score election-year points, even if they know there will be no more attention paid the bill this session." The rules make for interesting reading and a civics lesson on why government doesn't always work the way we think it does or the way it should.

Wisconsin is "an average state," not a "tax hell"

A recent story in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/watch/99657784.html>) told how Wisconsin stayed out of the top 10 states for combined state and local taxes in 2008 -- for the third year in a row. While true, it wasn't the whole story.

Milwaukee Magazine published a follow-up story (<http://www.milwaukeebuzz.com/?p=191808>) citing the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WTA at <http://www.wistax.org/>), the source of the Journal Sentinel story. Wisconsin did, indeed, rank 13th in tax burden. WTA also found The Badger State ranked 21st in total revenue (all taxes and fees). The truth is that Wisconsin probably never ranked in the top 10 for total taxes and fees.

Interpreting the WTA data, *Milwaukee Magazine* said, "When you look at total government spending and total revenue collected from its citizens to pay for this spending, this is an average state, not a tax hell."

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. Thanks.

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

- Sept. 28 -- School-funding reform discussion with students in the Education Leadership and Policy Analysis class (<http://www.education.wisc.edu/elpa/>) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, 4:40 p.m., Room 486, Van Hise Hall, 1220 Linden Drive, Madison
- Sept. 29 -- School-funding reform presentation with attendees at the Parent Leadership Conference, sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction (<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us>) and held at Monona Terrace (<http://www.mononaterrace.com/>), One John Nolen Drive, Madison
- Oct. 25 -- School-funding reform discussion at the District I Fall Meeting of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://wrea.net/>), Rice Lake (more details as they become available)
- Oct. 26 -- School-funding reform discussion at the District III Fall Meeting of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://wrea.net/>), Marshfield (more details as they become available)
- Oct. 27 -- School-funding reform discussion at the District II Fall Meeting of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://wrea.net/>), Kelly Lake (more details as they become available)
- Oct. 28 -- School-funding reform discussion at the District IV Fall Meeting of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://wrea.net/>), Racine (more details as they become available)
- Oct. 29 -- School-funding reform discussion at the District V Fall Meeting of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://wrea.net/>), Richland Center (more details as they become available)
- Nov. 11 -- School-funding reform discussion at the Wisconsin Association of School Councils Region IV Fall Conference at Brookfield Suites (<http://www.brookfieldsuiteshotel.com/>), Brookfield (details to be announced)