

# School-funding update

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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@wisconsinsfuture.org](mailto:tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org).

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## School-funding formula claims Wausaukee School District



Another Wisconsin school board, this time in Wausaukee in Marinette County in northeastern Wisconsin, has voted to close its doors because of unequal and inadequate funding (<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=767322>).

When it happened, many said the Florence County School District would be only the first of many districts dissolving. Since that time several others have held public discussions on the subject, including Weston, Rio, Montello, Waukesha, Wisconsin Heights, Markesan.

Lending further credence to the claim of the spreading crisis, one-quarter of the districts in Wisconsin responding to a recent survey said they were considering consolidation or dissolution (WEAC/WASDA 2006-07 study, <http://www.weac.org/Capitol/2007-08/march08/revcap08.pdf>).

According to EHEXTRA.com, the dissolution vote followed the failure of a second referendum, this one for \$575,000 to exceed revenue limits (<http://ehextra.com/main.asp?FromHome=1&TypeID=1&ArticleID=1506&SectionID=12&SubSectionID=35>). The vote was 544 for the referendum and 563 against (<http://www.peshtigotimes.net/?id=9549>).

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## **Wausaukee School District to dissolve? Let's talk about it**

When it happened in Florence, school funding reformers weren't sure what to do. Now, the Wausaukee School District Board has decided to dissolve in the best interest of the community's children. What comes next?

There are several opportunities online to talk about what comes next. It's about more than the hearings and soul searching that will go on over the coming months in northeastern Wisconsin. It's also about what it means to the other 424 school districts in the state. We need to learn the lessons of Florence and Wausaukee, map out a strategy, and stay on the road to reform.

There are several "places" you can take part in statewide discussions about school-funding reform. A good starting point is the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org>. Or, you can show your support and network with other people working to change school finance by joining the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools Facebook cause and start talking. Another reform discussion leader -- and member of WAES board of directors -- is John Smart, school board member from Park Falls. His comments on what's happening in Wausaukee and around Wisconsin can be found on the AMPS website at <http://madisonamps.org/2008/06/29/our-schools-are-in-danger-and-some-are-just-throwing-stones/> (another WAES member). Finally, there is a discussion ongoing on DemocraticUnderground.com at [http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=186x25765](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=186x25765).

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## **Small school districts get a little bit of sparsity aid from state**

It's not that the state doesn't recognize that the needs of small, rural school districts are different, it's just that it doesn't do enough to solve the problem. Those were the feelings of school districts throughout the state following the announcement recently ([http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/eis/pdf/dpi2008\\_97.pdf](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/eis/pdf/dpi2008_97.pdf)) that the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) had written checks totaling \$3.6 million in a new sparsity aid program.

According to DPI, 110 school districts will share the money during the 2008-09 school year. To qualify, districts must have enrolled no more than 725 students and have a density of less than 10 students per square mile. At least 20 percent of the students must qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The new categorical is meant to address the needs of districts facing challenges like declining enrollment, high transportation costs, the lack of economies of scale, and low median incomes.

We appreciate the "gesture," said Henry Lamkin, superintendent of the Glidden School District (<http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2008/06/25/news/doc486254e129241462197437.txt>). "But we would certainly cash a bigger check, too, with as much enthusiasm, if not more," Lamkin said about his district which will probably run a deficit next year. The sparsity aid "will just minimize the amount that we go in the hole." Even the DPI acknowledged the point, saying "there was more need than the amount allocated by the Legislature." For example, Wausaukee faces dissolution following the failure of a \$575,000 referendum. Their cut of the new aid program will be \$41,398.

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## Take this chance to help school-funding reform effort

WAES welcomed only one new member since the last e-mail update, Lisa Anderson from northeastern Wisconsin. You can see the complete list at <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm>).

While the number of those paying dues to WAES has leveled off, the organization's expenses haven't. Moving into the election campaign season it will be more important than ever to make sure school-funding reform is competing for attention in the public policy arena. WAES has a proven track record of reaching voters in communities all over the state, but it is through a strategy that involves a great deal of time and effort.

Your commitment to WAES and to school-funding reform is needed now more than ever. If you haven't joined already, now is the time. You can go to our website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and use PayPal or your credit card. If that doesn't work for you, go to [http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/membership\\_statement.pdf](http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/membership_statement.pdf) and print the Membership Statement. Fill it out and mail it, along with your check, to 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 Beebe at 920-650-0525 or [tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org](mailto:tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org).

Please, do it now.

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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

- July 29 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of the School Law and Politics class offered through Marian University (<http://www.mariancollege.edu/>), 9 a.m., Northcentral Technical College (<http://www.ntc.edu/>), Wausau (<http://www.ci.wausau.wi.us/>)
- September 3 -- School-funding reform presentation for the West Allis-West Milwaukee PTA Council, 6:30 p.m., at Parkway, 2930 South Root River Parkway in West Allis
- October 2-3 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of the annual conference of the Wisconsin Association of Talented and Gifted (<http://www.watg.org/>), Blue Harbor Resort (<http://www.blueharborresort.com/>), Sheboygan (<http://ci.sheboygan.wi.us/>); more details as they become available
- November 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/>)