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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

Solving Wisconsin's school-funding crisis

Our children are losing their futures

The Wausaukee School Board recently voted to dissolve the district because the state's school-funding formula doesn't allow them to raise the revenue needed to guarantee their children the education, security, and opportunity guaranteed them by the state Constitution.

It is so bad that the board would close the doors—threatening the very future of the community—rather than risk the quality and quantity of the education of its children.

No community should be put in that situation by the law of the land. Yet, every school district in Wisconsin is faced with the same business model that guarantees they will eventually fail. Along the way, teachers will be laid off, class sizes will be increased, communities will be divided by costly referenda, programs and services will be cut, and futures will be put in jeopardy.

All of this damage is being done at a time we should be investing more in our public schools. We know they are the engine that drives economic progress because business and industry tell us so. We know the value of a high school diploma is measured in hundreds of millions of dollars, not just for individual graduates but for our society. We know we have to ramp up our education system to compete globally in the 21st century.

Instead, we fund our schools with a formula that can only lead to failure.

For 15 years, the state's school-funding formula has put our children at risk. An annual survey has documented the damage¹:

- 57 percent of the school districts responding have reduced the number of courses offered
- 62 percent have laid off teaching staff leading to an increase in class sizes in 75 percent of Wisconsin's communities
- 59 percent have reduced programming for at-risk students while 63 percent have diminished the size of gifted and talented programs
- 67 percent have increased student fees in a time of economic downturn
- 56 percent have cut extra-curricular activities, a time-tested way to keep children in school
- 27 percent have talked about consolidation or dissolution
- 55 percent have decreased counseling opportunities to those most in need of guidance

Every child in Wisconsin is guaranteed a superior education by the Constitution. Despite those words, we allow that education to be diminished by a school-funding formula that is opaque, inequitable, inadequate, and unsustainable.

¹ "The Effects of Revenue Controls on the Programs and Services Offered by Wisconsin's Public Schools, 2006-07 School Year," 14th annual study by the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators and the Wisconsin Education Association Council (<http://www.weac.org/Capitol/2007-08/march08/revcap08.pdf>).