

## **School-funding reform update, week of March 23**

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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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### **JFC meetings start 2009-11 budget process**

Wisconsin's Legislature has begun its every-two-year dance with a new budget. State agencies have already made their presentations to the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/CommPages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?committee=Finance&house=Joint>) and the public will get their input during the next couple of weeks. Because both houses of the Legislature and the Governor's office are in the hands of the same party -- and because of the deepening state and national economic crisis -- the process is expected to be put on a fast track with budget passage anticipated in the summer rather than the fall as in previous years.

The public is invited to testify at one of seven JFC hearings around the state (<http://www.wispolitics.com/1006/090304JFChearings.pdf>). Six of the hearings run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with the Ashland event, on March 28, slated to begin at 9 a.m. Those wishing to testify need to bring with them 20 copies of their testimony. When you arrive, make sure you fill out a slip that will get you a place on the line-up of speakers. If you cannot attend, you can send comments to the committee co-chairs, Sen. Mark Miller

(<http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Senate&district=16>) and Rep. Mark Pocan (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=78>).

Nothing that has been introduced into the budget promises comprehensive school-funding reform. At the same time, much that is in the budget will determine the state of school finances in the future. Governor Jim Doyle, as he has in the past, has done a good job of protecting children and education. In terms of finance reform, however, the budget is basically a status quo budget, although he has talked about introducing legislation in the fall. If you do testify, urge legislators to continue to do what they can to guarantee revenues to schools, communities, and children who have been losing programs and services under revenue limits for 15 years. At the same time, tell them that your patience for real reform is wearing very, very thin.

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### **Funding reform, SFN plan subject of WRP talk show**

If you want to take an opportunity to learn more about school-finance reform and the School Finance Network (<http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>) reform plan, make sure to catch the rebroadcast of At Issue with Ben Merens that aired on Wisconsin Public Radio (<http://www.wpr.org>) on Wednesday, March 18.

Ken Bates, superintendent of the Green Lake School District, discussed the challenges faced by state schools, children, and communities with guest host John Munson. Bates is also a member of WAES.

You can hear the rebroadcast of the program at <http://wpr.org/merens/index.cfm?strDirection=Next&dteShowDate=2009-03-18%2016%3A00%3A00>.

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### **SFN reform plan subject of April 21 hearing at the Capitol**

Members of the Assembly Education Committee (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/commpages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Assembly>) will meet on April 21, at 1 p.m., to consider the funding reform plan of the School Finance Network (SFN at <http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>). The meeting will be held in Room 413 North and is open to the public (<http://committeeschedule.legis.state.wi.us/files/HearingNotices/09-04-21-0100-2009AEDU-11615.html>).

SFN's reform plan ([http://www.sfnwisconsin.org/user\\_images/files/SFN\\_Plan.pdf?phpMyAdmin=3b5c513428b10250725eca918a17ac9f](http://www.sfnwisconsin.org/user_images/files/SFN_Plan.pdf?phpMyAdmin=3b5c513428b10250725eca918a17ac9f)), two years in the making, will be the subject of the hearing. Parents, students, educators, and taxpayers from around the state will testify, in addition to members of the SFN coalition.

If you can attend and show your support for reform, please do. It is time for our elected officials to know that we expect change that guarantees our children the opportunity for success. To find out more about the hearing, WAES, SFN's reform plan, and how you can get involved in the reform effort, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org> or to the SFN website (<http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>).

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## **School districts continue to look for efficiencies**

Rather than talk about what's wrong with the state's school-funding system, many reform critics continuously demand that districts find more and more efficiencies. Actually, schools have been finding efficiencies since the present funding system went into effect 15 years ago, with the most recent effort a cooperative economic summit in Rock County.

Six county school districts met recently to brainstorm possibilities for saving revenue (<http://gazetteextra.com/news/2009/mar/13/schools-hold-economic-summit/>). Among those items discussed were Edgerton lending its grass seeder to Evansville. Also on the table was the possibility of a larger district "renting" its grounds staff to a smaller district. "There's got to be money saving by working together," said DuWayne Severson, president of the Janesville School Board.

The presidents of school boards in Janesville, Evansville, Edgerton, Clinton, Milton, and Beloit Turner floated other ideas at the meeting, including sharing expertise in computer technology, in professional development for teachers, or sharing high school courses through internet-based learning.

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## **Cuts, lay-offs, school closings continue statewide**

Forty-four Appleton Area School District teachers met earlier this month with district administrators to hear the details of their lay-offs (<http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2009303110015>). The lay-offs, on a 7-0 vote of the board, come less than a month after voters rejected two referenda to exceed revenue limits totaling \$15.9 million. Lay-offs -- which will cut 31 full-time teaching positions -- will take effect on June 9.

Lay-offs were also a major concern in the Eau Claire school district that faces a \$4.1 million budget shortfall next school year ([http://www.leadertelegram.com/story-news\\_local.asp?id=BJEHAM8AISR](http://www.leadertelegram.com/story-news_local.asp?id=BJEHAM8AISR)). The size of the teaching staff could hinge on contract negotiations scheduled to begin this week. Administrators and non-union staff salaries have been frozen for the 2009-10 year. Teachers could be asked to do the same thing. The school board renewed staff, recently, but reserved the right to "transfer, reassign, reduce contracts, or lay off employees ... "

A month after Waupun voters rejected a \$4.9 million referendum, the Waupun Area Board of Education followed through on its promise to make drastic changes in the local school landscape (<http://www.fdlreporter.com/article/20090317/FON0101/903170375/1985>). With 100 community members crowded into the Waupun High School large group room, the school board voted 6-1 to close three elementary schools at the end of the year. That will result in a reduction of 30 staff positions as well as other budget cuts that should close the districts projected budget deficit of \$1.25 million for 2009-10.

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### **Districts all over the state asking voters for operating funds**

One of the many referenda to be held April 7 will be in Loyal (<http://www.marshfieldnewsherald.com/article/20090310/MNH0101/903100406/1980>). The district will ask residents to OK a three-year \$1.5 million proposal to continue operating at its current level. The district faces declining enrollment and rising expenses, the same thing faced by districts throughout the state. "It's to keep business as usual," said Superintendent Graeme Williams. "Whether salaries and benefits, student programs, supplies, or extra-curricular activities, we're asking to use the money for all those purposes."

The Elcho School District, in northern Wisconsin, also faces a referendum on April 7. Voters will decide whether or not to exceed state-imposed revenue limits by \$1.54 million over three years. If it doesn't pass, the district will need to begin making cuts to its base programs, according to an article in *The Rhinelander Daily News* (<http://www.rhinelanderdailynews.com/articles/2009/03/16/news/doc49be5a792501f228943009.txt>). Elcho faces projected deficits of \$110,605 for next year, \$154,756 in 2010-11, and \$211,377 by 2011-12.

There will be 42 referenda in Wisconsin on April 7, 33 asking voters to increase their own property taxes in order to keep teachers in front of children, books on the desks, and the doors of schools open. You can find out who is bringing voters to the ballot box by going to <http://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/referendum.html>.

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### **HOPE plan introduced as a constitutional amendment**

Assembly Joint Resolution 24 (<http://nxt.legis.state.wi.us/nxt/gateway.dll?f=templates&fn=default.htm&d=bills09&jd=top>) has been introduced in the Wisconsin Legislature. Known during previous sessions as the HOPE plan (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen15/news/Press/2005/pr2005-046.htm>), it is designed to provide property tax relief "from school district property taxes to persons who have their principal dwelling in this state."

The measure, if approved, would exempt the first \$60,000 of the fair market value of a person's property from taxation for school purposes. AJR24 was signed onto by 20

Representatives and nine Senators -- all Democrats. It was referred to the Committee on State Affairs and Homeland Security (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/CommPages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=State+Affairs+and+Homeland+Security&HOUSE=Assembly>), chaired by Rep. Frederick Kessler (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=12>), D-Milwaukee.

AJR24 is a constitutional amendment. If approved during this session of the Legislature, it would also have to be approved during the next session and then go before the voters in the form of a referendum.

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### **Cole wonders: Are we watching a school-funding drama or comedy?**

Maya Cole, a member of the Madison Metropolitan School District board questions whether Wisconsin's school-funding reform drama will end in tragedy in an opinion article in the March 16 issue of *The Capitol Times* online (<http://www.madison.com/tct/opinion/column/443195>).

"All the world's a stage," she says, and "the feat is to decide whether this is a comedy or tragedy amid a dismal economy and different players." The article talks about the bleak economy and the cynical call from some that "now is the time for caution and control." "The usual follies involve state leaders (with the exception of Sondy Pope-Roberts [<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/contact/legislatorpages.aspx?house=Assembly&district=79>]) remaining silent on school finance discussions."

Cole does mention that Rep. Pope-Roberts will be holding a hearing on the plan ([http://www.sfnwisconsin.org/user\\_images/files/SFN\\_Plan.pdf?phpMyAdmin=3b5c513428b10250725eca918a17ac9f](http://www.sfnwisconsin.org/user_images/files/SFN_Plan.pdf?phpMyAdmin=3b5c513428b10250725eca918a17ac9f)) of the School Finance Network (<http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>) on April 21 ([http://www.excellentschools.org/events/SFN/March%2024\\_09Hearing.htm](http://www.excellentschools.org/events/SFN/March%2024_09Hearing.htm)) at the State Capitol.

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### **Join WAES and spread reform message statewide**

When you, your school district, or your organization join WAES, your dues support an effort that takes the message of school-funding reform to groups all over Wisconsin. Since 2004, we have done 173 presentations that have reach 8,224 people. And, that's not all, WAES has been part of media events, produced much needed research, sponsored rallies, built coalitions, worked with legislators, and done just about everything possible to push its children- and community-centered agenda to the front of the list.

WAES needs you to do two things right now. First, go to <http://www.excellentschools.org> and sign up for a presentation. Wisconsin won't have reform that helps all children and all communities until people around the state come

together and demand change. That starts when you learn about the present system, how it is hurting students and their schools, how to change the system to something better, and how we can work together to make change happen. All of that is wrapped in the package you get by booking a free presentation.

The second thing is to show your support for that educational effort. In other words, WAES needs you to join the coalition as a dues-paying member. Check our membership page (<http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm>) and, if your district isn't a member, do what you can to bring them on board. If you belong to a union, group, or organization that isn't a WAES member, do what you can to get them to sign on. And, if you as an individual aren't a member, join now. Your dues are tax deductible. Contact me or go to the WAES website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and click "Join WAES."

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### **Stoughton school district newest member of WAES**

And, when you join WAES, you join an excellent core of organizations and individuals who are working toward the same goal ... reforming Wisconsin's school-finance system. Go to <http://www.excellentschools.org/about/partners.htm> to see who you'll be "hanging around with."

The newest member of the coalition is the Stoughton Area School District (<http://www.stoughton.k12.wi.us/>). Those renewing their memberships since the last e-mail update were the School District of Wabeno, WEAC Council No. 10, the Japanese American Citizen League-Wisconsin Chapter, Fred Andrist, and Ellen Lindgren.

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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**

- March 22 -- School-funding forum, as part of the Multiple ViewUUS Forum series, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at the Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church (<http://www.obuuc.org/>), 625 College Avenue, Racine (<http://www.cityofracine.org/>)

- March 30 -- Discussion of the School Finance Network (SFN at <http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>) reform plan with the Central Wisconsin School Board Consortium, Stevens Point (<http://www.spacvb.com/>), 7 p.m. at the P.J. Jacobs Junior High School Cafeteria (<http://www.wisp.k12.wi.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=18&PHPSESSID=97d66aee7a8153f1832f94b113cdf739>), 2400 Main Street
- March 31 -- School-funding reform discussion with University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (<http://www4.uwm.edu/>) graduate class in school social work policy, 6 p.m., Room 151, Physics Building, 1900 East Kenwood Boulevard ([http://www4.uwm.edu/visitors/map\\_directions\\_tours.cfm](http://www4.uwm.edu/visitors/map_directions_tours.cfm))
- April 1 -- Lobby Day sponsored by the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association (<http://www.wsswa.org/>), 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., meeting at the Madison Masonic Center, 301 Wisconsin Avenue, and moving to the State Capitol
- April 16 -- School-funding reform discussion with members of the Richland Area Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net/>), 9:30 a.m. at the Country Kitchen Restaurant in the Ramada Inn ([http://www.ramada.com/Ramada/control/Booking/property\\_info?propertyId=11386&bra](http://www.ramada.com/Ramada/control/Booking/property_info?propertyId=11386&bra)), 1450 Veterans Drive, Richland Center (<http://www.richlandchamber.com/>)
- April 21 -- Informational hearing of the Assembly Education Committee (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/w3asp/CommPages/IndividualCommittee.aspx?COMMITTEE=Education&HOUSE=Assembly>) on the school-funding reform plan of the School Finance Network (<http://www.sfnwisconsin.org>), 1 p.m. in Room 413 North of the State Capitol
- April 24 -- School-funding reform discussion with those attending the 100th birthday celebration convention -- *Taking the Next Step* (<http://www.wisconsinpta.org/pages/convention.cfm>) -- of the Wisconsin PTA (<http://www.wisconsinpta.org>), 10:15 a.m., the Olympia Resort and Conference Center (<http://www.olympioresort.com/>) in Oconomowoc (<http://www.ci.oconomowoc.wi.us/>)
- April 27 -- School-funding reform discussion as part of the Social Justice Series at Lawrence University in Appleton
- May 3-4 -- "Students leading the way to school-funding reform" sectional presentation, 9:10 a.m. on Monday, May 4, at the Senior High School State Conference ("Leadership -- Out of this World) of the Wisconsin Association of School Councils (<http://www.wasc.org/index.cfm>), Regency Suite Hotel and KI Convention Center ([http://www.hotel-sierra.com/locations/green\\_bay/default.aspx](http://www.hotel-sierra.com/locations/green_bay/default.aspx)), 333 Main Street, Green Bay (<http://www.greenbay.com/>)
- May 6 -- WAES will have a booth to talk about school-funding reform with those attending the state convention of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (<http://www.wrea.net>) -- *Wave the Checkered Flag for WREA* -- from 2 to 6 p.m., at the Osthoff Resort (<http://www.osthoff.com/>) in Elkhart Lake (<http://www.elkhartlake.com/>)
- May 11 -- School-funding reform discussion as part of the Cedar Lake United Educators (<http://www.weac.org/clue/>) RA, 5 p.m., at the Washington County

Fair Park (<http://www.wcfairpark.com/>), 3000 Highway PV, West Bend  
(<http://www.wbachamber.org/>)

- May 18 -- School-funding reform discussion with those attending the Citizens Advocacy Project, 11 a.m., Oakwood Village West ([http://www.oakwoodvillage.net/default.php?page=29#sec\\_89](http://www.oakwoodvillage.net/default.php?page=29#sec_89)), Madison, sponsored by Dane County Advocacy Network Education (for more information call 608-441-7897)
- June 10 -- 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

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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.*

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"The moral test of a government is how it treats those who are at the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadow of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped," -- Hubert Humphrey, 1976

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