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Details: Public Hearing – November 15, 2007

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**WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ...
PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS**

2007-08

(session year)

Senate

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on ... Education (SC-Ed)

COMMITTEE NOTICES ...

- Committee Reports ... **CR**
- Executive Sessions ... **ES**
- Public Hearings ... **PH**
- Record of Comm. Proceedings ... **RCP**

INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

- Appointments ... **Appt**
- Clearinghouse Rules ... **CRule**
- Hearing Records ... bills and resolutions
 - (**ab** = Assembly Bill) (**ar** = Assembly Resolution)
 - (**sb** = Senate Bill) (**sr** = Senate Resolution)
 - (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
 - (**sjr** = Senate Joint Resolution)
- Miscellaneous ... **Misc**

MB

Part 2
of 2

**Senate Education Committee
Hearing on SJR 27**

November 15, 2007



**Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools**

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Senate Education Committee

Hearing on Senate Joint Resolution 27

Thursday, Nov. 15

Room 411S State Capitol

Testifying for the Wisconsin Alliance of Excellent Schools are the following:

1. Ruth Page Jones Project ABC-Waukesha president
2. Nancy Ketchman MacDowell Montessori School (MPS) PTA member
3. Jill Gaskell Pecatonica PTA member
4. Ashley From Florence County School District student
5. Katie Malinowski Florence County School District student
6. Dean Ryerson Port Edwards School District superintendent
7. Bonita Basty Birchwood School District bookkeeper
8. Jeff Spitzer-Resnick Disability Rights Wisconsin managing attorney
9. Rita Simon Wisconsin Association of School Nurses
10. Dan Brereton Florence County School District school board president
11. Jack Norman Institute for Wisconsin's Future research director
12. John Simonson University of Wisconsin-Platteville retired economics professor
13. Roxanne Starks Wisconsin PTA president elect
14. Janet Kane League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Committee chairperson
15. June Weisberger League of Women Voters of Dane County member and senior citizen
16. Randy Kunsch Phillips School District educator and Price County Citizens Who CARE member

Ruth Page Jones
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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

Good morning. My name is Ruth Page Jones, I am a parent from Waukesha, President of Project ABC, a local school advocacy group, and interim President of Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, WAES, a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to promoting excellent schools

I am so pleased to be here today, so pleased that you have heard our pleas for school funding reform and that you are finally getting down to the hard work of developing a new plan.

As you look around this room today, you will see a grassroots movement come to life. The people before you came from Waukesha and Oconto and Milwaukee and Madison and Florence, Pecatonica, Sturgeon Bay, Birchwood, Phillips, Kettle Moraine and elsewhere. We are parents and grandparents who came today to show our level of commitment and passion to Wisconsin's children and our state's future.

It is time to trash the current "Going out of Business Plan" that you crafted for schools 15 years ago. It is time, it is past time for a new "Kids First Business Plan" that helps all kids in all communities. Wisconsin needs a plan whose primary purpose is to educate children. Investing in education is the best, most effective use of state funds to ensure a thriving economy and a great future for the state of Wisconsin.

The current funding formula has forced schools throughout this state to cut valuable programs and eliminate opportunities for children.

Districts have already fired administrators, delayed maintenance projects, slowed down textbook adoption, reduced technology and site budgets, cut extra-curricular programs, and found efficiencies to reduce costs in utilities and transportation. And now in the last few years, for many schools, all that is left to cut are teachers. There is something drastically wrong with a system that forces schools to fire great teachers who are successfully helping children.

Let me tell you about my own school district, Waukesha. Last year the formula forced the firing of elementary school guidance counselors and librarians and the elimination of our gifted and talented program. The district increased class sizes at every level for the second time and cut back on our award-winning music program. What logic dictates that a school must cut the very programs that make them successful?

My friend Mary's daughter is in a freshman English class with 41 students. Teachers are reducing 3 page writing assignments to one page so they have time to correct and provide feedback.

Classrooms were so overcrowded, children were sitting on the floor at the beginning of the school year.

My son broke his foot in gym class 4 weeks ago playing soccer with 47 kids in a class with one teacher.

My friend Ronda's 7 year old daughter started school this fall in a class with 36 kids. She can go to the library once a week for an hour but she can't bring any books home because there is no librarian in her school.

The art teacher at my friend Stacey's school ran out of her supply budget in October. The PTO in this school with modest income parents doesn't have extra funds, the teacher has already spent too much of her own money. I guess this art class will just have to make do.

My heart breaks for the bright but struggling 8 year old boy sitting in the principal's office for disruptive classroom behavior. Last year he was an eager and engaged learner, benefiting from gifted and talented programming, a helpful librarian, a teacher with a manageable class size - and a guidance counselor to listen and advise. In just one year, that support structure was slashed, and now when he acts-out, no doubt due to boredom, he is sent to sit in the principal's office. What a terrible waste of potential!

The funding formula will force Waukesha to cut another 60 teachers next year, and on and on until you, the people we elect fix this mess. The Waukesha school board may very soon be forced to take the Florence vote - the vote to dissolve because the school district can no longer guarantee an adequate education to its students.

And as you will hear today, the Waukesha story isn't the Waukesha story, it is the Oconto story and the Sturgeon Bay story and the Kettle Moraine story and the Madison story. It will only get worse.

At this point in time, communities have exhausted all local remedies. Referendums especially are a lousy option that tears apart communities. Cuts have gone too far - there are no more 'efficiencies' that still preserve educational integrity

You, our legislators, have the power to change this law. You, or those who are elected to replace you, are the only ones who can remedy this situation.

We ask you to develop a new funding system that meets the criteria of SJR 27. We need it now! Please listen carefully as people testify today from around the state. The people who follow me will passionately and eloquently explain how the current 'Going Out of Business' plan is failing us all and they will share their ideas about ideas for a new plan that puts Kids First.

Properly funding public schools is the very best investment we can make for the prosperity of everyone in our state now and in the future.

Nancy Ketchman.
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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

Dear Wisconsin Senate Education Committee:

I am appearing before you to support Senate Joint Resolution 27. I am representing the PTA of MacDowell Montessori School (Milwaukee Public School) and WAES.

Background

My husband and I have two sons, both of whom attend Milwaukee Public School's MacDowell Montessori School. I am also an active volunteer at my sons' school. While there are many successes in our school – and my sons are thriving at MacDowell – there are many situations that cannot be solved by teachers and parents. These are problems directly affected by the budget.

Here are some examples that I have observed both at MacDowell and at other MPS schools in the past year:

- Budget cuts made it necessary this year for MacDowell to choose between eliminating a classroom or the assistant principal position. We eliminated the assistant principal.
- Budget cuts made it necessary to cut a teacher position last year, resulting in the elimination of one classroom and hence more crowding in the remaining classes.
- Our library lacks decent seating and there is only one piano bench for four of the school's pianos. Because the budget doesn't provide enough to replace these and other items that enhance our student's educational experience, we've requested these in our PTA newsletter "Wish List," hoping that some enterprising parent will find items at a rummage sale.
- Without the financial support of the PTA, our K3-K5 students wouldn't be able to afford the transportation costs for one annual trip to the Milwaukee County Zoo.
- At Milwaukee's Riverside High School, I observed few working clocks in the hallways and classrooms.
- At Milwaukee's Washington High School this past month, I observed several broken exit signs, with only a red box indicating that this was an exit.

In addition, our school (and many others in Milwaukee) deal with issues that more affluent communities do not: poverty (79% of MacDowell students qualify for free or reduced lunch and breakfast); a high percentage of low-income, single-parent families, many of whom work multiple jobs or do not own a car making it difficult for them and their children to participate in after-hour activities; and a greater percentage of students with special education needs. These are all factors that make educating a student at our school more difficult and more expensive than educating a student in more affluent communities.

On an even more personal level, I've seen my own city neighborhood become a revolving door of sorts for young families. It's become a bit of a standing joke that my husband and I don't get too close to anyone with kids until their children reach the age of 6 and their parents haven't moved away because of

the schools. But it's not funny. We've lost many fine families because of the "school" issue. And I can't blame them, especially when they see how hard MacDowell parents and other MPS parent groups have to work just to get the basics to our children. In more affluent communities, students receive – as a matter of course – a level of education (classroom size, teacher expertise, financial support, and physical environment) that students in MacDowell can only dream of. How hard would you work to ensure your child and their classmates have working clocks, properly trained and enthusiastic teachers, and working soap dispensers? It is an ongoing, relentless task. None of my suburban friends and relatives work as hard as my fellow MPS parents do to provide their children with the environment suburban parents take for granted: bright, well-lit classrooms; enthusiastic teachers; and extra-curricular activities. Nor do they struggle with issues of poverty, unemployment, and other social problems that make educating children in my community more difficult.

Support for SJR27

It's for that reason that I support SJR27. The community – and the state – must fund schools based on the actual cost of educating children in particular communities rather than some blind, universal formula that doesn't take into consideration specific circumstances that result in higher costs. School districts such as mine have vastly different populations and needs than more affluent, homogenous districts. Yet, the funding formula is the same.

We all know that education is the path to future success – as an individual and as a community. When you look at what makes a desirable community, number one on the list is the quality of the school system. But what makes those school systems so effective is that they are sufficiently funded. In Milwaukee, our public school system is not sufficiently funded.

I urge you – as legislators, as community leaders, and as parents – to take responsibility for the education of all of our children, not just those fortunate enough to have born into the right circumstances. Blaming the failure of our public schools on "bad families" or "lousy administration" and hence avoiding making structural changes in our current funding system is too easy. Please, accept this challenge and take action **now**. Our community's current and future social, economic, and political health depends on it.

We need your help. Please support and pass SJR27.

Sincerely,

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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

The Pecatonica School District is located in the beautiful rolling hills of southwestern Wisconsin. While it is a wonderful place to live, the economy is shrinking and people are moving to more urban centers. Our school enrollment this year is 456 students. Ten years ago, it was 561. We have lost over 100 students in 10 years, almost a 20% decrease. That loss of students comes when even a steady enrollment means there is not enough funding to make ends meet. The loss of 20% of our students increases that loss of funding to the point that our school is a skeleton of an education system.

This is the same thing that is happening to small, rural, and very necessary school districts all over Wisconsin.

In 1995, we had a wonderful Technical Education program, and a Family and Consumer Education program. They were cut. So we are a rural school district with no programs that teach skills that would be useful to businesses in our own community. The kids graduate and leave.

Today, our school offers one art class that you can take four times. We offer one language, Spanish, one band class, no orchestra, strings or woodwind ensembles, no chorus. One of our students open enrolled to Verona. He wanted a broader curriculum and was musically talented. Verona offers 16 music courses and an AP music class! But he had to drive 50 miles every school day for the additional courses.

We have one semester of Information Technology. We have 4 offerings in English; and for students planning careers in science, engineering or math, we have 3 math classes. Last year we added 2 in-house AP classes.

Our school board has looked at our curriculum and knows that it is very minimal. Where do we cut next? We have 2 school buildings in different towns. We have tried eliminating one principal in the past, but that didn't work, so the position was added back. We are considering a part time superintendent, but superintendent also serves as business administrator and there seems to be plenty of work. Do we cut sports next? Sports is often considered expendable. We have a minimal sports program and cooperate with a neighboring school. Sports is the incentive that keeps some kids in school. It also makes well-rounded students in body, mind and spirit. And, it is the only social activity for youth in our community. If we cut it, how many students will open enroll somewhere else?

We are at a crisis point at Pecatonica—as are scores of other small but necessary districts across the state.. We are not a wealthy district and we were low-spending in 1993. It is not morally responsible to ask people to choose between educating children or paying the bills. But our students are not getting the education they have been promised by the Wisconsin Constitution. The Wisconsin Supreme Court has interpreted the state Constitution to say that “Wisconsin students have a fundamental right to an equal opportunity for a sound basic education. An equal opportunity for a sound basic education is one that will equip students for their roles as citizens and enable them to succeed economically and personally.”

I, and many others in this room, do not believe we are fulfilling that fundamental right.

Study Hall

- I have had two study halls in one semester more than once. I could be taking more classes rather than sitting through two study halls, but because of the school funding, our class schedule is tight and nothing else could fit into my schedule.
- There were between 60-70 students in one normal sized room for one of my study halls last year. This makes it almost impossible to get work done because of the large number of people and the noise level.

High Ropes Course

- We have a High Ropes Course, but the gym class that I am in can't utilize it since the teacher we have comes from the elementary school just to teach our class at the end of the day. She doesn't have enough time in her schedule to be able to setup what she needs to have setup.

Extra-Curricular Funding

- Academic extra-curricular activities are no longer funded by the school. Forensics, Drama and Hi-Q are run by volunteers who hold fundraisers to make these activities go.
- We can't focus on the activities/competitions because we are too busy trying to fundraise at the same time.
- Both the forensics team, drama and speech class were cut from the budget. How are we supposed to learn how to talk in front of other people if neither item is offered at our school?

Spanish 4

- I've been told many times that the minimum requirement for college is 4 credits of Spanish
- We can't have a separate 4th year class because there are only 4 people in the class, and my teacher already teaches 7 other classes, so we share the same class time with the Spanish 3 students.
- My fourth year of Spanish is just a repeat of my third year – the same chapters, the same papers, the same projects as last year
- What's the point of taking Spanish 4 if it's the same thing as last year?

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To whom it may concern:

Not every person is aware of the financial difficulties schools are facing, but they should be. Even though adults may not think the students are affected by the negative numbers on paper, I believe they are. Throughout high school, students are strongly affected by the difficult scheduling for the classes they want, and sometimes even more for the classes they need.

Before freshman year, every person in my class made a plan with the guidance counselor for their entire high school schedule, but since the end of freshman year, I have never had my schedule according to what I had planned, and I know others' plans haven't worked either. In ninth grade I took Spanish I, but due to being in music classes and taking other courses to advance, I am just now taking Spanish II as a senior. Other classes continue to have conflict with music such as Human Physiology and Physical Education.

As a senior, I am in two semesters of Physical Education because I could not fit it in my schedule, and I could not take Human Physiology at all which means that I am only graduating with three credits of science.

These conflicts happen to many more students who are planning on attending college and want full schedules, but due to scheduling, students end up having one to two extra study halls and are missing out on important classes needed for college. Whether a student wants four credits of Spanish and they only get two, or they want to take Human Physiology and they can't, doesn't matter to a college. A college looks at what courses a student has taken, and not which courses they wanted to take.

I hope that in the future there are ways for schools without the funding to find a way for students to take all the classes they want and need without a problem.

Thank you for your time,

Katie Malinowski

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**Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools**

Wisconsin Senate Education Committee
 Written Testimony in Support of Senate Joint Resolution 27
 Thursday, November 15, 2007
 10:30 a.m.

Submitted by Dean Ryerson
 Superintendent
 Port Edwards Public School District

Honorable Senators Lehman, Erpenbach, Hansen, Kreitlow, Olsen, Grothman, and Lazich:

It's American Education Week. This year's theme is: "Great Public Schools, A Basic Right and Our Responsibility." That theme is consistent with the Constitution of the State of Wisconsin that requires the state to provide each child with an equal opportunity for a sound basic education.

I'm Dean Ryerson, Superintendent of the Port Edwards Public Schools. Prior to coming to Port Edwards this year, I served as Superintendent of the Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools for 11 years, and as that district's human resources director prior to serving as superintendent. I also served as human resources director in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District and as an assistant principal in the Beaver Dam Area School District.

In 2003 I was appointed to Governor Doyle's Task Force on Educational Excellence. As a Task Force member I served on the teacher issues sub-committee.

The Port Edwards School District is one of the 159 school district members of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellence in Schools due to that organization's commitment to seek change in the current funding formula for public schools.

I submit this testimony in support of SJR-27. Here's why:

It's time to fix a convoluted and out-dated school funding formula. The many changes to the basic formula that have taken place over time have created confusion, inequity, and mistrust.

Confusion. Attempting to explain a 13% levy increase when expenditures are going up 2.83% is one of many confusing aspects we face when speaking to others as when I spoke to our local business association last week. It is difficult to engage our electorate in discussion about school funding when such funding is so complicated to understand.

Inequity. The current budget supports wealthy districts more than poor districts, when the poor districts also serve students with more challenging needs. What's fair about that? While the intent of the formula to equalize funding is laudable, in reality modifications to the formula have created inequities

Mistrust. At a time when school districts are encouraged to collaborate, the funding formula fosters unhealthy competition that can be illustrated by a neighboring school district's billboards that have been erected in our local district. Consolidation is a panacea that will not solve the challenges for small schools. However, funding that encourages collaboration would keep quality educational programs in our small communities along with the pride that comes with small school and community spirit.

Efforts have been made to significantly modify the current formula but to no avail. The Governor's Task Force made recommendations to encourage systemic change. Several recommendations from the Task force have been honored through subsequent budgets including that which was recently enacted. Those recommendations include additional funding for SAGE, increased funding for school breakfast programs, enhancements to transportation funding, additional support for school districts such as Port Edwards for declining enrollment, and the maintenance of funding for 4K.

The Task Force called for a cost-out study that is a basis for what SJR-27 references in a component of the resolution that would provide "funding levels based on the actual cost of what is needed to provide children with a sound education..."

The Task Force also provided insights and recommendations into ways to reduce the burden on property taxpayers through sales tax revenues and other means.

The Port Edwards Public School District is being challenged by the current funding formula in several ways.

Changes in our paper-making industry have resulted in lower equalized values that mean additional costs for property taxpayers.

Open enrollment data (Exhibit A) indicates a gradual shifting of our students to other districts. When I talked with parents of those students this fall I was informed that many chose other school districts because of the additional program opportunities available to adjoining districts with high schools just minutes from our community. While for this year and in the near future our District will continue to compete through our personalized, small district approach, without changes in state funding the Port Edwards School District joins other small schools in facing the long-term future.

Special education funding places significant challenges on small school districts. Services for one high-cost student with severe needs can be crippling to a small district.

Over the last five years the Port Edwards School District expenditures for special education have increased over 24%, in spite of a recent teacher lay-off in this area.

Revenues in special education for the same period have decreased nearly 13% over the same five-year period. As a result, general Fund 10 revenues must make up the difference, putting pressure on regular education program sustainability.

Our district competes very well with neighboring districts on the basis of student performance (Exhibit B), and on our ability to offer personal student service through small class sizes. Yet, due to budget constraints resulting in support staff and professional staff reductions, our ability to maintain this edge is being challenged.

As with other comparable small sized districts our per pupil costs are above the state average. Yet we are trying to economize in several ways. Teacher negotiations in 2003-2005 resulted in the implementation of the 3.8% QEO, resulting in strained labor relations within our district.

For the current school year a vacant high school principal position was not filled. The board reduced the superintendent's position from full-time to part-time.

Employees in both of our labor organizations have accepted changes in health insurance resulting in more cost-effective insurance programs. The teacher union is currently negotiating with the Board on changes in post-employment benefits that could also result in cost savings. As school funding changes are explored, any changes must include a discussion on how benefits cost increases can be contained, meeting both the needs of our employees and of the district's ability to pay.

Our expenditures for this current year are budgeted to increase only 2.83% due to the reductions gained through the efforts noted. Yet, with revenues decreasing by .37%, the district's ability to maintain what it has is seriously being challenged.

This is not about our district not finding ways to economize. This is not about our community's unwillingness to pay more to continue a quality educational program it demands.

Efforts to change the funding formula as expected through SJR-27, if successful, will insure that public education continues to be the driver in economic development that it is widely acknowledged to be.

Efforts to change funding through SJR-27 will support communities such as Port Edwards in providing a quality life for its children in the midst of significant community economic change.

Efforts to change funding through SJR-27 will help districts to meet the numerous unfunded mandates placed on schools by federal and state legislation.

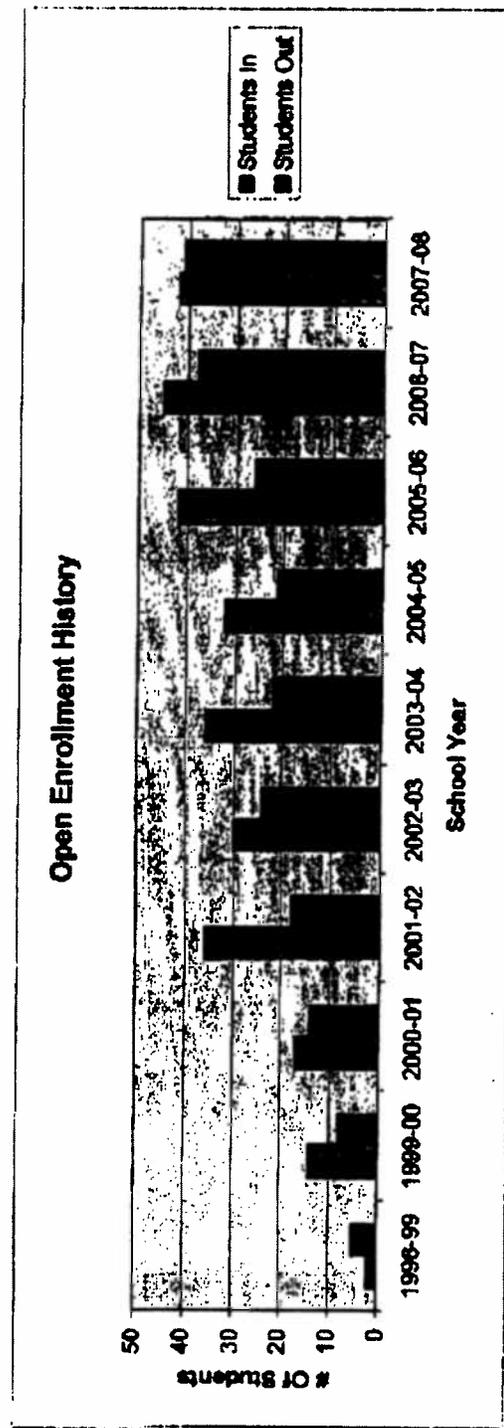
Efforts to change funding through SJR-27 will remove some of the burden of education from the property taxpayer and support a more equal system of taxation and education funding.

Thank you for your efforts to change an outdated and complex school funding formula, and thank you for listening to my comments this morning.

History of Open Enrollment for Fort Edwards School District

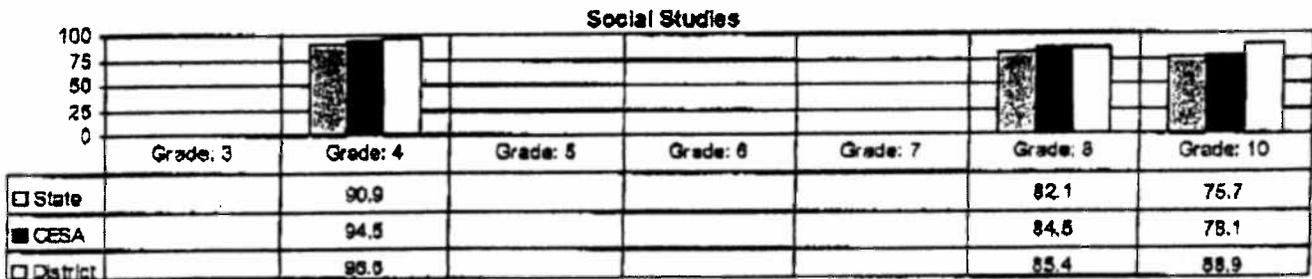
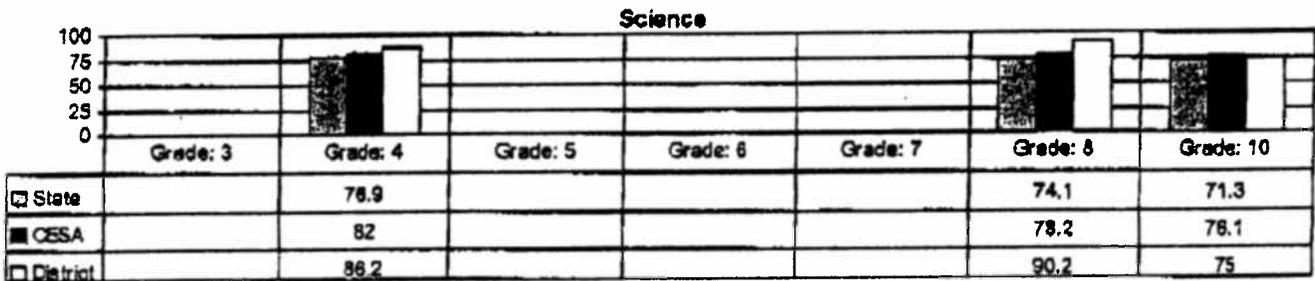
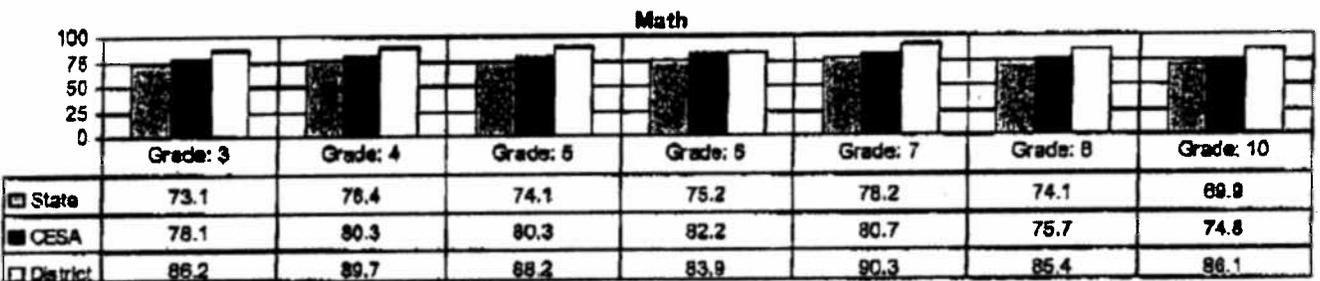
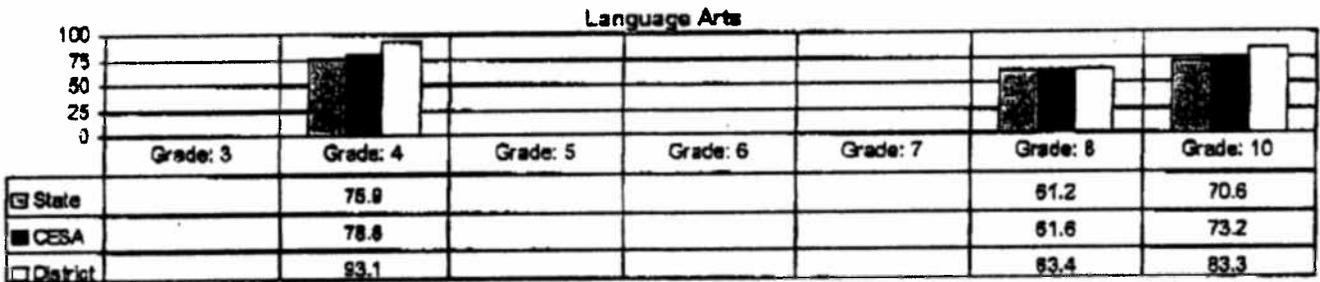
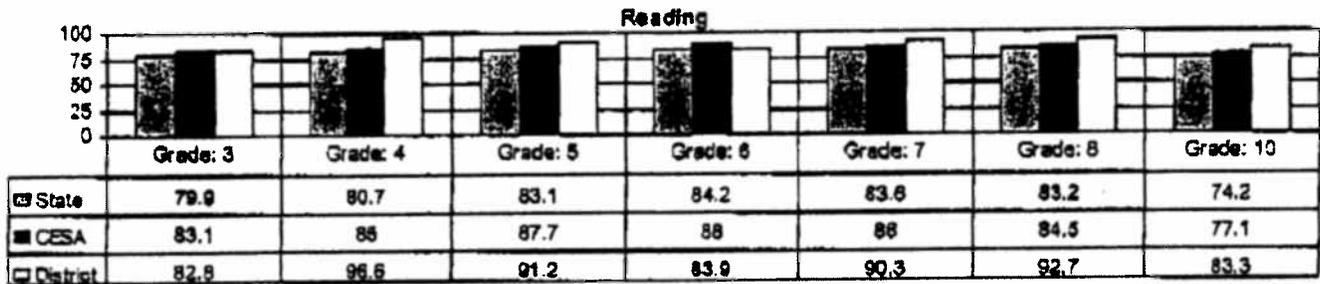
Year	Total Number of Student Transfers In			Total Number of Student Transfers Out			Net
	Students In	State Aid	Credit	Students Out	State Aid	Debit	
1998-99	2	\$4,543.00	\$9,086.00	5	\$4,543.00	\$22,715.00	-\$13,829.00
1999-00	14	\$4,703.00	\$9,406.00	8	\$4,703.00	\$37,824.00	\$28,218.00
2000-01	17	\$4,828.00	\$82,076.00	14	\$4,828.00	\$67,592.00	\$14,484.00
2001-02	36	\$5,059.00	\$192,124.00	18	\$5,059.00	\$91,062.00	\$91,062.00
2002-03	30	\$5,241.00	\$157,230.00	24	\$5,241.00	\$125,784.00	\$31,446.00
2003-04	36	\$5,445.00	\$198,055.00	22	\$5,445.00	\$119,812.00	\$76,244.00
2004-05	32	\$5,496.00	\$175,872.00	21	\$5,496.00	\$115,416.00	\$60,456.00
2005-06	42	\$5,972.00	\$239,645.00	26	\$5,972.00	\$147,732.00	\$90,912.00
2006-07	45	\$5,845.00	\$283,025.00	38	\$5,845.00	\$222,110.00	\$40,915.00
2007-08	42	\$6,043.00	\$269,806.00	41	\$6,043.00	\$247,763.00	\$6,043.00

Net Total = \$426,151.00



4508 PORT EDWARDS School District State and CESA 5 Averages versus District Scores 2006-2007

WKCE Scores (WAA Scores Are NOT Included)
Percent of Students at Proficient and Advanced Levels



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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

**Wisconsin Senate Education Committee
November 15, 2007**

My name is Bonita Basty. I've been a resident of Birchwood for 33 years, relocating here from Northern Indiana at the age of 14 and entering high school at Birchwood School. At first, this move to a very small rural setting was "culture shock" but I quickly thrived at this small school after being treated as a "person of value" and not just getting lost in the student body as a number. I went on to graduate as Valedictorian of the class of 1978 and along with my husband (my high school sweetheart who had moved to Birchwood from Chicago when he was 14) chose to stay in the community and have our son attend the school we had grown to love. He is now excelling as a senior at UW-Superior.

Birchwood is located in Northwestern Wisconsin. It is one of the more unique school districts in the state because of its continued loss of state aids, its large geographic size, its poverty levels and its academic success levels.

I have seen how funding changes that started in 1992 that had some positive impact through 1997 on our district, have since become a major threat to continuing quality educational opportunities for our students.

In addition, having worked in the school business office for 22 years now, I have experienced first hand the adverse affects of the current school funding formula on our district, both as a taxpayer and one who struggles to balance the budget. As a school we strive to maintain the integrity and value of the successful educational programs I grew up with, plus, meet and exceed the new demands of technology and our students' growth through expanding youth option programs thereby producing exceptional young adults. This is becoming increasingly difficult to accomplish as the 2007-08 school year represents the 11th year in a row that our district has lost 15% of its Equalization Aid because of property value increases largely due to vacation homes on lakefront property. The resulting loss of 80% of this aid had to be shifted to property taxpayers.

Birchwood is unique because it is one of the least densely populated school districts in the state. It encompasses just under 200 square miles and serves 330 students. Of these students, 62% of the elementary school students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Birchwood is also unique because it is, to our knowledge, the most recognized low-income school in the state for high student achievement. It has received the New Wisconsin promise award at the middle and high school levels for 5 years in a row and at the elementary level for the first four years of the award. Only 7 other districts in the state have had any school qualify for 5 years and we have done it for two schools.

I also need to mention that northern tier schools have a track record of being very successful in spite of an outdated funding system. A disproportional number of these rural and poor districts are being recognized by DPI as New Wisconsin Promise Schools.

In terms of funding reform, for the past several years the school district has supported efforts by the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools to have funding reform occur. This reform is needed by so many schools to overcome long-term adverse effects that have developed over time.

We support efforts to provide a true costing out of what it takes financially to support a quality education. This quality education needs to be paid for through significant school finance reform.

We are very thankful to the Legislature for recent changes that have been started with the passing of the new State Budget. While not all schools supported the shift of \$79 million in Equalization Aid to a Property Tax Credit, many northern tier district taxpayers benefited because of high property values. For many schools, unless a new aid is a categorical one, there is no positive impact because of our continued mandatory 15% loss in state equalization aid each year. Therefore, we support some additional new education dollars being applied as tax credits.

The Legislature “got it right” when it started to provide Sparsity Aid to a number of schools. Although this categorical aid is not fully funded, we hope that the Legislature sees this as the first step in providing additional funds to help rural districts whose costs are much higher than the state average due to small enrollments.

We also thank the Legislature for providing additional funds for high poverty schools. While we missed out in qualifying for this aid by 5 students, we will qualify in the future if the funding is available for the budget cycle.

There are any number of “Birchwoods” located “Up North.” We ask that you please consider the need for true school funding reform. What may have been a good

short-term strategy for funding schools back in the early 1990's has proven to be bad long-term policy for northern rural schools.

We have been a strong supporter of WAES proposals because they address the needs for significant school reform while not creating "winners" and "losers" among school districts.

disabilityrights | WISCONSIN

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SJR 27

by
Jeffrey Spitzer-Resnick
Managing Attorney

As many of you know, I am a Managing Attorney at Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), Wisconsin's designated protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities. In addition, I am the chairperson of the Quality Education Coalition (QEC), Wisconsin's only statewide coalition of parents, educators and advocates, who work to improve Wisconsin's system of special education. I am also here today in my role as chairperson of the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities Governmental Affairs Committee. In addition, I am privileged to testify on behalf of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations. Finally, these organizations also support the Wisconsin Alliance of Excellent Schools (WAES) mission to reform Wisconsin's system of financing its public schools so that all of Wisconsin's children can obtain an excellent education.

We are here to remind the legislature that fundamental flaws in Wisconsin's school finance system remain and will continue to worsen if that system is not fundamentally altered. As you know, that system is premised on a three legged stool: revenue caps, caps on teachers' salaries, and 2/3 support of school funding by the state. While the state continues to insist that local school districts and teachers cap revenues and salaries, the legislature has once again failed to support the third leg of that stool with the promised 2/3 funding. In addition, the source of funds for our states' schools is still reliant on an antiquated, inequitable source—property taxes. Here are just a few of the results of this broken system which are a national embarrassment:

- Wisconsin has the lowest reading scores for African-American children in the country;
- Wisconsin has the widest gap between African-American and Caucasian children's reading scores in the country;
- Wisconsin has one of the worst graduation rates for African American children in the country;
- The Milwaukee Public School (MPS) district and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently lost a special education class action brought by our agency in federal court, where the court found that MPS uses suspension instead of evaluating children for possible disabilities, and DPI fails to ensure that state and federal special education laws are enforced within MPS.

Lest you think that these problems stay confined within our schools, Wisconsin also has one of the highest incarceration rates of African-Americans in the country, and our prisons are bursting at the seams despite the major expansion of our prison system under former Governor Thompson. It is well known that being suspended from school, failing to learn how to read, and failing to have

one's disabilities addressed at an early age greatly enhances the chances of incarceration for such children. The time for flushing our neediest children down the toilet in Wisconsin must come to an end!

Others will provide further tales of woe regarding our system of education. Focusing on special education in particular, it becomes painfully obvious that our current system of school funding is broken and needs a major overhaul. After passage of the recent biennial budget, Wisconsin continues to fund school districts special education costs at a miserly rate of approximately 30%. Combined with federal reimbursement of approximately 16%, this means that local school districts continue to pay well over half of the costs of special education. They are forced to do this while they have their revenue constrained by state imposed revenue caps.

As you are probably aware, Wisconsin's reimbursement rate for special education categorical aids has plummeted since the advent of revenue caps. According to a recent Legislative Fiscal Bureau memo, during the 1993-94 school year, Wisconsin reimbursed local school districts over 44% of their special education costs. As that memo states, on a statewide and district by district basis, if the state had maintained that level, in 2005-06, Wisconsin would have paid over \$166 million in additional funding to local school districts in that year alone! Due to revenue caps, the only way to make up that gap is to reduce support for regular education programming.

Thus, the unfortunate reality is that some school districts are forced to reduce regular education funding in order to meet their state and federal obligations to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities. Other school districts are forced to deny those rights to children with disabilities because the funding simply is not available to them. This sets up a constant strain within local communities where regular education parents and teachers battle special education parents and teachers for insufficient funds—clearly an unhealthy environment for building positive school communities.

So much for the bad news. The good news is that for the first time, this legislature is seriously considering reform of this system. SJR 278 represents a good first step. We support this measure because if it is passed, and if the next legislature follows its dictates, we will have a system of school finance that:

- Funds schools based on the actual costs of providing a sound education to all of Wisconsin's children;
- Provides sufficient state funding to meet all state and federal mandates, including special education;
- Provides additional resources for other children with special circumstances, such as those who do not speak English, those in poverty, and those in rural environments who must be transported long distances to school.
- Ends the reliance on the antiquated and unfair property tax system.

As I have stated, passage of SJR 27 is just a first step. The real test will come during the next biennial budget. However, passage of SJR 27 will send a clear message to that legislature, that it must be prepared to roll up its sleeves and get the important work of providing a fair and adequate school finance system so Wisconsin's children can see a brighter day in the years to come.

test-SJR27



WASN

Wisconsin Association of School Nurses

Rita Simon

Wisconsin Association of School Nurses

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We have students coming to school today relying on school nurses to be their primary health care providers. Students need medication, but parents can't afford it. Students need glasses to see to read and write, but parents can't afford to buy them. Students are not able to learn due to being unhealthy, hungry, tired, and overweight because of inadequate exercise.

Wisconsin needs to address this health care crisis in our schools.

The Wisconsin Association of School Nurses supports Senate Joint Resolution 27. Funding public schools is the best investment we can make in the state's economy and in the future of our communities. According to the state constitution, a large part of that investment belongs to the responsibility of the state.

For the last 15 years we have fallen short of that investment because our school-funding system no longer works.

The responsibility needs to be taken for the school-funding problems that have been created. School districts are very efficient in finding ways to educate children. Very well educated, trained, and competent teachers work every single day to educate our children. Students and parents do what they can to bring knowledge into their homes and their lives. Now, it's time for the Legislature to do its part and change the way we fund our schools.

Again, the Wisconsin Association of School Nurses supports SJR 27 and urges its passage. We will continue to monitor how lawmakers handle this crisis as the November 2008 elections approach.

Thank you for your attention.

Rita Simon, RN, CSN, ME.D

President, Wisconsin Association of School Nurses

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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

TESTIMONY- SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE-SJR-27

Thank you for holding this hearing on this very important legislation, I am happy to be here talking about the need for school funding reform again. My name is Dan Brereton, I am here as an active member of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, I am also a board member of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, however my most important role, and by far my hardest is as the president of the School Board of the School District of Florence County. I'm pretty sure most of you by now either know where Florence is, or have heard of us. Our economic struggles have not gone away nor will they unless a comprehensive change is made in the way we fund schools. I travel the state as the "lighthouse" of what is to come for school districts under the governorship of the current school funding system. The one consistent question asked by every school and every group I have spoken with is "how can we educate our children within this formula without having to go to a referendum? The answer is easy, you can't. For most, if not eventually all school districts, they will come to a point where they will need more operational revenue than is allowed by current state statutes, or systematically cut the quality of education. You can close schools two ways, economically or educationally, both results are the same.

Before I close I would like to provide you with a snapshot of our '06-'07 vs '07-'08 revenue limit worksheets which clearly shows the economic impact of the current funding system on our district.

Declining Enrollment = 3 year average 653 to 615 (with budget exemption 75%-100%)
 Enrollment sets our revenue cap.

Equalized Values = increased 9% this year, 14% last year for a total of 23% in just the past two years. This determines how much money the state kicks in compared to how much money the taxpayers kick in.

General Aid = decreased by 15% A direct result of declining enrollment and the raise in equalization value. (Last year it was 14%)

Non-recurring referenda to exceed the revenue cap increase from \$750,000 to \$1,000,000. This year's revenue cap for our school with this additional \$250,000 of referendum money will only increase \$9,141.

The End Results

1. Aide Loss of \$338,671
2. Tax levy increase of \$373,559 this rise in levy primarily due to the loss of aid.
3. We do not control equalized values, enrollments, or revenue cap, but we must operate under these restrictions.
4. These restrictions will require another referenda or possible dissolution. We will be back to where we were a few years ago.

Florence is labeled as a "rich district" in this system, our aid from the state is 29%. In comparison the Howard-Suamico district is aided at 67%. I ask you to drive through Howard-Suamico and look at the houses in which their year-around residents live, then drive through Florence and look at the houses in which our year around residents live, I think you will notice a difference. I make this point not to promote the notion that Florence should receive more or less aid than other districts, however it clearly points out one of the several basic flaws in the system. Florence doesn't want someone else's money; all children need to be educated to the highest level. I hope there are several members of the legislature that are as concerned as I am with the National Assessments of Educational Progress report that shows the average reading ability of 4th and 8th grade black students in this state, are the lowest in the nation.

This funding system will not provide the education our students require to carry this state and nation forward. There will come a day as Florence has already come close, where this system will not allow the local taxpayers to support the referendums we all need to educate our kids.

Not only are we educating tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, and engineers, we are also educating our future state Senators and Representatives. We cannot wait for our students today to get into your seats tomorrow to save the education system in this state, it will be too late, we need you to do it now.

Jack Norman, Research Director
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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

Chairman Lehman and Senators:

I am Jack Norman, Research Director for the Institute for Wisconsin's Future (IWF). IWF is a Milwaukee-based non-profit doing research and education on school finance and on state and local taxes. Our work is funded almost entirely by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. Among my duties is staffing the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES).

You are hearing today from others about how severe are the financial problems facing public schools. You are hearing how urgent is the need for comprehensive school finance reform. That is why I urge you to support Senate Joint Resolution 27, which calls for enactment of broad reform in time for the 2009-'10 school year.

I am here to describe what should be the elements of a new school finance system. I will stop short of prescribing exact dollar figures and other highly specific components. Among other things, because we are working with our coalition partners in the School Finance Network on a school-finance reform plan, it would be premature for WAES to be too specific now.

But you should know that WAES first released a reform proposal in 2002 and has continued to modify that plan in the five years since, taking into account newer data and feedback from many people across the state. However, the elements of that plan have remained the same.

Specifically:

- **Adequacy:** All resource levels should satisfy an “adequacy standard.” That is, resources should be at least enough to give every student an opportunity to be educated to local, state and national standards.
- **Balance inputs and outputs:** Another way of describing this adequacy standard is that there must be a balance between educational inputs and educational outputs. Inputs—that is, resources available for each student—should be sufficient to achieve the expected level of outputs—that is, educational performance.
- **Adequacy cost-out:** The best way to determine what amount of resources satisfies an adequacy standard is through a cost-out which uses research evidence to determine the resources necessary for a certain level of student achievement.
- **Basic level of support:** Every student in a Wisconsin public school should be supported by a basic level of resources that satisfies an adequacy standard. This foundation can be thought of as the amount of resources needed to educate the ‘typical’ student to expected achievement levels. It can be expressed in dollars per student.
- **Students with special needs:** Additional resources are needed for three categories of students, in accordance with the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision in *Vincent v Voight*.

These are: students with disabilities; students living in low-income households; and students who are immigrants still learning English.

- **Small-but-necessary rural districts:** Additional resources are needed for students in certain rural districts where there are unavoidable inefficiencies of scale. These are low-enrollment rural districts that cannot be suitably consolidated with neighboring districts.
- **Student transportation:** Costs to bus students to and from school and school activities must not use funds that otherwise are needed to support educational programs.
- **Declining enrollment districts:** Districts with chronically declining enrollment must be cushioned so declining levels of resources don't undermine student opportunities.
- **Capital projects:** All students should be educated in buildings that are safe, well maintained, and conducive to learning.
- **Property value equalization:** State aid must be used to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity for a quality education, regardless of the property wealth of a student's district.
- **Inflation:** Annual increases in resources must match price inflation at work in the real world of public education.
- **Teacher compensation:** Schools must be able to compensate teachers enough to attract and retain quality staff, especially in difficult-to-staff schools and subjects.
- **Local options:** Districts must have local authority to spend above the basic adequacy levels, in a way that does not unduly advantage districts with substantial property wealth.
- **Capped level of property tax support:** Continued use of local property tax dollars is essential to maintain local control and diversity of revenue sources. However, taxpayers must be assured that levies will not go above current levels. It is preferable that levies decline over time in real (inflation-adjusted) dollars.
- **Accountability:** With the above elements included in a school finance plan, schools will be able to meet the high expectations for academic achievement set out by local, state and federal standards. Schools that fail to meet these expectations would be subject to ever-increasing control by outside authorities.

We know that putting all these elements into a school finance system will require an increased investment of state funds. The state is the logical source for additional funding, because as has been stated repeatedly by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, public education in Wisconsin is fundamentally a state obligation.

Most important of all, we are confident that a school-finance system with the elements summarized above will support schools to educate students who will sustain a successful and thriving Wisconsin in the 21st century.

John Simonson
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Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools

TESTIMONY: STATE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
 November 15, 2007

I am John Simonson. I live at 1851 Twin Bridge Road, Mineral Point WI 53565. My telephone number is (608) 935-0192, and my e-mail address is jsimonson@mhtc.net. I am an economist specializing in public policy, having retired from UW-Platteville in 2004. I am here today representing the Grassroots Citizens of Wisconsin, the Center for Applied Public Policy, and the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools. I appreciate having this opportunity to speak with you.

There can be no doubt that Wisconsin's school funding system is in dire need of reform. Funding levels are seriously inadequate, funds are allocated capriciously among schools, and the tax burden is distributed inequitably. As we see replayed year after year, unrealistic State-imposed revenue caps leave localities with two options—both undesirable—reduce educational quality or go to referendum to raise property taxes. A friend likens this to asking localities to form a circular firing squad.

To fix Wisconsin's school funding system will obviously require additional revenue, but not from property taxes; indeed, property taxes ought to be reduced, if not eliminated. By virtually any standard, the property tax is a terrible tax, unfair both among localities and among individuals, and having perverse economic effects as well.

We hear repeatedly that nothing can be done because "there is no money." This is a myth. Many options are available, including increasing income or sales tax rates. It should be noted that the State of Iowa permits counties to add up to two percent to the State sales tax to help fund local schools.

However, tax rates need not be increased to fund our schools adequately. Indeed, closing tax loopholes would not only generate the needed additional revenue, but would increase the overall fairness of Wisconsin's tax system as well.

We can start by enacting the Streamline Sales Tax Project. This would involve collecting an estimated \$200 million annually in Wisconsin sales taxes that are owed but not collected. It was deleted from the biennial budget submitted by the Governor. Why anyone would resist collecting owed taxes is beyond me. Moreover, this would level the playing field for Wisconsin retailers, who must collect sales tax, in their efforts to compete with on-line retailers who are not now collecting tax on sales to Wisconsin residents.

Then, we can move to tax loopholes which cost the State billions of dollars in lost revenue. A study by the non-partisan Wisconsin Tax Expenditures Survey estimates that loopholes cost the State some \$3 billion per year.

A recent study by the Institute for Wisconsin's Future, for example, found that two-thirds of all large corporations operating in Wisconsin pay no taxes at all; the "Las Vegas Loophole" is but one example. Wisconsin is fifth-lowest nationally in the share of all state taxes paid by corporations.

All sales taxes tend to be regressive, that is, taking a larger percentage of incomes from lower-income taxpayers than from higher income taxpayers. But Wisconsin's sales tax could be made less regressive by increasing the tax rate on luxury goods and services. I estimate the base (except for such essentials as food and health care). Or, the rate could remain the same and the added revenue used to fund our schools adequately.

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No other investment pays off for the State of Wisconsin and its citizens anywhere nearly as well as education does. The primary engine for economic growth is investment in our children. To short-change our schools is short-sighted and wasteful.

The problem is not lack of money, but rather lack of political will.

Thank you.

Roxanne Starks
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My name is Roxanne Starks, president-elect for Wisconsin PTA (Parent Teacher Association). The address is 4797 Hayes Road, Suite 102, Madison, 53704. The phone number is 608-244-1455 and email address is wi_office@pta.org.

The Wisconsin PTA has been in existence for 99 years. Our role is about advocacy for the health & welfare of all children and youth in Wisconsin. One of our legislative priorities for the 2007-2008 year is school funding. This has been a priority for Wisconsin PTA since the QEO and revenue caps have been in existence. It is the belief of our membership that we must fix the current funding formula for our schools in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin PTA is speaking in support of SJR27.

The crisis we are in with funding our schools encompasses not just our urban school districts, but also our rural and suburban school districts. We can no longer ignore the importance of school funding. Funding public schools is the best investment for Wisconsin's economy as well as the future of our communities. The state constitution states that a large part of this investment is the responsibility of the state. The old funding system has to be thrown out and a new system must allow school districts to meet state and federal mandates especially the needs of all children particularly those with special needs.

I'm sure many of you will say that **schools need to be more efficient** or simply **hold a referendum**. You might even go so far as to say that there is **no more money for schools**. The point is our schools have cut to the bare bone and referendums are expensive and yes there is enough money for funding schools. You can't continue to take funds for schools and use it on other programs, spend it on tax rebates, tax exemptions, or even tax breaks.

We are talking about our future, our children.

Bottom line, the system is broken. As elected officials, it is your job to fix it. Wisconsin PTA is nonpartisan; our membership will be watching all of you carefully with the upcoming November 2008 elections approaching **to see exactly what you will do for the children of Wisconsin and their education.**



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN
EDUCATION FUND**

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November 15, 2007

To: Senate Committee on Education

Re: Support of Senate Joint Resolution 27

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin strongly supports Senate Joint Resolution 27. League members from across the state selected financing education for primary attention in the League's 2007-2008 advocacy agenda. The League supports a system of school financing:

- which ensures equal educational opportunity and access for each child
- in which the state assumes a significant funding share, and
- which provides for increased payments for children with special needs.

Public education in Wisconsin is on increasingly shaky ground. The constraints of the current funding system are eroding the quality of education. Temporary mechanisms that were put in place in the early 1990s were narrowly designed for property tax relief and to buy time until the system could be reworked. After more than 15 years, they are not serving us well. Wisconsin has had a tradition of excellent public schools. Now we're losing ground. Our neighbor, Minnesota, has pulled ahead of us on many measures.

Sound policy is based on sound fundamental principles. Wisconsin's equalization aid formula was designed so every community could afford to fund good schools regardless of the property wealth in the area. Any new system should preserve this principle. The state has an obligation to provide good schools for all children.

The state also has an obligation to serve each child, in light of his or her individual circumstances and abilities. Many studies document that some students need more services than others. After more than a decade of revenue caps and increasingly-under-funded categorical aids, it has become impossible to serve all children well.

Financing education is very complicated and very expensive – but also essential. This bumper sticker expresses it well –

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.”

Many studies document the significant benefits of quality education – from an educated workforce and a robust economy to a decrease in crime and a reduced prison population. We need to support quality schools for our quality of life.

The good news is that many groups have worked extensively on alternatives for funding education in Wisconsin. There is detailed information and extensive analysis to provide a solid base for reforming our system. Within the last 10 years, several states have made fundamental changes to their school funding, and their experiences can provide guidance in undertaking this important task. The League of Women Voters strongly encourages you to adopt this bill.

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**Wisconsin Alliance
for Excellent Schools**

Representing: Price County Citizens Who CARE, the Phillips School District, and the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellence Schools

I am testifying to support the Senate Joint Resolution 27 and its mandate to find a better way to fund public education.

The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1791) specifically states that, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." In its constitution, adopted in 1848, Wisconsin further declares in Article X, Section 3 that "The legislature shall provide by law for the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable."

The state of Wisconsin has a legal obligation to establish public schools and provide a high quality education for all students attending those public schools. In 1993, Wisconsin forgot its moral obligation when it mandated revenue caps be imposed on Wisconsin school districts. These revenue limits, or "spending caps", froze spending at 1992 levels with only small increases allowed since that time. Since the mid 1990's, there have been financial shortfalls in nearly all public schools and reports of increasing problems in maintaining the quality of educational programs

In the spring of 1999, only six years into cost controls, a small handful of citizens from Price County stood on the shores of Butternut Lake (during the Governor's Annual Fishing Opener) and asked for the governor to come ashore and take a petition requesting a better way to fund public schools. The governor chooses to ignore the request and did not receive the petitions. That group of citizens then decided in the summer of 1999 to walk the 245 miles from Price County to Madison and present the governor with the petitions for a better future for all Wisconsin public school students. As we walked that route, many other walkers joined us and many names were added to the petition. When we arrived at the capitol, we found the governor of Wisconsin gone and only his representatives to receive the petitions. We did not hear back from the Governor. So, the following year, we walked the same route back to Madison with more walkers and more signatures. We eventually met with the governor and his representatives and they said the cost controls could and would not change. Over the course of six years, the "Walk on The Child's Side" to Madison was held five times. Each time more people participated and more names were added to those concerned about the loss of education's quality in our state due to the funding system. Each time we arrived at Madison, we were met with the same old political rhetoric—not answers:

- 1.) This is the best system for funding public education.
- 2.) This is a partisan issue and nothing will change until the political balance of power

changes in the governor's mansion and the assembly and senate.

- 3.) Referendums allow school districts in dire needs to exceed the revenue caps.
- 4.) Legislators telling us that they don't hear the general public on this issue.

I would like to briefly respond to each of those statements that our petitions and concerns.

- 1.) If this is the really best system of financing public schools. The state Supreme Court has questioned whether or not we are investing enough resources in our children. Anyone who has read a newspaper, watched television, listened to the radio, or gone to a school board meeting in the last decade know it is a system that is failing schools and failing kids
- 2.) Since when are children – their education and their future – a partisan issue? The care of our children and their education is a moral obligation of each and every generation.
- 3.) School boards are elected by the public to operate schools and then the state tells them they are not capable of making sound financial decisions. What does that say about how the state views the ability of our communities to elect competent board members? The last figures I saw indicated that barely 50% of all referendums for building and/or to exceed the revenue caps have passed. Have you paid attention to how those referendums have pitted the children against taxpayers, communities against one another over issues of consolidation, programs within a school vying for funding against each other – bottom line this policy has torn communities' apart and created divisions that will take as long as it took the Civil War to heal.
- 4.) When legislators say they don't hear about this issue from the folks back home they are, at best, stretching the truth. This is not the first time that this room full of people have asked for help. I have been the part of too many "contact-your-legislator" stunts to buy that excuse. That's why this hearing and this resolution are so important: We have your attention.

The present policy for funding public schools in our state has failed miserably and each day that our present elected officials allow it to remain in effect will cause irreversible damage.

I am tired of walking. I am tired of talking. Everything that CARE and WAES have said has fallen on deaf ears. Don't punish the kids of Wisconsin for the mistakes of its elected officials. The present system of funding education was and continues to be a tax policy plan and not an school-funding plan. We can and must do better in Wisconsin. SRJR27 calls on the Legislature to change the way Wisconsin funds its public schools by July 1, 2009.

What will the current system be replaced with? Well, ladies and gentlemen - that is your job! Article X, Section 3 of the Wisconsin State Constitution, gives you that task. As a part of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools and the Phillips School District, it is our sincere hope that you will include the guidelines as set down by the WAES in its work over the last decade.

How can the new system be funded? Well, there are certainly suggestions in the WAES plan. However, it comes down to priorities. The money is available if members of Legislature can put kids first and not worry about PAC money, partisan politics, and open their eyes, ears and hearts. While individual property owners have been burdened with taxes; many businesses and companies have seen their property taxes decrease, various products are exempt from sales taxes, etc. Money can and must be found for public education.

This issue is not about and never has been about teacher salaries and benefits! Those who have muddled those issues to confuse and mislead the public should be ashamed of themselves. What is this issue about?

- 1.) Do you teach in a school where middle scholars come to school bragging about being drunk the night before? I do and we have had to make cuts in guidance counseling.
- 2.) Do you teach in a middle school where middle school students have brought weapons to school? I do and we have cut back on the number of principals and now the police spend more time at our school than ever. The high school/middle school principal estimates in the first 50 days of school he has had to call the police 40 times and social services another 25 times.
- 3.) Do you teach in a school district where a child is left alone because his/her parent is hooked on meth? I do and now we charge participation fees for extra curricular making it impossible for some students to be involved in positive after school extra curricular activities.
- 4.) Do you teach in a school district where children who have special talents are overlooked? I do because the Gifted and Talented Program had to be cut.
- 5.) Do you teach in a district where students are lost to open enrollment? I do because the board had to close an outlying elementary school due to budget cuts and some members of that community retaliated by sending their kids to other districts.
- 6.) Do you teach in a middle school where students are sexually abused by significant adults in his/her life? I do and we cut even deeper into the guidance counseling positions.
- 7.) Do you teach in a district where a child gets on the bus at 6:40 a.m. and gets off the bus at 5:30 p.m. and rides over 60 miles one way on the bus route? I do and they are looking at eliminating buses and combining routes (i.e. even longer distances and times spent on the bus) to save money.
- 8.) Do you teach in a district where teachers are pitted against one another for funding for their academic class? I do as special education is pitted against regular education. If the federal government and state government are going to mandate special education programs, at the least should not district do the best possible job implementing those programs? Where are the funds and when they are not funded, but yet the district maintains high-level programs, the regular education students suffer.
- 9.) Do you live in a district where adults are charged \$4 admission to high school basketball game? I do and many of the spectators are parents of the participants who must already pay a fee of \$75 for their son/daughter to be in that activity.

The list could go on and on. I teach in Phillips, WI, at the middle school. Phillips is located approximately 200 miles northwest of Madison. It is located in rural Price County. Phillips has a population of 1,500 people and the enrollment of 920 (that number is projected to drop 170 students in the next 7 years) students' district wide and the middle school enrollment is approximately 200 students. The questions I asked may make it sound like I teach in an urban area. I don't. In fact people move to Phillips to get away from the rat race, because it would be a nice place to raise their children, and to enjoy life. Would you want your son/daughter to go to the Phillips District? Would you want your grandchild to go to the Phillips District? Do you know what? Phillips is a great school district with caring, compassionate and hard working staff members. We are facing an uphill battle that we cannot win due to the current way of funding public education. This issue is purely making our kids, our schools, and the future of Wisconsin the top priority as it had been throughout our history prior to 1993.

In conclusion, I ask you not only to support Senate Bill SJR27 but also then to be an active part of the solution to the crisis in public school funding. Some people live an entire lifetime and wonder if they have ever made a difference in the world, but if you stand up for kids and public education funding, you will not have that problem.