

## South Central Region-Janesville

October 5, 2000  
Janesville, Wisconsin

### Commissioners:

Winnie Doxsie, president, Wisconsin PTA  
Nancy Graczyk, president, Beloit Education Association  
Herbert Grover, former State Superintendent of Schools  
Sue Post, parent representative, Janesville Joint Legislative Council  
Art Rainwater, district administrator, Madison School District  
Bill Reis, district administrator, Delavan-Darien School District  
Richard Rogers, Mayor, Fennimore  
Virginia Wyss, president, Janesville School Board

### Demographic and Enrollment Data

The south central region generally covers the southwest portion of the state. It spans from the Mississippi River eastward to Whitewater, Eagle and Watertown, as far north as Portage and extending south to the Illinois border. The region contains 81 school districts with a total 1999-2000 enrollment of 151,191 students. District size ranges from 306 (Benton) to 25,131 (Madison Metropolitan School District) students; the average enrollment is 1,866. The districts in the south central region have a smaller population of low-income students on average (16.6%) as compared to the state-wide average of 25.9%. The region's enrollment is 4.4% minority, as compared to 19.2% for the state as a whole. The region has a greater preponderance of special education students (16.4%) than the average for districts throughout the state (13.9%). The average revenue per pupil in the south central region is \$8,663, ranging from \$7,482 in Mount Horeb to \$10,061 in the Monona Grove School District. The region's average equalized value per student is \$258,186; its median is \$251,192. The K-12 state average is \$292,951.

Of the 81 districts in the south central region, 34 or 42% of them reported a decline in their three year rolling average enrollments between 1999-2000. On average, the decline was 1.4% for these districts. Ten districts experienced a decline of 2% or greater, with Shullsberg the highest at 4.7%.

### Overview of Citizens Who Testified (See Appendix 3 for complete listing)

Thirteen school districts were represented at the forum: Argyle, Beloit, Cambridge, Cassville, Fort Atkinson, Janesville, Madison, Mauston, Milton, Oregon, Palmyra-Eagle, Pardeeville, and Sun Prairie Area. A district administrator or school board member represented 11 of these districts, all but Beloit and Cambridge. Additionally, parents, teachers, building principals, and other citizens gave testimony. Five people provided written testimony and 18 spoke at the forum. The breakdown is as follows:

|  | <b>N</b>  | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|-----------|----------------|
| District Administrators/Business Mgrs.       | 9         | 39%            |
| Teachers                                     | 2         | 9%             |
| Building Principals                          | 2         | 9%             |
| School Board Members/Former Member           | 2         | 9%             |
| Parents                                      | 2         | 9%             |
| Students                                     | 2         | 9%             |
| Citizens/Janesville Joint Legislative Comm   | 4         | 16%            |
| <b>Total Number of Persons Who Testified</b> | <b>23</b> | <b>(100)</b>   |

### Overview of Testimony

The 23 persons providing testimony cited 11 general areas that have been negatively affected by the revenue caps in their district or school. Delayed or postponed maintenance projects/inability to adequately maintain buildings and district property was the most common problem cited by 35%. Five speakers (22%) indicated that their school/district faced a lack of supplies or that teachers were forced to pay for classroom supplies with their personal funds. Table 1 delineates the most frequently reported negative impacts of revenue caps in the south central region.

**Table 1: Speakers Reporting Specific Negative Impact of Revenue Caps**

| <b>Impact Areas</b>                                   | <b>N</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------|----------------|
| Delayed or postponed maintenance or building projects | 8        | 35%            |
| Inadequate supplies/teachers pay with personal funds  | 5        | 22%            |
| Program Cuts  | 4        | 17%            |
| Outdated or inadequate textbooks/curricular materials | 4        | 17%            |
| Staff Cuts (instructional and other )                 | 4        | 17%            |
| Increased class sizes/overcrowded classrooms          | 3        | 13%            |
| Insufficient access to computers/technology           | 3        | 13%            |

In the area of program cuts, comments focused on reading and language arts programs in the early grades and middle-school electives. In addition, one speaker cited cuts in staff training and development and one district had depleted its fund balance.

Speakers cited several factors that in combination with revenue caps, have produced further funding problems for the districts/schools. The QEO was the most commonly referenced issue (30%) as it relates to a district's ability to attract and retain qualified teachers. Six speakers (26%) mentioned low teacher salaries in general and an impending shortage of teachers as concerns in their district. Table 2 indicates the range of these responses.

**Table 2: Speakers Reporting Factors Exacerbated by Revenue Caps**

|   | <b>N</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------|----------------|
| The QEO has a negative impact on finances, salary levels, and/or ability to recruit, hire and retain teachers | 7        | 30%            |
| Low or non-competitive teacher wages/teacher shortages  | 6        | 26%            |
| Underfunded ESL, special education and other mandates   | 4        | 17%            |
| Declining enrollment  | 4        | 17%            |
| Status as low spending/below state average districts  | 2        | 8%             |

In addition, five speakers reported on recent referenda held in the region. One had failed; three spoke of the difficult, time consuming and costly nature of conducting referenda. Five or 22% of those who testified stated that the annual revenue cap increase is inadequate to meet district's rising personnel plus other operating and fixed costs. They indicated that the revenue caps curtailed the amount of funds available for non-personnel necessities.

Six testifiers offered recommendations on improving the school finance system. Two advocated for increases in the annual revenue cap allowance and two suggested carve-outs or exemptions to the caps for certain expenditures. One recommended restoring the full authority of local school boards to raise local funds for schools. Another speaker indicated that the State should increase its funding of mandated programs and standards. One speaker generally stated that while the revenue caps have provided some property tax relief, they need to be improved.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The Forum on Revenue Caps in Janesville on October 5 was the first in the series of forums held across the state and provided concerned residents from South Central Wisconsin with an opportunity to testify on how revenue limits have impacted their school districts. There are 81 districts in this primarily rural region serving over 151,191 students. The population of this region is more than 95% white with average equalized property value approximately \$34,000 below the state average. Special education enrollment is 2.5% higher than state average. Moreover, 42% of the districts have declining school enrollments. Twenty-three persons from 13 school districts testified at the hearing. The vast majority were school district superintendents or business managers but parents, teachers, students and concerned community residents were also involved. The testimony provided on revenue limits directly fell into six primary areas:

#### **Building repairs, maintenance and expansion is being delayed or cancelled.**

Our buildings and playgrounds and stadium bleachers are more poorly kept each year. If we are lucky... our meager maintenance budget stays one step ahead of disaster... We have parking lots with only one light when we need two or three and roofs that, while not leaking, are not keeping the heat in costing us more to heat the building. —*Cynthia Di Camelli, Oregon school board member*

The infrastructure budget has been reduced 43% over the past four years. We have stopped improving our buildings and we are doing only necessary maintenance. For next year's budget... I will recommend deferring maintenance in hopes that the feds or the state will come in with monies. —*Marty Holmquist, Cassville district administrator*

## **Schools have inadequate supplies for students, at times requiring teachers to pay for supplies with personal funds.**

Our physical education teacher used his PTA dollars during the summer to go to garage sales and purchase baseball gloves so each child would have a glove. —*Cynthia DiCamelli, Oregon school board member*

My supply budget for classrooms has been cut 50% over three years – so far that when I visited the kindergarten several weeks ago, I noticed children waiting for another to be able to use a pair of scissors. The teacher hadn't ordered more because she needed pencils and art supplies more. We did order more scissors – going over some other budgets hoping this will be another warm winter. —*Marty Holmquist, Cassville district administrator*

## **Important programs have been reduced or eliminated.**

In athletics we had a “no-cut” policy so everyone who tried out for a team made it. We had to eliminate this policy so fewer students are enrolled in athletics where they meet people, stay off the streets and feel like they belong.

Because of revenue limits, funds are not available for some programs, such as the “FAST” program (Families and Schools Together) which provided parenting skills training for parents of at-risk elementary school students. This year it was not renewed. —*Edward Stried, teacher and executive board member of the Janesville Education Association*

## **Many schools have outdated or inadequate textbooks, curricular materials and computer technology as an outcome of the revenue limits.**

In Janesville, 80% of our high school classrooms do not have modern computers. —*Philip Frei, Sun Prairie deputy district administrator*

For many students, school is the only place they have access to computers. If schools are not financially able to fill the technology chasm, then economically disadvantaged students risk becoming economically challenged adults. —*Marty Stogsdill, student representative, Beloit school board*

## **In many schools, staff reductions have become necessary.**

Over the last two years, we have cut three full time equivalent teaching positions. In a district of 1,250 students, it is difficult to cut staff as we do not have economies of scale and the flexibility of larger districts. We have to maintain staff to meet state standards. —*Erin Gauthier, Palmyra-Eagle business manager*

Over two hours per week was added to the teacher load in art, music and physical education this year so the district wouldn't have to hire new teachers. But each of these teachers works in more than one building with over 700 students a week. These teachers are desperately worried that they will not be able to do the “extra's” that Janesville expects such as the elementary track meets, the all-city “sing” and various art shows. —*Edward Stried, Janesville teacher*

## **There are increasing class sizes and overcrowded classrooms.**

It is common for the average class at the secondary level to have 29 or 30 students. Perhaps to an outsider, this

does not seem outrageous. . . . But in a single class, there are students with a wide range of abilities from those with special needs up to those who are termed talented and gifted and students from different demographic backgrounds. It is increasingly difficult to meet the needs of these different students while the public is asking for more accountability and academic rigor. —*Edward Stried, Janesville teacher*

**Many speakers also referred to problems in the level of funding for educational staff. Both the QEO (Qualified Economic Offer which limits wage and benefit increases to 3.8%) and revenue limits have reduced compensation for teachers, especially in poor districts. This minimizes incentives for talented adults to enter or stay in the field.**

It is a pretty harsh reality when a veteran teacher with over 25 years of experience comes away with a net increase of \$11 per month in his or her paycheck. —*James Fitzpatrick, Fort Atkinson district administrator*

As a college sophomore, I was about to declare my intended major. Originally, I had been contemplating going into education. However, after seeing what the revenue cap is doing to public education in Wisconsin, I have decided this is not a career path that has long term stability. —*Jennifer Dye, UW-Madison and former Janesville student*

**While districts can use the district referendum to override the revenue limits, speakers noted that the process is arduous and diverts resources from the central task of education.**

When a district goes to referendum, it absorbs time, energy and personnel of the district from three to six months. That means that all other issues which these people should be concerned with gets pushed aside until the referendum is over. Increasingly, districts are finding that they have to go four or five times to get people to approve changes in their school budget. —*Carol Carstensen, Madison school board member*

**Overall, speakers painted a negative picture of the scope and seriousness of the educational problems caused by the revenue limit policy.**

This past summer, I was a delegate at the American Legion's Badger Boys' State where I learned Beloit was not the only school district in dire financial need. I was told by my fellow Boy Staters that their districts did not have the funds to remove asbestos, hire teachers or add new classes. —*Marty Stogsdill, student representative, Beloit school board*

**More than one in four stated that the policymakers should be aware of and address the problems caused by spending caps through some changes in the policy.**

I would invite Governor Thompson and state legislators to Sun Prairie classrooms to talk with staff and students about revenue caps. Ask the high school teacher if a computer is needed. Ask the kindergarten student if colored paper would make her project better. Speak with the Director of Building and Grounds how you add over 120,000 square feet of building space but aren't allowed to add any custodians to clean it. —*Philip Frei, Sun Prairie deputy district administrator*

In what other government entity are the elected representatives told to go to referendum to gain improvements? None. Yet, dealing with children would seem infinitely more important than building a new garage for county trucks or deciding to buy a new fire engine. Who put children at the back of the line?

**The speakers were overwhelmingly against the current structure of revenue limits and felt the long-term implications of continuing the policy were destructive to Wisconsin's schools and children.**

Locally elected Boards should have the authority to exceed the revenue caps or this proud state which has led the nation in so many educational endeavors might be headed toward the educational backwater—*John Kammerud, Mauston district administrator*

We are not only capping the revenue schools can spend but more importantly we are capping the education of Wisconsin's youth.—*Jennifer Dye, UW-Madison and former Janesville student*

## **North Region of Wisconsin- Rhinelander**

Held: October 11, 2000

Rhinelander, Wisconsin

### **Commissioners:**

Winnie Doxsie, president, Wisconsin PTA

Herbert Grover, former State Superintendent of Schools

Ted Kempkes, publisher, The Bee, Phillips

Ray Rivard, Editor, Lakeland Times, Minocqua

### **Demographic and Enrollment Data**

The north region covers the northeast corner of the state spanning westward via the Michigan border to Vilas County on the north, and Marathon County on the south, stretching from Edgar to Antigo. The region contains 42 school districts with a total 1999-2000 enrollment of 45,132 students. District size ranges from 187 (Phelps) to 3,453 (Merrill) students; the average enrollment is 1,074. The districts in the north region have a significantly larger population of low-income students on average (30.9%) than the rest of the state, which averages 25.9% low-income or 19.6% excluding Milwaukee Public Schools. The region's enrollment is 9.8% minority, as compared to 19.2% for the state as a whole. The region has a slightly larger population of special education students (14.5%) than the state as a whole (13.9%). The average revenue per pupil in the north region is \$9,178, ranging from \$7,435 in Phillips to \$18,270 in the Lac du Flambeau #1 School District. (The highest spending non-Native American reservation school district is Phelps at \$12,808.) The region's median equalized value per student is \$282,450; the average is \$449,331. The K-12 state average is \$292,951.

Of the 42 districts in the north region, 26 or 62% of them reported a decline in their three-year average rolling enrollment between 1999-2000. On average, the decline was 1.4% for these districts. Nine districts experienced a decline of 2% or greater, with Phelps the highest at 4.7%.

## Overview of Testifying Citizens (See Appendix 3 for testifier listing)

Twelve school districts were represented at the forum: Antigo, Athens, Edgar, Elcho, Florence, Laona, Merrill, Minocqua-Hazelhurst-Lake Tomahawk, Northland Pines, Phelps, Phillips and Rhinelander. A district administrator or school board member represented all of these districts except Rhinelander. Additionally, parents and teachers/school staff gave testimony. Five people provided written testimony and 20 spoke at the forum. The breakdown is as follows:

|  |           |              |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| District Administrators/Business Mgrs. | 12        | 48%          |
| Teachers/Instructional aides           | 8         | 32%          |
| School Board Members                   | 2         | 8%           |
| Parents                                | 3         | 12%          |
| <b>Total Number of Testifiers</b>      | <b>25</b> | <b>(100)</b> |

## Overview of Testimony

The 25 persons providing written and verbal testimony for this region cited 12 general areas that have been negatively impacted by the revenue caps in their district or school. The most commonly mentioned negative impact of the caps was staffing reductions; seven speakers (29%) indicated that their school/district had been forced to cut staff, including teachers. Five speakers reported program cuts, all of which were instructional and were concentrated in the areas of foreign language, library, gifted and talented and remedial programs. Table 1 delineates the most frequently reported negative impacts of revenue caps in the north region.

**Table 1: Speakers Reporting Specific Negative Impact of Revenue Caps**

| Impact Areas  | N | Percent |
|---|---|---------|
| Staff Cuts (instructional and other)                  | 7 | 29%     |
| Program Cuts; Curricular                              | 5 | 21%     |
| Outdated or inadequate textbooks/curricular materials | 5 | 21%     |
| Inadequate supplies/teachers pay with personal funds  | 5 | 21%     |
| Delayed or postponed maintenance or building projects | 3 | 12%     |
| Depleted/Low fund balance                             | 3 | 12%     |

In addition, one speaker cited increased class sizes in key academic areas, one inadequate technology and equipment and two referenced a general budget cut or shortfall.

Speakers cited several mitigating factors that exist within their district/school that, when considered in combination with revenue caps, have produced further funding problems for the districts/schools. Teacher shortages due to low pay, regional competition and failure to replace exiting teachers were indicated by 25% of the testifiers. Declining enrollment was the second most commonly referenced issue (21%). The officials of four school districts mentioned the "sparsity factor", or the fact that rural districts face proportionately higher transportation costs and difficulties when these expenses increase due to rising fuel costs. Four speakers reported on the problems districts face due to under funded special education and other mandated programs. Table 2 indicates the range of these responses.

**Table 2: Speakers Reporting Factors Exacerbated by Revenue Caps**

|   | N | Percent |
|---|---|---------|
| Teacher shortage due to low or non-competitive wages, regional competition, failure to replace                | 6 | 25%     |
| Declining enrollment  | 5 | 21%     |
| Underfunded special education and other mandates  | 4 | 17%     |
| Rural transportation needs/increased fuel costs   | 4 | 17%     |
| The QEO has a negative impact on finances, salary levels, and/or ability to recruit, hire and retain teachers | 2 | 8%      |

In addition, nine speakers mentioned past or future referenda. Three of these had failed and two were in planning as follow-up to previous building referenda. Five of the speakers spoke of the difficulty of convincing voters to support operational or multiple referenda and the time consuming nature of the process.

Two testifiers offered recommendations to improve the school finance system. One advocated for increases in the annual revenue cap allowance and one recommended restoring the full authority of local school boards to raise local funds for schools.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The Forum on Revenue Caps in Rhinelander on October 11th was the third in the series of six forums held across the state and provided concerned residents from North Central Wisconsin with an opportunity to testify on how revenue limits have affected their school districts. There are 42 districts in this region serving over 45,000 students. The population of this region is more than 90% white with average equalized property value approximately \$150,000 above state average. Special education enrollment is at state average. Almost two-thirds (63.4%) of the districts have declining school enrollments.

Twenty-five persons from 12 school districts testified at the hearing. Almost half were school district superintendents or business managers, one in three were teachers and the other 20% were parents or school board members. The testimony provided on revenue limits indicated that cuts in school budgets have caused budget shortfalls in most of the districts in the region.

### **Budget shortages have had a widespread impact on multiple aspects of school districts operations.**

Phelps has not replaced teachers who left, depleted its \$350,000 fund balance, limited materials and supplies, placed curriculum on hold for needed programs and gone to referendum for regular operations dollars.—  
*Robert Cavannaugh, Phelps District Administrator*

Athens is facing a projected increase in heating costs that will be 30-50% higher than last year. That will be a reduction in aide time, cancellation of field trips, refusal to order new texts or other painful measures.—  
*Dave Wessel, Athens District Administrator*

Elcho is facing budget cuts in 2000. It is unlikely that the business teacher will be affordable. Another key academic teaching position and teacher aides will have to be cut. A desperately needed roof replacement will be



put off. The janitor will continue to put larger buckets in the classrooms and in the gym to catch the leaks. Equipment replacement budgets and supplies have already been cut along with textbooks.—*Wayne Johnson, Elcho Superintendent*

Northland Pines in Eagle River has cut 17 FTE staff positions including the District Social Worker, the Alcohol and Drug Prevention Coordinator, the Reading Recovery teacher the District Hearing Impaired Coordinator, the Technology Coordinator, the Children at-Risk Coordinator, the Curriculum and Instruction Director, three special education aides and other school support staff. In addition, the district has cut the maintenance budget, the activity bus, all field trips, the textbook account, the breakfast program, middle school co-curricular programs, staff development and student accident insurance.—*Linda Kunelius, Northland Pines District Administrator*

### **Cuts in funding for staffing levels and staff development are reducing the quality of schools.**

Marshfield learned last spring of a 30% increase in health insurance requiring a \$675,00 budget cut. The result was a loss of instructional staff for programs like the gifted and talented, a reading specialist and other programs.—*Dave Smette, Marshfield District Administrator*

Because of the increase in health insurance premiums, people will have to be laid off or reduced in hours to pay for the huge increase. Our hourly employees might have to take a pay cut.—*Dave Wessel, Athens District Administrator*

In my daughter's school, we have no reading specialist. There is a half time librarian and half time guidance counselor for 274 students to handle drug, alcohol, sexual and physical abuse. My daughter deserves better.—*Randy Kunsch, parent and teacher, Phillips*

Our problem is the inability to pay teachers. We have a deficit this year of \$370,000 and next year it will be \$660,000. Michigan pays \$10,000 more per year and is recruiting trained teachers. We have cut maintenance staff, four cooks are running three kitchens but we can't cut food service. With our low-income kids, lunch may be the only meal they get.—*Heidi Garrell, Business Manager, Florence*

### **Facilities, technology and supplies are inadequate for current educational programming.**

Adequate computer equipment and software, installation costs, phone line maintenance, physical space and trained personnel are beyond the reach of too many schools. Fewer dollars spent on the school media center stress local public libraries especially in northern rural communities where small public libraries are already operating with reduced personnel and hours of access. The result is that Wisconsin students do not have equal access to information and library services to support curriculum.—*Kris Wendt, librarian, Rhinelander*

Textbooks in core curriculum areas were on a five year replacement schedule, now its ten. Horrible when you realize a new book is already seven years old (that's how long it takes to write, edit and publish). We are delaying maintenance. If our 20+ years heating unit gives out in the high school, we will either have to close schools or "jerry rig" it again. High school drivers education (which is very important up here with no buses and our kids working after school) was eliminated. Behind the wheel instruction went from \$40 to \$320.—*Patti Shoppe, parent, Northland Pines*

### **In small rural communities, transportation is a costly and critical component of the educational budget.**

Antigo is a 520 square mile district. We spend \$1.5 million a year in gasoline to get our children to and from

school. If we reroute anymore, children in K-4 and K-5 will spend 2 1/2 hours on the bus. When gas prices went up, there was nothing we could do but cut programs. —*Lance Alwin, Antigo District Administrator*

**This region of the state is a low-wealth area with communities struggling to balance a deep commitment to education with the growing pressure of the state mandated revenue limits. Districts originally unharmed are now being affected because of declining enrollment.**

Our technical education school was built 30 years ago – inadequate with increased technology. We need to remodel and add on and equip it. We went to referendum for \$150,000 and lost by 24 votes. Students lost with the failure of the referendum. —*Patti Schoppe, parent, Northland Pines*

Merrill lost 350 students and had to cut \$300,000 this year. We cut supplies, textbooks and maintenance. Next year, we will cut people and programs. We can't cut transportation because we are a rural district. This is a blue-collar district and a referendum will probably not pass. —*Pam Kurcheval, Finance Director, Merrill*

I am tired of the political rhetoric that the solution is simple – just go to referendum. A referendum is the only time a citizens can say "NO" to rising taxes. They may be angry with the tech school budget increase of over 12% or the county increase of over 5% for the jail. The public school referendum is the only opportunity to say no and not surprisingly our community said no. —*Linda Kunelius, Northland Pines District Administrator*

**Forum participants expressed serious apprehension about the future of the region's schools and more than one in three expressed a strong demand to see policy change occur.**

There should be some measure of flexibility for school districts to deal with emergency situations such as dramatic increases in health insurance, etc. Special Education costs for mandated programs should be outside the revenue caps and more fully funded by the state and federal government. —*Dave Smette, Marshfield, District Administrator*

It is not reasonable to expect school districts to meet standards, maintain a faculty, pay increasing maintenance, transportation, utility bills, keep up with textbook hikes, negotiate salary increases and provide expanded programs with smaller class sizes with the same budget that we had five years ago. Something had to be cut. At some point, any financial benefits you feel that you have reaped will have diminishing returns. I implore you to lift the caps . . . and find an equitable way to shield taxpayers and protect schools from devastating fiscal burdens. —*Bonnie Dana, Director of Instruction, Antigo*

## Central Region- Stevens Point

November 2, 2000

Stevens Point, Wisconsin

### Commissioners:

Winnie Doxsie, president, Wisconsin PTA  
Herbert Grover, former State Superintendent of Schools  
Clem Hintz, supervisor, Stevens Point County Board of Supervisors  
Robert Jenkins, former judge, Stevens Point  
Ken Krahn, former district administrator, Marshfield  
Bob Mancel, business owner, Milladore  
John McCarty, Marshfield Clinic, Marshfield  
Cathy McGinnis, MD, Stevens Point  
Representative Luther Olsen, 41st District  
Jean Rumsey, resident, Stevens Point

### Demographic and Enrollment Data

The central region spans along the Mississippi River from St. Croix Falls at the north to Desoto at the south; the northern border extends to Wausau, Iola and Waupaca on the east and the southern boundary extends west through Wisconsin Dells, LaFarge and Viroqua. The central region is the largest with 116 school districts and a total 1999-2000 enrollment of 174,702 students. District size ranges from 112 (Saint Croix Central) to 11,122 (Eau Claire) students; the average enrollment is 1,508. The districts in the central region have a slightly larger population of low-income students (26.2%) as compared to the state-wide average of 25.9%. The region's enrollment is 4.1% minority, as compared to 19.2% for the state as a whole. The region has a similar number of special education students (13.6%) as districts throughout the state. The average revenue per pupil in the region is \$8,376, ranging from \$6,964 in Colfax to \$10,831 in Pepin Area. The region's median equalized value per student is \$213,700; its average is \$229,086. The K-12 state average is \$292,951.

Of the 116 districts in the central region, 63 or 54.3% of them reported a decline in their three-year rolling average enrollments between 1999-2000. On average, the decline was 1% for these districts. Sixteen districts experienced a decline of 2% or more, with Prairie Farm the highest at 5.4%.

### Overview of Testifying Citizens (See Appendix 3 for speaker listing)

Twelve school districts were represented at the forum: Adams-Friendship, Blair-Taylor, Frederic, Marathon, Marshfield, Medford Area, Owen-Withee, Stevens Point, Viroqua, Wausau, Wisconsin Rapids and Wonewoc-Center. A district administrator or school board member represented 10 of these districts, all but Frederic and Viroqua. Additionally, parents, teachers, building principals, a legislator and other citizens gave testimony. The breakdown is as follows:

|  |    |       |
|--|----|-------|
| District Administrators/Business Mgrs. | 10 | 33%   |
| Teachers                               | 4  | 13%   |
| Building Principals                    | 2  | 6%    |
| School Board Members                   | 3  | 10%   |
| Parents                                | 8  | 26%   |
| Students                               | 2  | 6%    |
| Citizens/Legislator                    | 2  | 6%    |
| Total Number of Testifiers             | 31 | (100) |

## Overview of Testimony

The 31 speakers cited 12 general areas that have been negatively affected by the revenue caps in their district or school. Program cuts were the most frequently mentioned problem. Eight speakers, or 25%, reported that the caps had forced program cuts in the Wausau, Stevens Point, Merrill and the Owne-Withee school districts. The program cuts were essentially split between curricular and extra-curricular areas. Delaying or postponing building and maintenance projects was the second most common negative impact, with 22% of the speakers citing problems in this area.

**Table 1: Speakers Reporting Specific Negative Impact of Revenue Caps**

| Impact Areas  | N | Percent |
|---|---|---------|
| Program Cuts  | 8 | 25%     |
| Delayed or postponed maintenance or building projects | 7 | 22%     |
| Increased class sizes/overcrowded classrooms          | 6 | 19%     |
| Outdated or inadequate textbooks/curricular materials | 6 | 19%     |
| General budget cuts/shortfalls/deficits               | 5 | 16%     |
| Inadequate computers, equipment, use of technology    | 5 | 16%     |
| Staff Cuts (instructional and other)                  | 5 | 16%     |
| Staff development cut or eliminated                   | 4 | 12%     |

Program cuts focused on gifted and talented programs, early reading and other remedial programs. An elementary school in Wausau was closed as a result of revenue caps.

Speakers cited several factors that exist within their district/school that, in combination with revenue caps, have exacerbated funding problems for the districts/schools. Declining enrollment was the most commonly cited problem: 28% of the speakers reported that their district faced this issue. Table 2 indicates the range of these responses.

**Table 2: Speakers Reporting Factors Exacerbated by Revenue Caps**

|   | N | Percent |
|---|---|---------|
| Declining enrollment  | 9 | 28%     |
| The QEO has a negative impact on finances, salary levels, and/or ability to recruit, hire and retain teachers | 5 | 16%     |
| Low or non-competitive teacher wages/teacher shortages  | 5 | 16%     |
| Status as a low spending/below state average district   | 3 | 9%      |
| Under-funded mandates, particularly ESL programs  | 3 | 9%      |

In addition, seven speakers reported on recent referenda held in the region. Three of them had failed. Four spoke of the difficult, time consuming and costly nature of conducting referenda, and how it diverts district resources away from education.

Two speakers mentioned that having passed building referenda in previous years makes it extremely unlikely that their communities would now approve referenda to exceed the revenue caps.

Ten testifiers offered recommendations on improving the school finance system. Four advocated for changes to in the funding formula, three for carve-outs or exemptions to the caps for certain expenditures and two recommended restoring the full authority of local school boards to raise local funds for schools. Two speakers indicated that the State should increase its funding of mandated programs and standards, in particular special education and ESL programs.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The Forum on Revenue Caps in Stevens Point on November 2nd was the last in the series of six forums held across the state and provided concerned residents from Central Wisconsin with an opportunity to testify on how revenue limits have affected their school districts. There are 116 districts in this region serving over 174,702 students. The school population of this region is more than 95% white with average equalized property value approximately \$63,000 below state average. Special education enrollment is at state average. Moreover, over half (54%) of the districts have declining school enrollments.

Thirty -one persons from 12 school districts testified at the hearing. One in three were school district superintendents or business managers, more than one in four were parents. Teachers, school board members, students and concerned community residents were also involved. The testimony indicated that revenue caps have caused budget shortfalls in many districts in the region.

### **Budget shortages have had a widespread impact on multiple aspects of school districts operations.**

Wausau has reduced the operating budget by \$2 million in the last two years alone. This has forced the district to close an elementary school, reduce staff development, delay textbook and curriculum material purchasing, increase class size in secondary schools, halt expansion of foreign language program, reduce extra-curriculars and transportation, forced the administration to hire "lower cost staff" rather than experienced teachers who cost more, pushed the district into deficit spending. —Charles Skurka, Wausau District Administrator

Merrill has a shortfall of \$450,000 which will be covered by added fees, reductions in equipment, cutbacks in co-curricular activities and reductions in programs and personnel.—*Frank Harrington, Merrill District Administrator*

Stevens Point has reduced staff development, put a moratorium on textbooks, supplies, equipment, held equipment purchases, curtailed the writing in-service, reduced maintenance, reduced the programs for ESL and the gifted, cut secretarial staff, 3 administrative positions, student travel, playground money, curriculum development and the list goes on and on.—*Mike O'Meara, Stevens Point School Board member*

Frederick made \$150,000 worth of cuts which included classroom aides, a school-to-work coordinator, a transportation coordinator/bus driver, athletic coaches, advisors and club funding. Next year we will have a shortfall of over \$250,000. Our building budgets have remained the same since 1992. Obviously, costs have not remained constant.—*Don Peterson, Frederick principal*

We've lived here six years and I have two kids in the system. I've pretty much heard nothing but we've got to cut, we need to trim... I can't think of one category that hasn't been cut.—*Paula Bell, Stevens Point parent*

To control property taxes, we have a system... that forces districts to cut the "fluff", the "it was good but we can live without it", then "only some people think its important", then well, "we know this is best practice but we'll have to get along without it" then talking about how many years before we are bankrupt.—*John Knowlton, Stevens Point teacher*

### **Key programs are not available to meet student needs.**

Our state standards have been improved and yet as our budget is squeezed, we are cutting those programs to help meet those standards. The legislature wants us to test children more and prepare them for the global marketplace, we can but this requires a significant investment.—*Francis Bohon, Marshfield School Board member*

I am worried about the brain drain that occurs. Marshfield Clinic is a big part of the economy and professional people come here but leave because the programs aren't there for the education of their kids.—*Donna Rozar, Marshfield parent*

### **Cuts in staffing levels and staff development are reducing the quality of schools.**

We have attempted to balance the budget by making \$163, 127 in cuts for 2000-2001 and place minimal stress on system quality. But, you cannot cut all teacher overloads, reduce a school psychologist, eliminate part-time staff positions, eliminate 3FTE teacher positions, decrease teacher expenditures,... and not inflict unknown harm to the school and the community.—*Michael Manning, Wonewoc-Center School District Superintendent*

Viroqua is operating with six less teachers, ... less staff development, field trips supplies, etcetera, than two years ago... revenue limits are eroding our ability to deliver a quality education.—*Angie Lawrence, Viroqua parent*

The pool of dollars available to teachers for professional development hasn't changed for a decade. In the meantime, the number of teachers has increased, the registration fees have skyrocketed and the cost of substitutes has increased... It isn't that our school board doesn't understand the importance of professional development. And certainly the policy-makers understand it because they've made it a key component of the new licensure rules. But when school boards are faced with decisions allocating dollars to staff development versus something as basic as keeping staff in the classroom, there really is little choice.—*Mary Lee Reineking, Stevens Point teacher*

In many cases, first graders know more about computers than teachers because there has been no funding for teacher training. —*Carol Weston, Stevens Point parent*

### **Facilities, technology and supplies are inadequate for current educational programming.**

Two of my children had classes in closets in grade school. For the past three years, my fifth grader has had his classroom in a trailer isolated from the rest of the school. . . the computer labs have obsolete computers that can't run current programs. . . When the computer club entered the statewide web page competition, club members came to my home to finish the project because the school computer didn't have the capacity to store the data needed for the web page. —*Carol Weston, Stevens Point parent*

I am a parent of two kids from Washington Elementary where the computers are so old and so slow you want to throw it, and the kids in the computer lab are crawling all over each other because it is so small. —*Trish Baker, Parent and Assistant. District Administrator, Marathon County*

In science last year, I had to sit on a stool because we didn't have enough desks and I had to do my homework there. In technical education, the books are old and tattered because they put money into the wood. For science, we use Apple IIE computers and a lot of new software doesn't even run on those old computers. —*Mahalia Miller, Stevens Point student*

I'm in a gifted program in a Jackson school that's in a storage space converted into a classroom. We have small computers and they use halls for space. And in orchestra, the lessons are in the teacher's office. —*Ian Miller, Stevens Point, student*

Students are still taught in a 77 year-old building with a defective, out-dated boiler and chicken wire on the ceiling to keep falling plaster in place. —*Michelle Bjela, Stevens Point, parent*

### **Teacher wages are low which makes it difficult to find and keep qualified educators.**

There is a teacher shortage in many areas. One of the reasons is money. How many college graduates have to settle for \$25,000 per year. . . . The gap is growing and we are not able to pay signing bonuses and company cars. —*Jim Friesen, Owens-Withee District Administrator*

This year our district was granted a 3.8 QEO. Due to large insurance increases, our salary was decreased by \$385 and we were frozen on advancement. —*Jim Ganrude, Blair-Taylor teacher*

### **While school districts are told they can use the public referendum process to override the spending caps, parents and educator groups have found the referendum process to be a formidable barrier.**

In Stevens Point, we tried two referenda that failed. I worked on them and everybody who worked on them is too busy to do referendum. The referendum process, intellectually and theoretically, sounds very nice—the local control, the citizens making the decision – but it ends up on the back of about 24-40 people like me who are taken away from so many things. We have professionals who know what they are doing who could be doing this. —*Trish Baker, Stevens Point parent*

Most of the townships and municipalities have been reassessed so there has not been great taxpayer relief even though we received 2/3 state funding. The Trempealeau County Board is presently campaigning for a new jail and additional staffing. With this on the horizon, we are not optimistic about a referendum to exceed the

caps anytime soon.—*Guy Leavitt, Blair Taylor Superintendent*

After a failed referendum for building repairs . . . a true coalition of parents, community labor and civic groups, administrative and school personnel and townspeople worked even harder to make the case for student needs. Community events were held, massive outreach, phone call efforts and community education were completed. The funding request was turned down. —*Michele Bjela, Stevens Point parent*

There is a huge hurdle to jump when you ask people to approve a referendum when it is the only opportunity to say “no” to a tax.—*John Knowlton, Stevens Point teacher*

**This region of the state is a low-wealth area with communities struggling to balance a deep commitment to education with the growing pressure of the state mandated revenue limits. Districts originally unharmed are now being affected because of declining enrollment.**

Medford will have a \$439,853 shortfall by 2003 which will need to be made up through staff cuts, reduction in programs and reductions in maintenance. Can we do it? Yes. Is it the right thing to do for kids? No.  
—*Paul Schroenberger, Superintendent*

**Forum participants expressed serious apprehension about the future of the region’s schools and more than one in three expressed a strong demand to see policy change occur.**

The continued existence of Wisconsin small rural districts is soon to be a memory under the present system of funding. —*Michael Manning, Wonewoc-Center Superintendent*

We have reorganized our elementary and middle schools over the past two years to maintain quality education but we are running out of options We need a change in the way we fund public education. The inequities are getting broader and local boards cannot continue to operate as we have in the last few years.  
—*Angie Lawrence, Viroqua parent*

## **Northwest Region- Superior**

October 12, 2000  
Superior, Wisconsin

### **Commissioners:**

Representative Frank Boyle, 73rd District  
Jann Brill, Director, WITC  
Ron Christensen, director, AFSCME in Superior  
Winnie Doxsie, President, Wisconsin PTA  
Darryl Helenius, Candidate for State Assembly, Superior  
Senator Robert Jauch, 25th District  
John Munson, Station Manager, Wisconsin Public Radio/KUWS  
Ken Stubbe, Director, Superior-Douglas County Development Association  
Mike Wallschlaeger, Chair, Department of Educational Administration, UW-Superior



## Demographic and Enrollment Data

The northwest region extends from Grantsburg to Superior following the northern state border from Bayfield to Hurley, on the east to Manitowish and Park Falls and on the south through Weyerhaeuser, Rice Lake and Siren. The northwest region contains 23 school districts with a total 1999-2000 enrollment of 24,176 students. District size ranges from 243 (Mercer) to 5,344 (Superior) students; the average enrollment is 1,085. The districts in the northwest region have a significantly larger population of low-income students than the state; it has a poverty rate of 41.4% versus 25.9% statewide. The region's minority student population is lower (10.2%) than the statewide average of 19.2%. The region has a larger number of special education students (14.9%) than districts throughout the state. The average revenue per pupil in the region is \$9,227, ranging from \$7,515 in Maple to \$11,438 in the South Shore School District. The region's median equalized value per student is \$299,044 and its average \$385,950. In Wisconsin the statewide K-12 average is \$292,951.

Of the 23 districts in the region, 17 or 74% of them reported a decline in their three-year rolling average enrollments between 1999-2000. On average, the decline was 1.9% for these districts. Six districts experienced a decline greater than 2%, with South Shore the highest at .6.3% and Butternut following at 5.2%.

## Overview of Testifying Citizens (See Appendix 3 for speaker listing)

Six school districts were represented at the forum: Ashland, Maple, Mellen, Shell Lake, Superior and Washburn. A district administrator or school board member represented all of these districts except Maple. In addition, parents, teachers, students, building principals and other citizens gave testimony. The breakdown is as follows:

|  |    |       |
|--|----|-------|
| District Administrators/Business Mgrs. | 6  | 7%    |
| Teachers                               | 14 | 17%   |
| Building Principals                    | 4  | 5%    |
| School Board Members                   | 3  | 4%    |
| Parents                                | 32 | 38%   |
| Students                               | 20 | 24%   |
| Citizens/Community Leaders             | 4  | 5%    |
| Total Number of Testifiers             | 83 | (100) |

## Summary of Testimony

There was a total of 83 people who gave written or in-person testimony in the northwest region. Many of the speakers did not provide organizers with a written copy of their testimony. Further, technical difficulties with the forum recording made it impossible to glean the testimony of 17 individuals who spoke towards the end of the forum and did not provide a written copy. Therefore, for comparative purposes, the total number of valid testimonies was 66 instead of 83. The 66 documented testifiers cited twelve areas which have been negatively impacted by the revenue caps in their district or school. In this region, program cuts, the majority of which were curricular, was the most commonly reported negative impact (33%), followed closely by increased class sizes and over-crowded classrooms (30%). Table 1 delineates these and the other reported negative impacts of revenue

caps in the northwest region.

**Table 1: Speakers Reporting Specific Negative Impact of Revenue Caps**

| <b>Impact Areas</b>                                   | <b>N</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------|----------------|
| Program Cuts  | 22       | 33%            |
| Increased class sizes/overcrowded classrooms          | 20       | 30%            |
| Staff Cuts (instructional and other)                  | 14       | 21%            |
| Outdated or inadequate textbooks/curricular materials | 11       | 17%            |
| General budget cut/shortfall/deficit                  | 9        | 14%            |
| Delayed or postponed maintenance or building projects | 6        | 9%             |
| Inadequate computers, equipment, use of technology    | 6        | 9%             |

There were a significant number of students who spoke at the northwest forum. The majority spoke in support of programs where potential funding cuts may occur, such as in the visual arts and music. Other students, several recent high school graduates, relayed the importance of extra-curricular activities and other special programs to the success of students in high school and beyond.

Speakers cited several factors that exist within their district/school that, when considered in combination with revenue caps, have produced further funding problems for the districts/schools. Table 2 indicates these responses.

**Table 2: Speakers Reporting Factors Exacerbated by Revenue Caps**

|   | <b>N</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------|----------------|
| Low or non-competitive teacher wages/teacher shortages  | 7        | 11%            |
| Status as a low spending/below state average district   | 5        | 7%             |
| Declining enrollment  | 5        | 7%             |
| The QEO has a negative impact on finances, salary levels, and/or ability to recruit, hire and retain teachers | 4        | 6%             |

In addition, eleven people (17%) expressed general concerns relating to a lack of equity in terms of finance and educational quality across the state. These speakers felt that students in the region (and the entire northern portion of the state) were not afforded the same educational opportunity as children in other parts of the state. The fact that students in this region are disproportionately poorer than elsewhere, live in areas with lower property wealth and go to school in lower spending districts creates an inequitable and inadequate educational system for them, particularly under the revenue caps.

Six testifiers (9%) stated that the annual revenue cap increases are inadequate in keeping pace with rising personnel and fixed costs. Two individuals noted that the under funding of special education by the state was forcing the displacement of funds away from other areas of the budget. Seventeen speakers (24%) offered recommendations on improving the school finance system. Twelve advocated for changes to the funding formula and four supported the restoration of full authority of school boards to raise local funds for schools. One speaker requested that the state provide larger annual revenue cap allowances.

## Summary and Conclusion

The Forum on Revenue Caps in Superior on October 12 was the fourth in the series of forums held across the state and provided concerned residents from the northwest region of Wisconsin with an opportunity to testify on how revenue limits have impacted their school districts. There are 23 school districts in this region serving 24,176 students. The population of this region is 89% white with average equalized property value approximately \$93,000 above state average. Special education enrollment is at state average. The low-income population is 15% higher than the statewide average. Eighty percent (80%) of the districts have declining school enrollments. While 83 persons from six districts testified at the forum, testimony from only 66 is included in this report. Almost two out of three speakers were parents or students from the region with the other one out of three being educators or educational administrators. There were a small number of general citizens. The testimony provided on revenue limits directly fell into six primary areas:

### Important programs have been reduced or eliminated.

For 1999-2000, the middle school had to eliminate 3.3 teachers and reduce programs in music, art, family and consumer education, industrial technology and language. The reading immersion program was cut altogether. —*John Blankush, Superior principal*

We were forced in the 2000-2001 school year to reduce our summer school offerings, eliminate band in fifth grade, reduce a program to improve the writing skills of our students and reduce professional development for remedial programs. —*Benjamin Villarruel, Ashland district administrator*

Over a two year period, we are losing over 16 sections of business class electives at a time when the demand for business classes is growing. —*Ed Gallagher, Superior teacher*

Parenting classes have been discontinued and after school programming for social/emotional and academic needs have been discontinued. We have lost funding for field trips. Our district has a high proportion of disadvantaged students who will not get a trip to the Great Lakes Aquarium or visit the nursing homes to read to the elderly – all extra travel is cut. —*Karen Saarinen, Ashland library specialist*

### Class size in schools is continuing to grow.

My daughter has art and music only one time a week and during that time her class has to be doubled up with another kindergarten because the music and art teacher is not there enough. That means over 30 5-year-old students with one teacher. —*Brenda Schrader-Johnson, Superior parent*

There are now significantly larger classes at the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade level. —*Mary Anne Korsch, Superior principal*

My nephew in 8th grade is in a physical education class with 58 children and one teacher. This cannot be a safe environment. —*Tammie Walsh, Superior parent*

As our enrollment continues to decline and we are forced to reduce expenses, we will be forced to further raise class size and reduce teaching staff who assist students deficient in academic areas... which impedes our ability to improve student performance on state tests. For a district with a high poverty rate and a significant minority student population, we need to maintain or increase resources. —*Benjamin Villarruel, Ashland district administrator*

## **Staff cuts have negatively impacted a wide range of educational and support services in the schools.**

This year there were 14 positions eliminated: two elementary classroom teachers, five middle school classroom teachers, five high school positions and one elementary library position. Because of these cuts, Superior students have larger class size, many with over 30 in class and fewer electives in technology, business, science, math, art, vocal music and band. —*Jay Mitchell, Superior district administrator*

School nurses are in schools only three hours each day. Children with chronic health needs (diabetes, asthma, ADHD) are monitored by their teacher, the school secretary or the principal the rest of the day. —*Mary Anne Korsch, Superior principal*

## **Students focused heavily on the negative impact of staff cuts in extracurricular programs and the arts.**

I am a student involved in swimming, forensics, the spring musical. High school is an opportunity to do things we love but may not have the chance to participate in after high school. This is our chance, please don't take it away. —*Katie Heisel, Superior High School student*

There are 2,842 elementary art students being taught and evaluated every week by only four full time art educators who also put on art shows, decorate for student programs and design art curriculum. —*Craig Petersberg, Superior teacher*

My life has been greatly enriched by having taken music classes and I can't imagine school without these programs. —*Misty Williams, senior at Superior High School*

## **Schools are attempting to educate students with outdated or inadequate textbooks and materials.**

In my son's elementary school, the textbooks are old and in bad repair and there's not always enough to go around. This year the exciting buzz was that sixth graders had new math books and were not going to have to share. —*Donna Flake Superior PTA leader*

In my German textbook, the Berlin Wall has not fallen yet, so I definitely think we need new textbooks. —*Crystal Nisle, Superior student*

## **Basic maintenance is a luxury for many schools in this region.**

District fuel costs have increased 17% to over \$100,000 this year. Natural gas costs have risen 25% to over \$110,000. Cutting bus routes is not an option. Students wearing jackets in cold classrooms is not an option. —*Donna Spotts, Ashland parent*

We are considering keeping the thermostat at 60 degrees in the upper grades to meet budget limits in the face of rising heating costs. —*Jay Mitchell, Superior district administrator*

If it could be possible, please just give us enough money to heat our building, Please. —*Katie Heisel, Superior student*

**The district is unable to provide appropriate technology training due to inadequate computer and technology resources in the schools.**

The minor increase allowed under the caps has not kept pace with the rising cost of modern education. Our kids will be coming out of the public school system having learned their computer skills on old and outdated computers because the district can't afford to keep up with the new technology. What kind of education is that?  
—Jodi Thronton, Washburn parent

**The districts in the area are struggling to meet educational goals faced with the general budget shortfall.**

This year, we are struggling to maintain most of the services we offered to our students in 1998 but with 25% less staff, class sizes that exceed thirty students, less available time and the same challenges as two years ago. I have to ask myself, "How much is too much?" —John Blankush, Superior principal

Decisions on which programs to reduce, which positions to leave vacant, what repairs to delay for another year – these are tough decisions. My time on the school board has been less of making the best possible education for our students and more concerned with doing the least possible damage. —David Tunell, president Superior school board

**Many speakers spoke out against the lack of educational equity in the state. Parents and educators alike felt that the northwest region, particularly in the districts close to Superior, the lack of property wealth and the spending caps were creating conditions that left young people without a fair educational opportunity when compared to other, wealthier districts.**

Why should children in Superior have less than someone in a district with higher per pupil expenditure? Why should our students in seventh grade not have vocational tech when almost every other school in the state has that offering? —Jay Mitchell, Superior district administrator

**The forum in northwest Wisconsin was the largest (over 500 people attended) and longest (commissioners heard testimony for over 3 and one half hours) in the state. The level of concern was profound and the sense of real crisis was palpable. Families and educators from the northwest are want relief from the revenue limits and the chance to provide their children with the education needed to compete effectively.**

Where does it all end? How much damage must be done before the message is heard? —John Blankush, Superior principal

A quality education is something I feel so strongly about that I have taken time away from my family and driven 80 miles here tonight to let you know how I feel. Please help the community of Washburn and the other communities of northern Wisconsin supply our young people with the possibility of a quality education by seeing that the revenue caps are repealed and that education funding can be more equitably distributed. —Christina Sauer, Washburn parent

# Southeast Region- West Allis

October 17, 2000  
West Allis, Wisconsin

## Commissioners:

Rita Cheng, professor, UW-Milwaukee School of Business  
Alderman Michael D'Amato, 5th District  
Senator Alberta Darling, 8th District  
Winnie Doxsie, president, Wisconsin PTA  
Herbert Grover, former State Superintendent of Schools  
Reverend Robert L. Harris, WISDOM  
Supervisor Ken Herro, Waukesha County  
Senator Mary Lazich, 28th District  
Bill Marris, business owner, Oconomowoc  
David Meissner, director, Public Policy Forum  
Representative Sheldon Wasserman, 22nd District

## Demographic and Enrollment Data

The region includes the southeastern corner of the state from Kenosha to Cedarburg, west to Waukesha and Washington Counties and West Bend on the north and Lake Geneva and most of Walworth County on the south. The southeast region contains 92 school districts with a total 1999-2000 enrollment of 304,251 students. District size ranges from 81 (Dover #1) to 101,905 (Milwaukee) students; the average enrollment is 3,307. The districts in the southeast region have significantly smaller populations of low-income students (9.0%) than statewide average of 25.9%. (Milwaukee is the exception at 80.5%.) The same holds true for the minority student population, which is 9.1% for the region and 19.2% statewide. The region has a lower number of special education students (11.8%) than districts throughout the state (13.9%). The average revenue per pupil in the region is \$9,009, ranging from \$6,228 in Union Grove J1 to \$13,618 in Nicolet. The region's median equalized value per student is \$452,986; its average is \$665,132. The K-12 state average is \$292,951.

Of the 92 districts in the region, 25 or 27.1% of them reported a decline in their three-year rolling average enrollment between 1999-2000. On average, the decline was .7% for these districts. Four districts experienced a decline greater than 2%, with Herman the highest at 6.8%.

## Overview of Testifying Citizens (See Appendix 3 for speaker listing)

Twenty-three school districts were represented at the forum: Bristol, Cedarburg, Elmbrook, Fox Point, Franklin\*, Germantown, Glendale-River Hills\*, Grafton, Greendale\*, Hartland-Lakeside\*, Kenosha, Menomonee Falls, Milwaukee\*, New Berlin\*, Oconomowoc\*, Racine\*, Shorewood, St. Francis, Waukesha, Wauwatosa, West-Allis-West-Milwaukee\*, West Bend and Whitefish Bay. A district administrator or school board member represented nine of these districts, indicated by a \*

above. In addition, parents, teachers, students and other citizens gave testimony. The breakdown is as follows:

|  |    |       |
|--|----|-------|
| District Administrators/Business Mgrs. | 7  | 12%   |
| Teachers                               | 8  | 14%   |
| School Board Members                   | 5  | 8%    |
| Parents                                | 31 | 53%   |
| Students                               | 5  | 8%    |
| Citizens/Community Leaders             | 2  | 5%    |
| Total Number of Testifiers             | 58 | (100) |

### Overview of Testimony

The 58 speakers cited several areas which have been negatively impacted by the revenue caps in their district or school. In this region, program cuts, predominantly curricular, were the most commonly mentioned impact at 27. This was followed closely by increasing class sizes and over-crowded classrooms, which was reported by 21 or 36% of the testifiers. Staff reductions were also commonly cited by 31% of the speakers. Table 1 delineates the most frequently reported negative impacts of revenue caps in the southeast region.

**Table 1: Speakers Reporting Specific Negative Impact of Revenue Caps**

| Impact Areas  | N  | Percent |
|---|----|---------|
| Program Cuts  | 27 | 46%     |
| Increased class sizes/overcrowded classrooms          | 21 | 36%     |
| Staff Cuts (instructional and other)                  | 18 | 10%     |
| Outdated or inadequate textbooks/curricular materials | 17 | 29%     |
| Inadequate computers, equipment, use of technology    | 17 | 29%     |
| General budget cuts/shortfalls/deficits               | 13 | 22%     |
| Delayed or postponed maintenance or building projects | 7  | 12%     |
| Depleted/low fund balance remaining                   | 1  | 2%      |

Other less frequently cited impacts were: reduction or elimination of staff development activities (5%) and the spending down of the district's fund balance (2%).

Speakers cited several factors that exist within their district/school that, when considered in combination with revenue caps, have produced further funding problems for the districts/schools. Table 2 indicates these responses.

**Table 2: Speakers Reporting Factors Exacerbated by Revenue Caps**

|   | <b>N</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------|----------------|
| The QEO has a negative impact on finances, salary levels, and/or ability to recruit, hire and retain teachers | 9        | 15%            |
| Low or non-competitive teacher wages/teacher shortages  | 7        | 12%            |
| Inadequate state reimbursements for Special Education   | 6        | 10%            |
| Inadequate state reimbursements for ESL and other mandates  | 5        | 9%             |
| Status as a low spending/below state average district   | 2        | 3%             |
| Declining or open enrollment  | 2        | 3%             |

Seven speakers recounted their experiences with holding referenda in their districts. The majority spoke about the difficult nature of passing referenda, especially for operating expenses/to exceed the revenue caps.

Seventeen testifiers offered recommendations on improving the school finance system. Three felt that the revenue cap increase should be greater, including to minimally match the QEO percentage. Eight advocated for changes to the funding formula, and one for carve-outs or exemptions to the caps for technology and building expenditures. Four speakers recommended restoring the full authority of local school boards to raise local funds for schools.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The Forum on Revenue Caps in West Allis on October 17th was the fifth in the series of forums held across the state and provided concerned residents from the urban and suburban areas of Southeastern Wisconsin with an opportunity to testify on how revenue limits have impacted their school districts. There are 92 districts in this region serving over 304,251 students. While the overall population of this region is more than 90% white, this region includes districts with high minority populations (Milwaukee at 73% and Racine at 38%). The average equalized property value is approximately \$370,000 above state average – again including a number of districts with property wealth far below state average ( Milwaukee at \$160,703) Special education enrollment is 1% below state average. Less than one in three of the districts have declining school enrollments.

Fifty-eight persons from 23 school districts testified at the hearing. Over 60% were parents and students. One in four were school administrators or teachers and one in six were either school board members or concerned community leaders.

Diverse districts were represented at the hearing – wealthy suburban districts, property poor urban districts and small towns – but in spite of these differences, all have experienced serious budget shortfalls because of the revenue limits.

### **Budget shortages have had a widespread impact on multiple aspects of school districts operations:**

New Berlin had eliminated 8.5 teachers, a District psychologist and 2 guidance counselors, two library positions, an athletic Director, two aides, an audio visual position and three clerical staff, reduced book purchases,



extra curriculars and busing, staff development, lowered salaries and increased fees and book rental costs in the first years after spending caps were implemented. Then in 1999-2000, a \$2 million cut was required so the district had to eliminate 12.5 teaching positions including teachers of foreign languages and the gifted and talented. Over that the district cut 2.5 guidance staff, one nurse and a psychologist, a principal, a maintenance person and two aides. The district eliminated some coaching, all department coordinators and the middle school health program while reducing staff development. —*Dick O'Connor, New Berlin School Board President*

Greendale has been forced to make budget cuts of \$1.2 million in the last three years. Among these cuts have been an elementary principal, 9 teachers, two librarians, a reading specialist, an elementary school guidance counselor, the high school technology education teacher, over 20 full time support staff, busing, extra co-curriculars, drivers' ed and much more. We have frozen wages for maintenance personnel, coaches and extra curricular programs. Middle and high school classes have increased to 30, even the AP classes are projected to increase to the mid -30s within 4 to 5 years. —*Jim Germain, Greendale School Board President*

In Grafton, our schools are falling apart. While enrollment has remained constant, over the past eight years, programs have been cut, classes have become overcrowded, maintenance delayed. Resources have been stretched to the bone. —*David Hofferbert, Grafton parent*

"Responses to budget shortfalls can include postponing maintenance, eliminating infrastructure and technology improvements, eliminating extra-curricular programs and athletic opportunities, delaying implementation of security measures, delaying the purchase of books, increasing class sizes, and reducing staff." —*Anne Weiland, Menomonee Falls parent*

The Hartland/ Lakeside district has operated at a deficit for the past two fiscal years, in the last three years, the district has made numerous cuts including: eliminating summer school and the 5th grade science specialist; reducing library services, remedial math and reading, guidance, at-risk support services, gifted and talented program, maintenance and custodial services; deferring technical education, family and consumer education and computer application teacher. —*Jeff Gruber, Hartland-Lakeside District Administrator*

### **Cuts in staffing levels, pay and staff development are reducing the quality of schools.**

In Madison, all resource teachers were eliminated. We lost the coordinators for math, science, art, phys ed and health. Vocational and advanced placement courses lost out. Our administrative staff with the expertise to act as resources to improve teaching have been cut and cut again. They work 60 hour weeks and are being courted by private industry where they can work less and earn more. —*Kathy Zingsheim, Madison school board member*

The new teacher licensure regulations create opportunity for meaningful performance goals as a condition of license renewal and advancement. But this license "revolution" will require new revenue for training and mentoring and serving on peer review committees. —*Anne Weiland, parent, Menomonee Falls*

In Glendale-River Hills, the administrative staff has been cut by 30%, the teaching staff by 17% and the custodians cut by 15%. —*Robert Kattman, Glendale-River Hills District Administrator*

Teacher salaries are significantly lower than what comparable college educated professionals make. Lest you think this is an issue purely of self-interest to teachers. . . . Data shows that, controlling for parents' educational level, income and later educational attainment, the earnings of male high school graduates increases by 1% for every 3% increase in the average teacher salary in their high school. —*Cheryl Maranto, Associate Dean of Marquette University School of Business*

## **Key programs are critical to meet student needs and spending caps are placing these programs in jeopardy.**

Woodshop, auto mechanics, metal shop, home economics, general business and school guidance services are either extinct or nearing that. These are classes that are both needed and wanted with basic skills for future workers. —*Dianne Satton, New Berlin parent*

Kenosha has an after school program for 19,000 middle schoolers in danger of closing. Of those who attend the program, 98% are free of delinquency referrals, 62% decrease truancy, 72% maintained or improved their grade point. —*Jill Anderson, Kenosha parent*

Last year, budget cuts of \$3.5 million were enacted and the students lost elective classes and music, art, consumer and tech ed were cut in half. The contact advocate teacher was cut so middle school students have no parent conferencing. How am I to know if my child is progressing, what her strengths and weaknesses are and what I can do to help? —*Karen Zickus, Racine parent*

The art teacher is reduced to 1/10 time. Music and gym teachers are only \_ time. Instead of having art classes each week, they have art class once a month. —*Peter Blewett, Milwaukee parent*

This year we only have a librarian two days a week. We cannot go to the library as often to check out books and she is unable to teach us library skills or information seeking skills to get us ready for a high tech world. —*Alex Kowalsky, Milwaukee student*

The middle school lost the reading teacher and two family and consumer teachers as the classes got larger. The elementary foreign language program was eliminated. —*Kathy Engsheim, West Allis/West Milwaukee parent*

The language immersion school has sustained budget cuts over the last four years that have seriously cut into most programs. Art and music have been cut to the bone, we had to eliminate all extracurriculars except athletics. —*Marcia Lynn Morris, Milwaukee parent*

## **Facilities, technology and supplies are inadequate for current educational programming**

We are one of the fastest growing communities in Southeastern Wisconsin. Our schools are already at full capacity and there are no plans for new schools or extensions to existing schools. As classroom sizes grow, the children's education will suffer... Our library, textbooks and related materials and computer facilities need updating. —*Rebecca Stolfi, Pleasant Prairie parent*

Over the past two years, our PTO has spent \$5,000 on new desks replacing the originals built in 1957, Instead of raising money for new books, field trips or assemblies, we are buying furniture so our children have a safe place to sit. My initial reaction was to blame the district but I quickly learned that with expenses like salaries, electricity and transportation increasing at twice the rate of revenue limits, there wasn't enough for major repairs, much less furniture. —*Frank Finman, Waukesha parent*

We do not have enough money to replace equipment that breaks down and my class of 26 has to share 10 scissors and six bottles of glue to complete an art project and we're not sure there will be any supplies for the next time. —*Michael Guadalabene, Milwaukee student*

## **Students with special educational needs face greater barriers to securing appropriate instruction under the revenue limits.**

Our children require specialists—Special Needs teachers, Speech Pathologists, Occupational and Physical Therapists and teaching assistants to help them stay in an “inclusive” classroom. This requires a lot more money than regular curriculum. The additional money that the state pays is not nearly enough. In our district alone, the number of children enrolled in special needs programs have doubled in the past two years. My daughter has lost access to several regular classrooms. She asked me if this is happening because I forgot to give her a good brain when I made her. —*Kelly Hurda, Bayside parent*

Students having certain physical needs such as the hearing or visually impaired have extensive costs -- \$32,000 for one hearing impaired child. These dollars compete with the needs and programming of regular education children. In 1989, our classroom budgets were \$1,200 to \$1,800. In the current year, it is \$225.  
—*Susan Katrosits, Special Education teacher, Grafton*

For children who cannot speak English, a key requirement is an enormous amount of extra help.. They need assistance learning English and in the classroom when coursework is particularly difficult, they need help just to take the tests. There are over 200 non-English speaking children in Shorewood from 20 different countries and they speak 27 languages. —*Mary Gundrum, Shorewood parent*

With the combination of revenue limits and the lack of state reimbursements as authorized in Wisconsin Statute section 115.88, we are forcing school districts to determine which group of children get the better education. I would like to send my son’s Individual Education Plan to Madison with a big red stamp that reads “STATE MANDATED SPECIAL EDUCATION NOT RECEIVED DUE TO INSUFFICIENT FUNDS!” —*Gail Kolvenbach, St. Francis parent*

## **Forum participants expressed serious apprehension about the future of the region’s schools and many expressed a strong demand to see policy change occur.**


### **The revenue limit does not allow adequate growth for certain market based realities.**

This year, MPS was faced with a structural deficit of over \$30 million. One third of that was caused by a 12% increase in health insurance costs. What revenue limits force us to do with cost increases like health insurance that are beyond our control is to make cuts in areas that we can control. And more often than not, those cuts effect kids. —*Michelle Nate, Finance Director, Milwaukee*

Locally elected boards of education must be permitted the financial latitude to maintain and improve the institutions which serve our children. I fear that without fundamental reform of revenue cap legislation, the quality of schools will quickly erode and the price we have paid for property tax relief will be far higher than anyone intended. —*Anne Weiland, Menomonee Falls parent*



**INSTITUTE FOR WISCONSIN'S FUTURE** 1717 South 12th Street #203 Milwaukee, WI 53204-3300

Phone 414-384-9094 - Fax 414-384-9098 - Web [www.wisconsinsfuture.org](http://www.wisconsinsfuture.org)  42