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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**
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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)
- Miscellaneous ... **Misc**
 - (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
 - (**sjr** = Senate Joint Resolution)

MB

Date ?

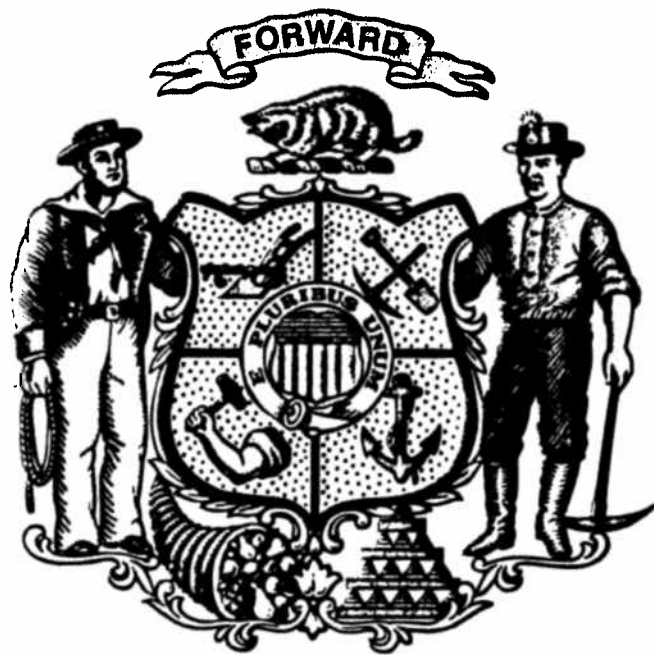
School Funding Reform Legislation SJR27/AJR35
Senate Hearing

My name is Lisa Atherton; I am a taxpayer and parent in the Waukesha School District. I am very concerned that the current state funding law for education is preventing schools from delivering adequate education for our children.

Every year over three million dollars must be cut from our local schools, resulting in increased class sizes and cuts in programs. The quality of education suffers desperately.

I am attending this hearing to indicate my support for comprehensive funding reform. I encourage you to support the goals of this resolution and work to develop a new funding plan. 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 an great future for the state of Wisconsin.

Lisa Atherton Email: lammaj@msn.com
2715 Burton Drive
Waukesha, WI 53188



Dwayne Olsen, 5118 Kinzie Avenue, Racine, WI 53406
Professor Emeritus of Teacher Education, University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Former member of the Racine Unified School Board (1989-1994)

SJR 27?
Date ?

If you want to make Wisconsin urban schools better, I have an offer and a challenge for you today. Beginning eighteen years ago, in terms of financing Wisconsin public schools, you experimented with Milwaukee with a voucher/choice system. While last week's report on MPS indicated that many mistakes have been made and that that system is not successful for a variety of reasons, the state of Wisconsin recognized the challenge that MPS presented and stepped forward.

If you don't want to have a second Milwaukee, I'm here today to offer Racine and Racine Unified as a site for you and for the citizens of the state of Wisconsin to focus their attention. Yesterday, the president of the Racine Unified School Board told a community group that the entire community is needed if we are to solve the challenges facing the district. I will go one further and suggest that the resources and expertise of the state are needed if Racine is to avoid being Milwaukee II. And if you establish a successful program for Racine, you will have provided a model for other school districts in Wisconsin to follow.

In terms of support for its schools, the Racine Unified School District needs:

- Reduced class size—class size of over 30 is absolutely unconscionable;
- More space—all of our schools are overcrowded;
- Up-to-date technology/computers integrated at every grade level;
- Buildings repaired and made more attractive as well as safe;
- In addition to high-quality academic programs, we need programs, including advanced programs, perhaps in cooperation with Gateway Technical College, that prepare students with job entry skills (this kind of education is more expensive, but it must be available to hold kids in school as well as prepare them for the job market);
- To move away from a traditional model of educating its students to taking the risks that are needed to find new ways that will attract and hold kids in school; and,
- To provide teachers the resources needed to educate students as well as a high-quality support system for inducting new teachers.

Anything the state legislature can do to facilitate Racine Unified would be an investment in the future.

In addition, the community needs:

- Family-supporting jobs—this may require WPA-type jobs to get many people started in the job market along with mentoring systems to help these families; most children aren't going to do better in school until their parents can provide stable family lives including decent housing, food/nutrition, clothing, and health care;
- To put forth the tax effort required to support its schools;

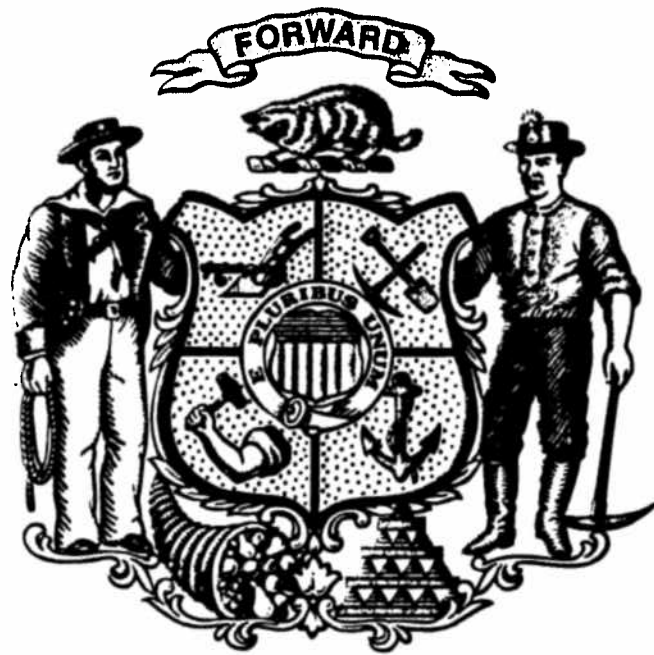
Anything the state legislature can do to facilitate the greater Racine community would be an investment in the future.

Also, this is a good time for the state of Wisconsin to facilitate Racine and Racine Unified in these endeavors as we are:

- Currently seeking a new superintendent of schools—but what quality person will want to risk her/his career if the community and state aren't supportive of its public schools;
- The teachers' union and the school district are working more cooperatively today than they have for some thirty years—let's take advantage of that; and,
- While we have a long way to go, the community is beginning to get the idea that, if its public schools aren't successful, it won't be successful.

Unless you want a second Milwaukee, anything the state legislature can do to facilitate Racine Unified and the greater Racine community in the immediate future will be an investment in all Wisconsin public schools as well as in all Wisconsin communities. Thank you.

lehmanb.doc



Cathryn Atkinson
144 B Fountain Avenue
Waukesha WI. 53186
262-521-9939

Date?
SJR 27?

My name is Cathryn Atkinson. I am a lifelong resident of Waukesha and am in my 23rd year teaching in the School District. Until recent history, Waukesha has been regarded as a leader in the state in educating future citizens of the state. Unfortunately, because of the revenue caps and an out-of-date funding formula, we are now a district in crisis. Since 2001, Waukesha has reduced programs and services by \$14 million dollars, and are looking at an approximate \$2.7 million in reductions for the 2007-08 school year. There has been a consistent gap in our state funding of 1.6% every year. Meanwhile, the number of low income and minority students in our district has increased from approximately 10% to 22%. Over the past seven years our district has tried everything to reduce our budgetary needs (ie. reduced energy consumption, eliminated "non-essential" programs, increased class size, reduced administrative positions), that were perceived as less harmful to students. We have now well surpassed that point and the reductions we are making are having a terrible impact on students, with no relief in sight. Needless to say, the negative impact was only enhanced as a result of the delay in establishing a state budget for this year

Overall, Waukesha County is perceived as a wealthy county. Seven of the ten school districts in the county have an increased enrollment, or had a high per pupil expenditure in 1992 (when revenue caps were instituted) to allow for higher revenue increases each year. That is not the case for the city of Waukesha. Waukesha has experienced gradual enrollment decreases, and because our district was extremely frugal in 1992 with per pupil expenditures, we have been punished every year since then with lower revenue limits. Where is the logic in that?

I conducted a survey of Waukesha educators regarding the impact of reductions and services for this year, and here are some of the results I discovered:

- Kindergarten classes with 28 students
- No guidance counselors in elementary schools, resulting in no preventative programs and lack of support when students are having problems
- 38 7th grade students in Health/Phy Ed classes – safety and curricular concerns
- Overall lack of individual instruction due to large class sizes across the board
- Advanced Placement classes at the high school at 30-plus students (which goes against College Board requirements). In several instances, students are either asked to drop the class for some relief, or they withdraw voluntarily because of the class size.
- A dramatic increase in the number of grade level split classes at the elementary level
- High school Phy Ed classes ranging from 41-47, with safety issues (especially in swim class)
- Elementary teachers having to deal with very large classes, as well as no guidance counselors, librarians, technology resource teachers, or GT support.
- Increased concerns over health of students with cuts in custodial staff (unclean environment)
- Extremely sad situations with students who are attempting to cope with problems at home.
- Teachers of Emotionally Disturbed and English Language Learners are overburdened and are unable to attend to their students' needs.
- Lack of adequate staffing has reduced supervision, therefore we are seeing an increase in volatile situations at all levels.
- Many classrooms do not have enough desks for their students – students are forced to bring in chairs or desks from another classroom, or sit on the floor or counters. This is not a positive learning environment.
- Due to large class sizes, it is difficult to conduct labs: science, computer, art, or tech ed.

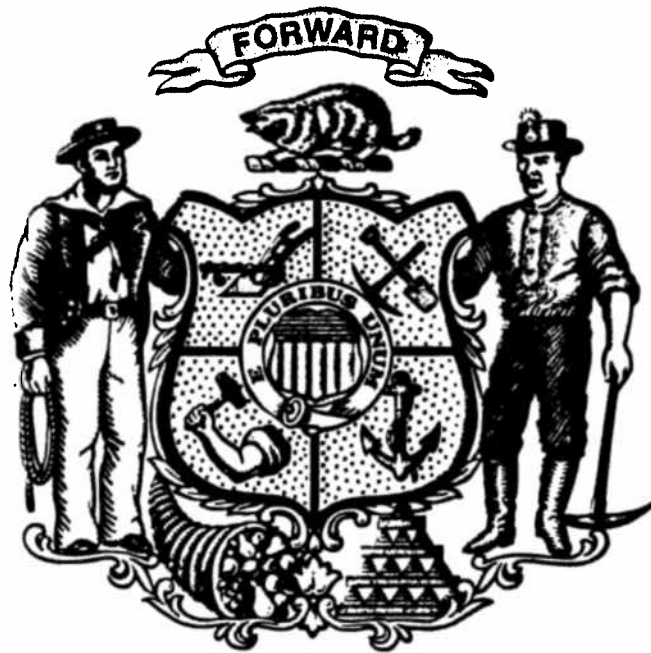
- Due to large class sizes, reading and writing (critical thinking) activities are largely diminished.
- Large classes with a high percentage of students with special needs. Example: 30 students in a fifth grade class – 2 CD (one of whom is not toilet trained), 2 LD, 6 GT (but no GT teacher), 1 English language learner, 1 ADHD, 1 with severe psychological issues.

Now let's consider the toll that special education takes on public school budgets. I am not suggesting that we reduce services to special education students, but I am suggesting we work to make our state and federal government uphold their commitment to special education. They have yet to fully fund legislation they promised or proposed to meet the enormous demands of educating children with special needs. Imagine the cost of serving one child that needs not only a special teacher at a smaller ratio than a non-special ed student gets (and these children are also usually included in a regular classroom), but also receive services of speech and language specialists, occupational and physical therapy, specially designed PE (another specialist involved), even nurses services and special aides, often one-on-one. It is not that these children don't need and deserve these services, but without federal and state support, these very costly services fall to the districts. It impacts every student when the government mandates programs then fails to fulfill their part of the funding.

It's really a matter of the demand for individualized instruction (and justifiably so) pitted against a political system that refuses to acknowledge the realities of the cost of doing business. Our students need numerous instances of one-on-one instructional time in order to meet the expectations of local, state, and national standards. Society expects our students to think critically, problem-solve, work as a team, and be engaged as active citizens, and I completely agree with this notion - we owe this to our young people and our society. But to demand this while at the same time loading our classes and reducing our resources, it is not only wrong, it is truly insulting. The methodology of balancing budgets by cutting flesh may fly in the factories of this world, but education is not and cannot be run

like a factory any more than parenting can. I find it curious that the state sees the validity and essential nature of individualized instruction, of giving everything we can to insure that “No Child Is Left Behind,” but refuses to take on its responsibility to insure the integrity of our educational institutions when it’s time to pay the bills. There are some who will pay for nothing unless it profits them. The problem is, most of society does not realize how we all benefit from a properly funded public education system. Wisconsin legislators must begin to depend on the opinions of educators when considering education policies. They cannot blindly rely on the unfounded claims made on AM talk radio – Wisconsin’s future cannot afford that kind of ignorance. Please consider changing the school funding formula to restore the high quality public education system Wisconsin has been known for.

Thank-you.



Speaker: Stephen Seyfer
District Administrator
Gibraltar Area Schools
Fish Creek, WI 54212
sseyfer@gibraltar.k12.wi.us

Date ?
SJR 27

Good morning Senator Lehman and members of the committee. I am Stephen Seyfer, district administrator of the Gibraltar Area Schools in Fish Creek.

In the past, I have spoken in this state house about the effects of one size fits all financing policies upon small, rural schools with declining enrollment, sparse population, and seasonal economies. As politely as those words have been heard, they have had no effect. While there continue to be real differences between metropolitan and northern tier school districts, they grow more alike than different – they all are losing their financial sustainability.

Instead of reciting a litany of facts today, I will present a brief allegory.

Captain Edward J. Smith
Chief Officer Henry T. Wilde
First Officer William Murdoch
Second Officer Charles H. Lightoller
Third Officer Herbert Pitman
Fourth Officer Joseph Boxhall
Fifth Officer Harold Lowe

Governor James Doyle
Senator Fred Risser
Senator Russ Decker
Senator Scott Fitzgerald
Assemblyman Michael Huebsch
Assemblyman Jeff Fitzgerald
Assemblyman James Kreuser

Each of these names is responsible for the safety and welfare of the souls aboard the great ships they were or have been assigned to sail. One ship was the RMS Titanic and the other is the Good Ship Wisconsin Public Education.

In April, 1912, the Titanic set sail into a field of icebergs and delivered more to 1,000 souls to their deaths in the north Atlantic. Captain Smith could have changed course. He could have gone slower. He could have followed several different courses of action. In fact, he did not.

In 1993, Governor Thompson and a legislative majority issued orders that sent the Good Ship Public Education on a course straight into a similar field of icebergs. This course is sending several hundred thousand souls into educational disaster. Governors Thompson, McCallum and Doyle and many legislators each could have changed course. In fact, they have had many opportunities to do so, but the economics of their politics consistently got in the way and our ship continues to sail among icebergs that it cannot avoid. In fact, they have not.

There are some who do not believe that there is any similarity between the RMS Titanic and the Good Ship Public Education. However, when the architect of the Titanic evaluated the rip in her side and announced that "it is a mathematical certainty that Titanic will founder," he said what so many educational professionals are saying about the worthiness of the Good Ship Public Education. "It is a mathematical certainty that she will founder."

For the RMS Titanic, it was a matter of buoyancy. For the Good Ship Public Education, it is a matter of solvency. The number of districts with declining enrollments is now greater than 60% and includes 12 of the largest 20 districts, 16 of the state's 25 most wealthy districts, and almost all districts in the northern tier and lake effect counties. It is clear that when their mandated and required expenses are greater than their limited revenues, each of these parts of the Good Ship will founder. It is only a matter of time. Expenses are the water and revenues are the bulkheads and when expenses annually are greater than revenues – these school districts will founder and in their aggregate they will sink the Good Ship.

As the Titanic collided with its iceberg, a fatal gash was inflicted and water flooded its lower decks. Screams filled the air. As our Good Ship is buffeted by its icebergs, it will be the collective effect of multiple damages that will inflict fatal wounds. This will not happen without warning. In fact, we know what is happening as it happens. It sounds like this.

Music programs have been eliminated due to a lack of funding.

The school district is pitting art programs against athletic programs, because it can only afford one but not both.

Roofs are leaking in classrooms, because the Board cannot afford to fund its academic programs and maintenance.

All first and second year teachers have been laid off as a cost reduction due to the rising cost of health insurance that was bargained in the last contract. The Board tried to change carriers to find a less expensive plan, but bargaining rules did not allow for a change.

The school district did not meet its AYP goals and will need to reserve 10% of its budget next year for an intervention plan. The problem is that the district has to cut seven teaching positions in order to set aside the funds for the required interventions.

Our leaders know what is going on. Recently, a ship's steward named Olson told passengers that it may be necessary to change course sometime soon, but not now. Even though the hull keeps getting dinged, there has not been a critical mass of damage, yet. When enough decks are suffering, a change may be in order.

Our deck officer named Lasee told us that if we really wanted to improve our plight, we need to win a referendum to pay for a change of berths. In that way, if the majority said no, it was what the majority wanted, really. Next fall, the Gibraltar School will begin a second decade of surviving on revenue limit overrides. We will be on the ballot again in November.

These are just several of the sounds. There are many more.

We are not strangers to our dangers. The bergs in the ice flow have names. We call them out as they bang against our ship. Some bergs circle around in the wake so often that they have become part of the hostile environment surrounding us everyday. These well-known bergs are called:

Revenue limits

Qualified Economic Offer

Unfunded mandates

NCLB

Minimum aid or special adjustment aid only

Failed referendum

Ironically, the Good Ship may look like she is sailing in good health, but the water line rises every day. 673 districts have yelled for help through revenue limit override referenda. 383 have failed and the water is rising in the lower decks. Six referenda failed last week and each school district will be looking for more programs to abandon in order to stay afloat.

These days, when I talk with school leaders about the state of our ship, I constantly hear the voices of the spectators on the docks of Liverpool. "The greatest ship of all time. This ship is unsinkable." It sounds like, "Great Schools. The best college prep scores in the nation."

Is it that the Good Ship is actually a Ship of Fools? Are educators the last of the eternal optimists believing that state leaders will not let them drown? Maybe they are fools. To date, there is no evidence to the contrary. Are the officers on deck just obtuse? Maybe they are. There is no evidence to the contrary on that either.

It may be that course changes taken soon can yet save the ship. But, it will take courage to approve Senate Joint Resolution 27 and demand legislative action to reform financing of Wisconsin's public education.

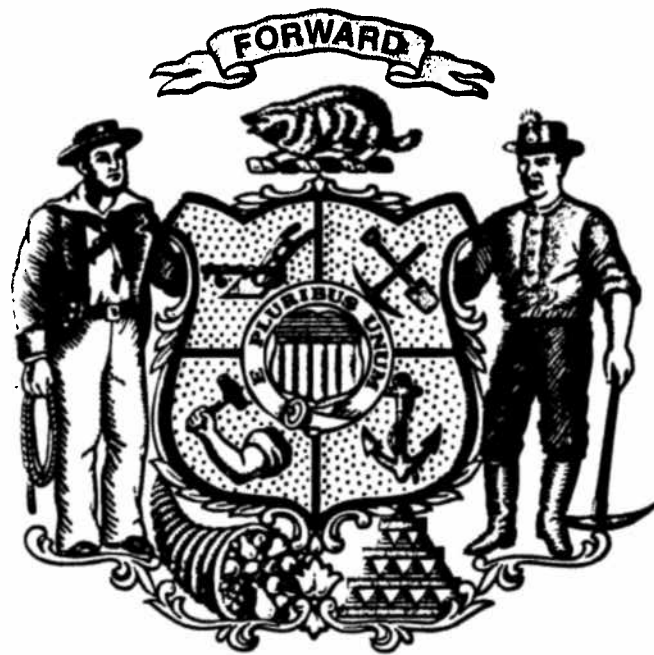
We wait to see if our ship's officers have such courage or if they, as with the officers of Titanic, will believe their self-serving publicity about unsinkability and Great Schools.

The great thing about an allegory or a metaphor or an allusion is that it provides an image for understanding what we want to communicate. Wonderfully, meaning can be exponentially enhanced through this property of association. More than 270 school districts can quickly see themselves as sinking or about to drown in a sea of legislative indifference. And, the great thing about allegories in a technological age is that with a key stroke an allusion can be read by every concerned citizen in the state.

Ah, I hear the band on deck. Can you hear them? They've just started playing "nearer my God to thee."

God Bless all souls aboard our fine ship.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on such an important issue.



Date?
SJR 27?

Good morning. I am Jill Gaskell. I am here today as a member of Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools and as a parent of 3 children in the Pecatonica Area School District.

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.

In 1995, we lost a wonderful Technical Education program, and a Family and Consumer Education program. 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.

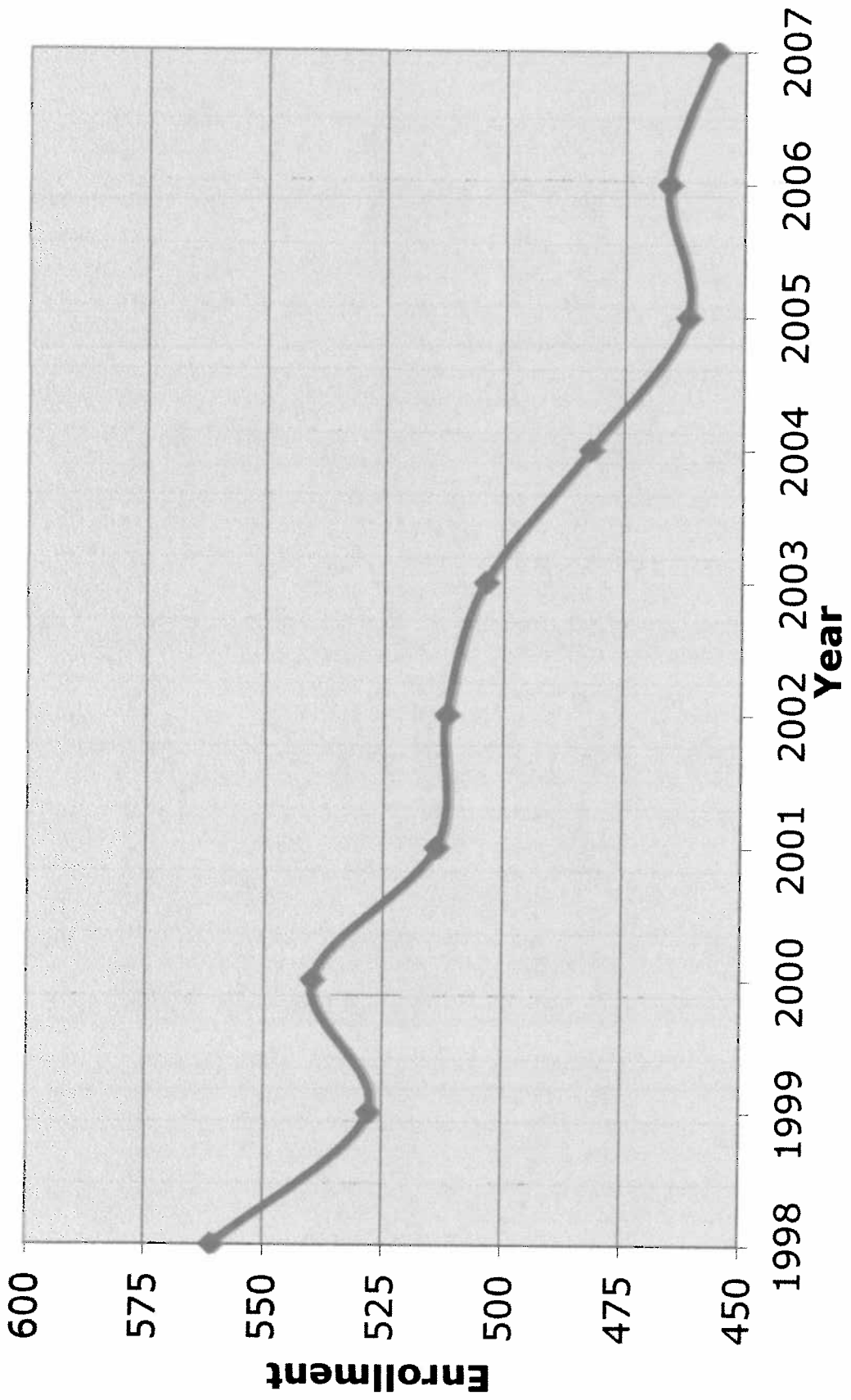
We have one semester of Information Technology. We have 4 offerings in English; and for students planning careers in science, engineering or math, we have 3 math classes. Recently, we added 2 in-house AP classes.

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 have considered a part time superintendent, but the 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. We are not a wealthy district and we were low-spending in 1993. It is morally reprehensible 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.

Pecatonica Area Schools Enrollment





Mallory Massey
Pecatonica High School

Date?
SJR 27?

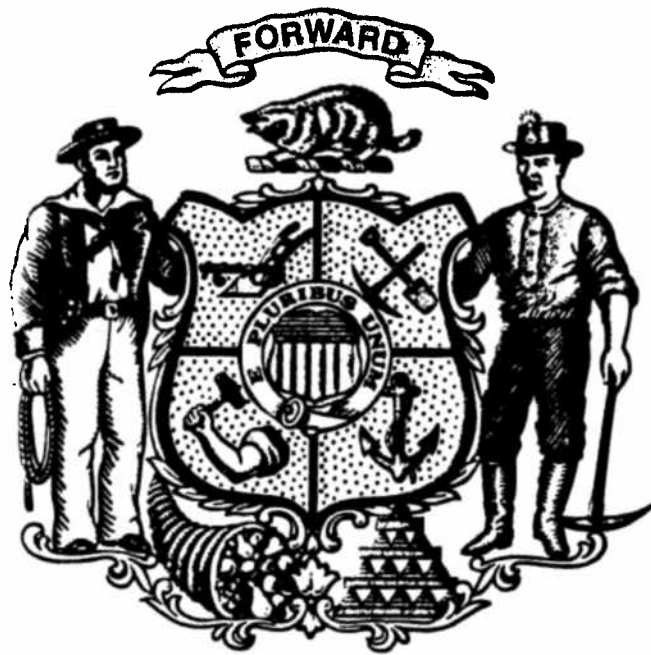
I attend Pecatonica High School located about 40 miles southwest of Madison. There are 42 kids in my senior class and around 150 kids in the high school. I love the small school experience, knowing everyone in the high school and being able to build relationships with my teachers. However, Pecatonica faces declining enrollment and a limited budget.

Since I started school in 1995, Pecatonica has had to make countless budget cuts. We have lost numerous programs and experiences that benefited me, but no longer benefits students today. I was able to attend an advanced reading group separate from the classroom reading class in third and fourth grade where a few other students and I read more challenging books at a faster rate. I remember being so bored with in-class reading that I hated it because I found it so easy. Kids at Pecatonica today do not have this opportunity. In high school, our Forensics program was directed by an excellent coach for many years. Last fall she stepped down from her position because she was burned-out and was tired of the lack of compensation. Since that time, the team has gone through a series of coaches, most of them interns or non-school employees with little prior experience in coaching. The program has since seen a decrease in participation, and many kids are missing out on building life skills such as public speaking and organizing thoughts for a presentation.

Students in my school are not offered much beyond basic core classes. The money our school has is enough to teach us the basics, but not much more than that. Our course handbook is only sixteen pages long. There are no home economic classes, computer technology courses, or gifted and talented programs. Students gifted with skills in singing, dancing, photography, journalism or technology have no outlet for their talents, while other students have no opportunities to try out any of these things. In rural communities, students depend solely on their school to provide them with opportunities to explore their talents therefore, their lives and their communities are centered around the school. There are no alternatives to the school classes for rural kids as there are for students in larger cities. There has been one instance during my time in high school when a student actually opted to go to a high school other than Pecatonica through open enrollment just because that student was not satisfied with the variety of classes available at Pecatonica.

Kids who graduate from high school today are expected to know exactly where they want to go to college and what they want to study. But I am struggling with this because I have hardly been exposed to the career options available. When choosing a college, the first thing a prospective student should look for is what majors are offered there. But without a firm grasp of the options, many rural students enter college undecided and unprepared for the course load of their first semester.

Pecatonica has educated its students as well as it could within its means, but in reality, it is not the best education we could have received if our school had been properly funded. We have a dedicated track team, but no track to run on. We have talented singers and actors, but no stage. We have brilliant minds but no outlet for their creativity. As a student of Pecatonica, I have missed out on too many opportunities to learn and too much information that could have influenced my future to call it a quality education.



Date?
SJR 27?

Good afternoon, I am Brian Dasher, Administrator of Finance for the West Bend Joint School District #1 in West Bend Wisconsin. The West Bend School District serves residents in the City of West Bend, the Town of West Bend, and parts of the towns of Addison, Barton, Jackson, Polk, Trenton and the villages of Jackson and Newburg. We are the 16th lowest spending district in the state and are the lowest spending district educating more than 2,000 students.

I am here today as a representative of the district to express our support for Senate Joint Resolution 27 calling for new school finance system. Much has been said about Wisconsin's property tax burden and how that burden compares to residents in other states. It is time that this state take a hard look at how it funds education and other governmental services. Our ability as a state to compete and survive in the global economy depends on our ability to develop a workforce that can compete for 21st century jobs, and maintain and develop our transportation, education, energy and governmental infrastructures. Currently, our state is in a precarious position. According to statistics compiled by The Wisconsin Way, we are slightly below the national average for the number of people aged 25-64 with Associate Degrees or higher. When looking at Bachelor's degrees and higher we fall even further below the national average. In 2005 our Wisconsin's per capita income was 11% lower than Minnesota's. Also, according to The Wisconsin Way, Wisconsin finished the fiscal year ended June 2007 with a \$2.5 billion dollar deficit, has the largest GAAP deficit in the country and has one of the worst bond ratings in the nation.

An educated workforce is vital to addressing these problems and positioning Wisconsin to successfully deal with the challenges of the future and public schools are vital to producing this educated workforce. Therefore, it is vital that the legislature cut through the partisan polarization that has characterized the last few years of business here in Madison and address the issue of school funding.

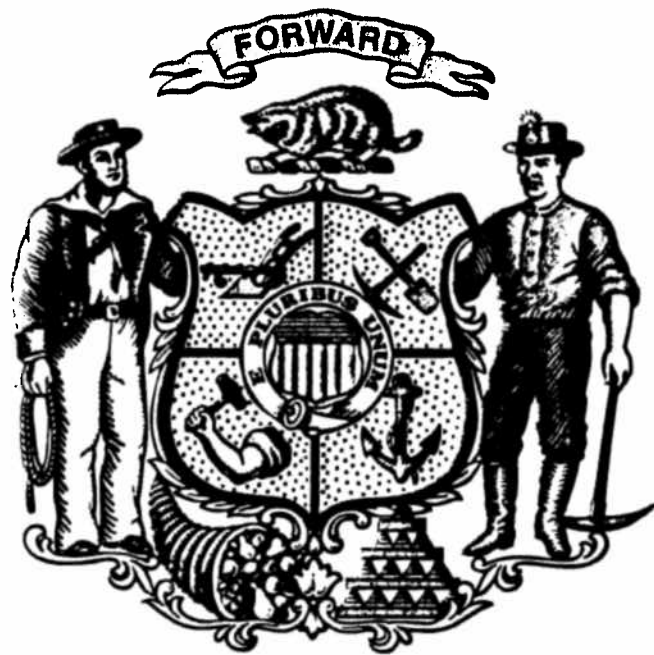
Our current funding system, based on the property tax, is regressive, relying upon a centuries old notion that property value is a reliable indicator of wealth and ability to pay. Two people living in homes valued equally can and often do have very different abilities to bear their tax burdens. The current system requires citizens to choose between property tax relief and the continuation of vital services, which they need to maintain the quality of the communities and economy in which they live. For schools specifically, this translates into reducing funding for educational programs and services needed to position our future workforce to keep Wisconsin competitive in the global economy by draconian measures like revenue limits, TABOR, TPA and other variations of property tax limits.

In public education we are facing many critical issues that we were not facing in 1993, the year revenue limits were enacted. The infrastructure in which we operate is in critical need of repair and updating. No Child Left Behind, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, and other statutory mandates increase pressure on schools to provide additional services to pupils, which can be expensive, exceeding average per pupil expenditures by tens of thousands of dollars. Health care and retirement costs are escalating at unsustainable rates. Collective bargaining agreements and statutes require us to negotiate changes to

these benefits with our employee groups. Reaching agreements through this process is a painstakingly slow process, too slow for us to keep ahead of the escalating costs, and imposing a QEO prohibits any changes to the benefits side of teacher's total compensation package. When revenue limits were imposed on school districts back in 1993, these were not critical issues facing districts. At that time health insurance premiums were far lower, No Child Left Behind did not exist and district's infrastructure was old but not critical.

As you begin this process of reexamining school funding I would like to urge you to be patient and prudent in your deliberations. Please do not rush into a solution without taking the time to consider the ramifications of the changes you propose. Please be careful when setting deadlines for changes. I am referring to the deadline of July 1, 2009 stated in the resolution. We are concerned that this deadline is too soon to allow adequate debate and consideration of potential solutions. We ask that you set a deadline that is realistic, that gives the legislature time to adequately study the issue, seeking input from experts in public taxing policy and school finance. It was disconcerting to hear how many legislatures were taken by surprise at the results of shifting the additional equalization aid monies to the School Levy Tax Credit and how many admitted that it was a mistake made as a result of not taking the time to thoroughly think the issue through. That must not happen again in this process.

The time for reexamining our funding system and updating to address current economic realities is long past due. If nothing is done, and this legislature continues its polarized, partisan posturing, our current system of school funding will negatively impact local communities and the state economy. The current atmosphere among legislators is not healthy for the long-term future of this state. We are the generation responsible for changing this path; we will either do it together or abdicate our responsibility and push it off to another generation. Thank you.



Date?

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



Wisconsin Property Taxpayers, Inc.

P.O. Box 1493 Madison, WI 53701

608 255-7473 / 800 994-9784



Date?

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For more than twenty years, we have advocated for changes in educational financing to increase the state's share and reduce the property taxpayers' share of basic school costs, and to revise the funding formula to provide equal educational opportunity for all with equal tax effort from all. In 1987, we supported the Barry Commission's recommendation to give every child the same basic level of funding -adjusted for their special needs - for the same tax rate regardless of their districts' property value.

In 1988, we developed and asked the Legislature to adopt a proposal that would have removed 2/3 of the statewide school costs from the property tax and revised the school funding formula to provide equal basic educational opportunity to all for equal tax effort from all.

More recently, we urged the Governor's panel for educational excellence to recommend adoption of the Ellis plan; a plan that would have guaranteed the same basic educational opportunity to every child in the state for the same minimum statewide school property tax rate; a plan similar to Michigan's in which districts that are willing and able to invest more to provide more than the basics may levy more than the statewide minimum by referendum.

Except for removing 2/3 of the school costs from the property tax, none of these recommendations have been enacted in the past twenty years, and nothing else has changed.

Today, as twenty years ago, children in low value districts receive less, while children in high value districts receive more than the statewide average support for their schooling. Today, as twenty years ago, property taxpayers in low value districts pay more than the statewide average tax rate to provide their children with less than the statewide average while taxpayers in high value districts pay less to provide their children with more than the statewide average.

In 2005, children in low income/low value districts received only \$869 worth of education per taxpayer dollar, while children in low income/high value districts received almost double that - \$1,533 worth of education per taxpayer dollar. (See Table 1, attached.)

Article X of our Constitution, adopted 159 years ago, promised to provide every child with free and equal access to a uniform, basic level of education funded by two-thirds from the state school fund and one-third from local property tax revenues. SJR-27 challenges the Legislature to renew that promise.

The fact that others have tried and failed before does not relieve this Legislature of the obligation to try again to restore pupil and taxpayer equity to our school financing system. We encourage you to adopt this resolution. We look forward to working with you to achieve this resolution's objectives.

#

Table 1.
Statewide Average vs. Above and Below Average Income, Value School Districts

Low Income/High Value Districts

District	Income	PP Value	PP Expense	Tax Rate	Yield
Bayfield	\$30,317	\$1,104,148	\$13,759	\$7.63	\$1,803.28
Birchwood	\$33,468	\$1,629,131	\$11,126	\$6.13	\$1,815.01
Northland Pines	\$34,390	\$1,982,664	\$10,675	\$5.98	\$1,785.12
Northwood	\$39,985	\$1,613,892	\$9,277	\$5.97	\$1,553.94
South Shore	\$32,136	\$1,115,526	\$11,414	\$8.25	\$1,383.52
Southern Door	\$38,844	\$720,092	\$8,453	\$7.71	\$1,096.37
Mercer	\$30,355	\$1,868,138	\$10,353	\$5.51	\$1,878.95
Spooner	\$32,257	\$1,015,397	\$8,513	\$6.09	\$1,397.87
Rhinelanders	\$37,451	\$700,349	\$9,051	\$8.36	\$1,082.66
Category Avg.	\$34,356	\$1,305,482	\$10,291	\$6.85	\$1,532.97
% Of Avg.	75.89%	264.78%	116.83%	79.53%	149.83%
K-12 Avg.	\$45,268	\$493,046	\$8,809	\$8.61	\$1,023.11

High Income/High Value Districts

District	Income	PP Value	PP Expense	Tax Rate	Yield
Cedarburg	\$65,908	\$661,646	\$8,598	\$9.37	\$917.61
Elmbrook	\$86,475	\$1,019,795	\$9,481	\$9.61	\$986.58
Mequon-Thiensvll	\$103,298	\$1,097,337	\$8,919	\$8.82	\$1,011.22
Shorewood	\$69,782	\$795,184	\$11,335	\$10.70	\$1,059.35
Whitefish Bay	\$104,380	\$707,580	\$9,675	\$9.90	\$977.27
Category Avg.	\$85,969	\$856,308	\$9,602	\$9.68	\$990.41
% of Avg.	189.91%	173.68%	109.00%	112.43%	96.80%

Low Income/Low Value Districts

District	Income	PP Value	PP Expense	Tax Rate	Yield
Shiocton	\$41,941	\$298,296	\$8,109	\$9.03	\$898.01
Shullsburg	\$30,817	\$245,237	\$8,705	\$9.64	\$903.01
Stanley-Boyd	\$28,941	\$251,076	\$8,422	\$8.91	\$945.23
So. Milwaukee	\$38,862	\$355,306	\$8,516	\$9.73	\$875.23
Osseo-Fairchild	\$33,273	\$268,077	\$8,243	\$11.00	\$749.36
Blair-Taylor	\$30,079	\$251,342	\$8,653	\$9.21	\$939.52
Cornell	\$31,184	\$256,685	\$8,284	\$10.77	\$769.17
Category Avg.	\$33,585	\$275,146	\$8,419	\$9.76	\$868.50
% of Avg.	74.19%	55.81%	95.57%	113.31%	84.89%

District	Income	PP Value	PP Expense	Tax Rate	Yield
Low Inc./High Value	75.89%	264.78%	116.83%	79.53%	149.83%
Avg Inc./ Avg Value	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
High Inc./High Value	189.91%	173.68%	109.00%	112.43%	96.80%
Low Inc./Low Value	74.19%	55.81%	95.57%	113.31%	84.89%

LEGEND

- Income: Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) per return, 2004.
- Value: Per pupil property value, 2005.
- Expense: Comparative Cost per pupil, 2005.
- Tax Effort: 2005 tax rate per thousand dollars of property value.
- Yield: Per Pupil Expense divided by Tax Rate.



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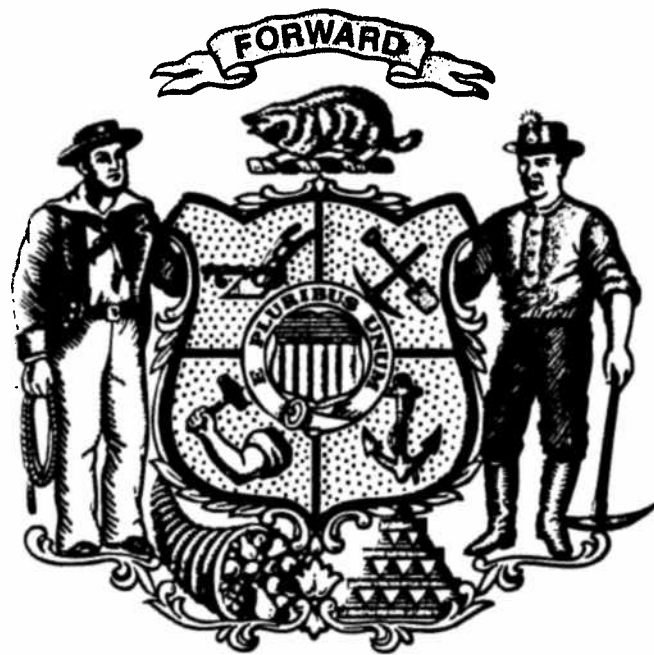
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#



Date?

Introduction

I am hear speaking as a proud parent of three children who attend a Milwaukee Public School. I am also hear as a citizen and taxpayer of Wisconsin who believes that all children, no matter if they are rich or poor, where they live, or what color they are, deserve a good education. I have chosen the dynamic and vibrant City of Milwaukee to live in and I have chosen an equally dynamic and vibrant school for my children. A passionate and involved school community is driving the spirit of our school. (I just want to note that the average income at our school is about \$11,000 per year and we are over 80% minority.) But a school cannot survive on passion alone. We are slowly being starved of the essentials. An injustice is being imposed upon us. The public schools are a faltering system.

Are We Doing Right By Wisconsin's Children?

Every adult can remember back to one or two incidents as a child when they felt wronged. When I was nine years old I had found a package of lifesavers lying on the sidewalk outside a store. I walked out of the same store with it still in my hand; the storeowner grabbed me, yelled at me and pried it from my hand. I felt wronged by that adult.

My daughter came home from school recently and announced that there would be no homework for a while. When I inquired, she told me the copy machine was broken...again. My daughter loves homework and she loves school. She was very disappointed.

Earlier this year her sister came home and was upset and angry. She was given assigned seating in the cafeteria. Because of staff cuts we no longer have an assistant principal whose job it was to monitor kids during lunch hour. So, to help control the more rambunctious kids, the more well-behaved children are placed sitting in assigned seats between them. She's angry that she cannot sit with her friends. Will my kids walk away from public schools feeling wronged by these experiences?

And the examples of the injustices go on and on. My daughter looked at me today and asked, "why don't the stall doors work." She is a fourteen-year-old girl. As anyone with a fourteen year old knows, she needs working bathroom stall doors.

Another classroom has a bookcase falling apart and has nobody to fix it. The front door of the school has been marked for repair for years. It has caused several injuries, but every year the district says they don't have the money yet. Meetings were held, plans were made and drawn up but still the inadequate, dangerous door remains.

And the kids will not even know the level of injustice being imposed upon them. They will not feel it until they walk out the door and into a university. It is there they will realize they had no second language, no regular art program, no daily library hours at school to do research, no music program, not enough science and math teachers, not enough attention from their well-intentioned but stressed out teacher with thirty-five kids in her class.

For three years the school has been holding bake sales and selling the kids artwork trying to save up for a kiln. They have \$800. They need an additional \$1200. It occurred to my oldest daughter who is in eighth grade that she never will have a chance to use that kiln. When she told me this, a little part of my heart broke. And not just for her, but for all the eighth graders at all the schools who scrimped and saved but never got to use their kiln.

It is time to support Senate Joint Resolution 27

Cathy Olive
2511 N. Gordon Ct.
Milwaukee, WI 53212



Laura L. Vernon
3133C W. Wisconsin Ave
School Safety Assistant (31 years)
Milwaukee Public School

Date?
SSR 27?

I am a proud employee of MPS, a proud product of MPS, proud of three (3) children that graduated from MPS and a proud grandmother of two (2) grandchildren attending MPS. Everyday I go to work at Roosevelt Middle School of the Arts. That middle school has 850 children, the largest middle school in Milwaukee. For these children it is a time when learning and growing is so critical to the young adult life that they will soon encounter. These babies are our future and they really matter. We should be making them feel that way. In an almost perfect world we would be making sure that they have access to all necessary avenues for them to be successful. Those avenues require resources. We as employees of the largest School District in the state depend on those resources to mold character and education into our future, the children. What happens when those resources are severely limited, slashed, cut or eliminated?

Our present reality!

As I walk the halls of my school to ensure a safe environment so children can learn, I see so many inadequacies. Not on the part of those trying to teach. But the circumstances by which they must try and teach. The lack of books, the lack of supplies, improvements to deteriorating equipment and desks. Classes being cut or combined because there is no money to hire the teacher to teach the class being dropped. Children who are eager to learn, but no one to teach that subject. Thus ~~comforting~~ children who have to deal with one disappointment after another. Put into classes of 35, 40, 45, 50 children. They are forced into a spiral of accepting less, like their education doesn't matter. The children become

frustrated, the educators are frustrated. Because of lack of resources we have cut back to the bare bones of our schools. This is wrong in every sense of the word. Our children matter, they are not invisible.

At a time when society and environment so often dictates the climate of our schools and safety is such a priority, lack of resources to ensure a safe environment for our schools, a teacher in every classroom, support staff that creates a nurturing environment, like social workers, nurses, paraprofessionals, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and school safety assistants should not be a “pick and choose, an either or”.

Our children matter. They are not invisible.

We need to be increasing opportunities for children.

Encouraging more academic skills building, advance academics, socialization skills, extracurricular activities providing alternatives to the lure of the streets. This is so critical to our city, our state.

Year after year our challenge has been to continue motivating our children to become successful citizens in our society despite the lack of funding present to ensure that. It's like throwing a life-preserver out to a person who has not learned how to completely swim and the preserver has a big hole in it. THAT IS WHY I hope you sincerely do everything you possibly can to develop a school funding formula that will guarantee all children receive a great education.

Because our children matter. They are not invisible.



Date ?
SJR 27 ?

Ladies and gentlemen, one question for you, Do you believe that children are our future and our most precious natural resource?

I have been in education since 1969 in Wisconsin: as a parent, educator, recipient of the Parent of the Year for Gifted and Talented, a Kenosha school board member and an advocate for equitable school funding. I have seen many changes, but something has not changed since 1845, that is that schools are still funded by local property taxes. You have the power to change that outdated method.

I ask you what else is still funded by a hundred fifty year old antiquated method. You have the power to upgrade and change the funding for Wisconsin children—our future.

The formula for funding schools has remained the same for about 130 years. Then changes started, driven by taxes, not because it was best for education or children. It was started by people who did not value the education of the leadership of the future. This legislature can change that absurd thinking.

In the 1970's, the Standards for mandated by the Legislature, with no funding and institutions were closed with the special needs children becoming part of the local school district. The Legislature, which granted exemptions for machinery and equipment for business, was going to pay 100% of the educational costs of these special needs children as it did when they were in an institution. The Legislature defaulted on the funding to the local school districts and the funding was not equal across the state. That Legislature had created unfunded mandates. You courageous Legislators have the ability to change that.

According Constitution, all children of Wisconsin are to receive the opportunity of an adequate education with the supported by the state. Since 1994, that opportunity has become limited to the location of the place of residency in the state and sometimes even the school district. You have the power to make education equal across the state.

Beginning in 1995, schools have not been funded to meet the needs of the previous year's expenses. Think of the environmental expenses: asbestos removal, energy(gasoline, electricity, heating oil), and mold detection; technological expenses of installing, equipment and upgrades; maintenance, upkeep, remodeling, codes and new construction; and last but not least, the cost of personnel; salary, health care costs, more personnel for the special needs and the costs of the educational requirements of the educators. The Legislature that enacted the QEO and Revenue Caps was short sighted and unaware of the real cost of education. This Legislature can correct that uninformed thinking.

That Legislature created, overcrowded classes, broken equipment, old textbooks, not enough personnel to deal with behavior needs, without considering the changes in society and the family that have created conditions the schools now deal with. I have a fireplace in my kindergarten classroom that was built in 1911. This Legislature can correct that uninformed thinking.

Your can make corrections that will give all children of Wisconsin an opportunity to an adequate education, if you are statesmen, first and not politicians, first. It is your job to take care of the citizens that can't vote or come to lobby you to take care of them. You ask How??

1. Plug the tax loop- holes and remove the total cost of schools from the property tax.
2. Change the Revenue Caps so that schools can maintain the buildings, and build new schools so classes do not have to be held in the hallways.
3. Change the Revenue Caps so that the needs of non-English speaking children can be met.
4. Change the Revenue Caps so that the needs created by many children living in poverty can be met.
5. Change the Revenue Caps so that the cost of transportation and technology can be met.

This Legislature is smart, dedicated, creative and astute enough to correct the actions of past legislatures and give education and children they must have to create a better world.

Joyce Behlke
3700-4th Street
Kenosha, WI 53144



Date ?
SSR 27 ?

Good morning, I'm Nancy Holmlund, retired Racine teacher of 31 years, and President of Racine Interfaith Coalition, a faith-based justice organization, which in support of our children, has been fighting for adequate public school funding, all 12 years of its existence. RIC is a member of WAES.

To be brief, I've made a list of reasons why the system for funding WI public schools is broken. Because I have been a part of many statewide education meetings. . .

- I know that across the state, school districts are making programming cuts and being forced to turn a blind eye to needed improvements in their schools because they are being held hostage by the need for dreaded referenda.
- I know that even if a referendum passes that valuable time, energy and \$\$ have been spent promoting them instead of working to provide children with the best educations.
- I know that in WI we don't need a referendum to build a road or a prison.
- I know the many states legislatures have changed their systems to use a variety of taxes and not rely so heavily on the property tax.

Because I have lived and worked in Racine. . .

- I know the school board, administrators, and teachers want the best for Racine's children.
- I know that Racine's property values, which figure into the convoluted funding system, are low.
- I know that presently 43% of our children are eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- I know that Racine's middle schools lost a period in their day, which slashed participation in music, foreign languages, technical education, art . . . all electives.
- I know that our school libraries must share librarians.

What is really disturbing to me, and should be to you, is that there are many other destructive practices occurring throughout our state schools due to the broken system which hurts our children's chances for bright futures.

Please think about all of WI's children. They are voiceless in the political process, but they are our future.

nancyholmlund@sbcglobal.net
262-886-3602



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



Wisconsin Property Taxpayers, Inc.

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#

Attachment

Table 1. District Averages 2005

<u>District Category</u>	<u>Expense*</u> <u>Per pupil</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Avg.</u>	<u>Tax Rate</u> <u>Avg.</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Avg.</u>	<u>Yield</u> <u>Per Pupil</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Avg.</u>
Avg.Inc./Avg.Val.	\$ 8,809	100.00%	\$ 8.61	100.00%	\$ 1,023.11	100.00%
Low Inc./Low Val.	\$ 8,419	95.57%	\$ 9.76	113.31%	\$ 868.50	84.89%
High Inc./High Val.	\$ 9,602	109.00%	\$ 9.68	112.43%	\$ 990.41	96.80%
Low Inc./ High Val.	\$10,291	116.83%	\$ 6.85	79.53%	\$ 1,532.97	149.83%

* Comparative Expense

Data Source: School Facts, Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, 2006

As indicated in the table above, the current system is far from equitable for either pupils or property taxpayers.

In 2005, children in low income/low value districts received only \$869 worth of education per taxpayer dollar, while children in low income/high value districts received almost double that - \$1,533 worth of education per taxpayer dollar. Children in high income/high value districts received \$990 - less than the average \$1,023 - per taxpayer dollar.

Taxpayers in low income/low value districts paid 13% more to provide 5% less school support than the statewide average.

Taxpayers in low income/high value districts paid 20% less to provide 17% more school support than the statewide average.

Taxpayers in high income/high value districts paid 12% more to provide 9% more school support than the statewide average.