



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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GUEST EDITORIAL
Wisconsin's School Funding Crisis

In school board meeting rooms across the state, difficult conversations are taking place. Now is not the time for significant property tax increases, yet further cuts to educational programs are also unacceptable. The deep cuts to school programs that have gone on for years are getting even deeper. Property taxes are rising fast. Taxpayers who are struggling financially, students whose opportunities are being taken away, and citizens concerned about the future of Wisconsin are all asking, "*What is going on?*"

The answer is clear when one considers what has happened at our state capitol.

For the past 16 years, Wisconsin's school districts have been subject to state-imposed budgetary controls, known as revenue limits or revenue caps. Revenue limits control the amount of money a Wisconsin school district can receive through a combination of state aid and local property taxes.

In most districts, in most years, revenue limits have not provided the dollars needed to keep up with school districts cost to continue offering students what has been provided in previous years. Most often, balancing a budget has made it necessary to cut critical educational programming and increase class sizes.

This has happened over and over again, as the gap between allowed revenues and the cost of continuing educational offerings must be addressed each year. Recently, revenue caps have been allowed to grow by about 2.5% annually, while costs have gone up by about 4%. In the last budget, the allowed increase was a little over 2%.

To make matters worse, the state's most recent budget has provided less state money for K-12 education. This unprecedented loss of state funds has shifted more of the responsibility for funding our schools to local property tax payers.

Veteran State Senator Mike Ellis accurately predicted what would happen when he said, "The new state budget will dramatically increase property taxes for schools, at the same time the state is cutting its own spending on K-12 public education."

COALITION PARTNERS

AFT – Wisconsin
www.aft-wisconsin.org

Fair Aid Coalition

School Administrators
Alliance
www.wsaa.org

Southeastern Wisconsin
Schools Alliance
www.schoolsalliance.com

Wisconsin Alliance for
Excellent Schools
www.excellentschools.org

Wisconsin Association
of School Boards
www.wasb.org

Wisconsin Association
of School District
Administrators
www.wasda.org

Wisconsin Education
Association Council
www.weac.org

Wisconsin Parent Teacher
Association (PTA)
www.wisconsinpta.org

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This combination of tighter budget controls and decreased state funding places school leaders in a difficult position. They must balance the concerns of district residents, who may be unable to pay higher taxes, and the needs of their students. The results have pitted neighbors against one another in contentious school district meetings. No one wants to eliminate educational programs, lay-off staff, or defer school maintenance projects to balance the books, but everyone recognizes that raising property taxes is extremely difficult in most communities.

It is clear that Wisconsin's proud tradition of providing high quality education to its children is at risk. The state is at a crossroads. The burden on taxpayers is becoming too difficult to bear and the well-worn tactic of capping school revenues is now reducing our children's educational opportunities. A new way forward is needed.

What is the answer? One group of educational leaders strongly believes in fundamental reform to the way we fund our schools.

The School Finance Network (SFN), a statewide coalition of educational and community-oriented organizations representing parents, students, school board members, school administrators, and teachers suggests that all stakeholders in the state engage in a real debate about school funding reform. The SFN advocates reforming our school financing system from the ground up. For more information about the School Finance Network and its plan, go to www.SFNWisconsin.org.

During these difficult economic times, it more important than ever to provide our young people with a high-quality education that prepares them for entry into the 21st-century workforce. To ensure our state's future well-being and prosperity, our children must have the knowledge and skills they need to compete in a highly competitive global economy.

It is time for the citizens of Wisconsin to demand the change they deserve.

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The School Finance Network, a coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to improving the method of funding Wisconsin's public schools, is made up of the following groups: AFT–Wisconsin, the Fair Aid Coalition, the School Administrators Alliance, the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance, the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, the Wisconsin Education Association Council, and the Wisconsin PTA.

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