



Championing Great Schools in the Great Budget Debate

Linda Weaver, WSC President

The 2007-09 state budget debate raises a number of questions. Will the state commit to funding two-thirds of the cost of public education? Will school districts receive relief from revenue caps? Will categorical aid programs such as special education, bilingual/bicultural education and SAGE get a boost in funding? Will the unfair Qualified Economic Offer law finally be repealed? These questions and more will be answered by the state Legislature in the upcoming months.

The budget-writing Joint Finance Committee kicked things off in March with stops in Milwaukee, Arlington and Chippewa Falls to hear from the public about its budget priorities. WEAC Government Relations worked with UniServ governance and staff to identify and recruit members to testify about the importance of investing in public education for our future. During April, the committee will hold public hearings in Prairie du Chien, Rhinelander and Green Bay.

Before the Joint Finance Committee takes its first vote, co-chairs Sen. Russ Decker (D-Schofield) and Rep. Kitty Rhoades (R-Hudson) will decide which items in Governor Doyle's budget proposal will be stripped out as "non-fiscal policy" and which provisions will be voted on by the full committee. This key determination comprises "Round 1" in the fight to repeal the QEO and ensure fair treatment of education support professionals under the Wisconsin Retirement System.

With the committee divided 8-8 along party-lines, some speculate that the Joint Finance Committee process will be plagued by gridlock, setting the stage for a showdown between the Democratically-controlled Senate and the Republican-controlled Assembly with dueling versions of the budget. Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch (R-West Salem) has already laid down the gauntlet, declaring that the Assembly Republicans' budget bill will not include tax increases. Sen. Decker countered that eliminating the proposed oil franchise fee and cigarette tax will leave an \$818 million hole in the state budget. "We

[Senate Democrats] will not shortchange the future of our state with draconian cuts to education or stop our efforts to expand health care coverage," said Decker. (*The Wheeler Report*, March 23, 2007)

Ultimately, a conference committee made up of selected legislators from the Senate and Assembly will resolve the differences between competing budget proposals before a final version is sent to Governor Doyle for his consideration.

You can influence the great budget debate by going to the WEAC Members' Only Cyberlobby page to send an e-mail to your legislators in support of Governor Doyle's pro-public education state budget. Also, sign up today for WEAC's June 19 Lobby Day at the Capitol by going to the WEAC Members' Only page. With our crescendo of voices in support of investing in Wisconsin's great schools in the months ahead, we can ensure that education is a top budget priority for Wisconsin policymakers.



School-funding Update

Tom Zigan, WSC Vice President

School districts such as Wauwatosa and West Allis continue to scrap and fight in order to find new and creative ways to continue delivering quality educational opportunities to its students. West Suburban Council (WSC) voted to join The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) last year. WAES is a statewide network of organizations dedicated to reforming school funding and currently has 137 partners, including 65 school districts, 30 teacher organizations, 22 civic and faith-based groups, and 20 parent associations. Its Wisconsin Adequacy Plan—a proposal for school-finance reform—is the result of research into the cost of educating children to meet state proficiency standards.

In order to keep WAES partners, like WSC members, up-to-date on what's going on in the world of school funding, <http://www.excellentschools.org> now includes a link to many newspaper articles (.pdf files) that talk about the work of the (Funding cont. p2)

(Funding) coalition. Once at the homepage, click on “News” on the navigation bar on the left side of the page and then click on “WAES in the news.”

If you want to get a good look at which districts are having problems with Wisconsin’s school-funding formula or how bad it’s getting in your community, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has put online a series of maps showing everything from districts’ base revenue limits to changes in enrollment to changes in school aid.

You can access the maps by going to <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/sfs/maps.html>.

Finally, WAES, along with nine other state-level and regional organizations, such as WEAC, AFT, WASDA and the Wisconsin PTA, have come together around school-funding reform. The School Finance Network is presently holding meetings once a month to develop strategies and tactics for fixing the state’s system. This issue affects us professionally and personally as well as our students’ future. Expect to hear more about how this urgent issue is being addressed in the next few months. Visit WAES’ web page (listed above) to stay current on the latest news.



Faces on the Frontline of Public

Education: NEA’s National Conference for

Education Support Professionals

Both Stoskopf and Pat Collins (WESP officers and negotiators)

Beautiful spring weather greeted more than 950 ESPs as they converged on the Renaissance Hotel and convention center in Nashville, TN March 9 -11, 2007 for a whirlwind weekend of seminars, speakers, networking and solidarity. Participants included Paraprofessionals, Clerical staff, Student Supervisors, Security, Food Service Employees, Bus Drivers, School Nurses and other support personnel from public schools around the United States. The positive energy within the conference spilled out into the streets of “Music City USA,” where smiling ESPs greeted each other as they enjoyed the sights and sounds of the dynamic city.

The main conference ran from mid-day Friday through noon Sunday, but many participants were also able to attend very intensive pre-conference seminars beginning March 7th geared towards Local Presidents and Emerging leaders. Others dealt with

diversity and the School-Community relationship. Although we did not attend the pre-conference, others spoke highly of it.

The main conference kicked off Friday afternoon with a large group seminar entitled: “It’s not selfish to be self-sufficient.” This session explained the concept of the Living Wage Campaign and also focused on the need to build self-worth within ourselves and our locals as an initial step to secure professional wages for the work we do. We were very motivated after hearing from several ESPs who, despite working full-time, were still in the ranks of the working poor. One speaker was forced to live in a homeless shelter while another worked 5 jobs just to make ends meet. Despite these adversities, both continue working as ESPs because it is their passion. In this session it was emphasized that securing at least a living wage will have a positive effect on public education as ESPs will have more positive attitudes, higher self esteem and be able to focus more energy on their main job, instead of being distracted about making ends meet. The schools also will benefit by realizing a higher employee retention rate. Participants were encouraged to take steps to build up self esteem in themselves and fellow members before pushing ahead with a Living Wage Campaign. It was emphasized that everyone needs to truly believe that we are worth the pay before we will see change.

The message of dignity, respect and a need for a Living Wage was a theme that was re-visited throughout the conference in seminars and by all of the speakers. NEA President Reg Weaver motivated the group to push for these three goals in his characteristically entertaining yet forceful speech at Friday’s awards banquet. NEA Vice President, Dennis Van Roeckel and Elizabeth Edwards, wife of Presidential Candidate John Edwards, also shared these goals with us in their presentations during other working meals. It was obvious to Pat and I that the conference organizers were putting these concepts into practice as we truly felt respected and treated with a great deal of dignity throughout the weekend.

After a night of great food and celebration, Saturday was packed with hard work. We each attended three two hour seminars along with a working lunch. A total of 76 seminars were offered throughout the weekend focusing on ways to improve yourself, your locals and your schools. Pat and I had a hard time making choices as there were so many great topics being covered. Although we have enjoyed many seminars at other conferences and academies, this conference was especially exciting as all seminars were appropriate and relevant **(Faces cont. p3)**

(Faces) to ESPs. The sessions I attended on Special Education and Assistive Technology were filled with information that I am eager to share not only with my own Special Ed. team, but also with our District in hopes of developing in-service opportunities for other ESPs. The public relations seminar gave me many tools to help develop and deliver a message for my unit. Pat enjoyed sessions on creating a blog and hopes to set one up to easily disseminate information for our local. She also enjoyed a session on building a career academy for ESPs and discovered sources to share with our members as they work towards professional development. Her session on overcoming abuse of rank in the workplace also provided us with information that can be used in our schools.

Saturday night we had the opportunity to dine with 31 other members of the Wisconsin delegation. We learned more about the workings of WEAC while chatting with these new friends.

Sunday morning Pat and I both attended a very entertaining and motivational session on dealing with difficult people. We came away with many tools that will help us in all aspects of our lives.

Besides stressing the need for ESPs to earn at least a Living Wage, respect and dignity, this conference also emphasized the fact that all parts of the team are equally important. Administration needs to understand that anyone who works in the public school system has a need for training and input in decision making. Including ESPs in professional development was a point made time and again this weekend.

In addition to the excellent seminars and speakers, Pat and I truly benefited from the networking we did with the other ESPs from around the country. Striking up conversations with other participants in the elevator, at the pool and at meals gave us a greater

insight into the situation others are facing. We found many commonalities and some differences, but overall we found a common goal and came away from this conference extremely motivated and filled with positive energy.

Pat and I would once again like to thank the West Suburban Council and WEAC for providing us with this wonderful opportunity. This conference was such a positive experience which will help us in our personal lives, in our locals and in our schools. We would certainly welcome the opportunity to attend next year's conference in Baltimore, Maryland March 7 – 9 and highly recommend that other ESP units consider sending representatives, too.



PDP Workshops a Success

Mary Butkus and Debbie Brent just completed the second of three separate PDP workshops that have been held to help teachers in the WSC Uniserv write their Professional Development Plans as in keeping with the new licensure procedures for newly licensed teachers.

The first workshop held in September was to assist those teachers who needed to get their plans in by the October 2006 deadline. The second workshop, held in two sessions, was developed and delivered to work with those teachers who need to get their plans submitted by October 2007. The third PDP workshop is being geared towards mentors and how they can support and assist those that they mentor in the process of developing those plans. This last workshop will be held April 26th at the UEP office.

Those in attendance at the two (PDP cont. p4)

WSC Hosts Brickner Memorial

Retired Wauwatosa teacher and long-time union activist, Evan Brickner, passed away last September. Evan taught special education at Wauwatosa East High School for nearly 28 years until he retired in 2004. Evan was active in local, uniserv, state, and national levels of the union throughout his career.

West Suburban Council will be holding a memorial program for Evan on May 16th at 5:15 p.m., at the UEP building Brookfield, immediately following the WSC Representative Assembly. The program will include the dedication of the tree being planted on the UEP grounds in Evan's memory. The program is open to all of Evan's relatives, friends, and union family. Please join us in honoring and remembering Evan's life. Mark your calendars now and RSVP to Anita Wobst at 262-789-600 or wobsta@weac.org.

(PDP) previous workshops had the following to say about their participation.

- “Just enough info to make me feel more confident without being repetitive”
- “Very personalized.”
- “I have learned so much and like not being “evaluated”, but the help being “verified” by the instructors at this workshop.”

Funds and resources from the West Suburban Council supported all the training that Mary and Debbie went through and participants were able to attend for FREE. Your association dues at work!



WSC-Retired News

Anita Wobst

West Suburban Council – Retired sent seven participants to the Second Constitutional Convention of the Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans held in Madison during March. This coalition of activists who support the improvement of legislated policies

that affect the needy, disabled, and aged populations in our society gathered to elect its leadership and to reorganize into a more politically capable organization. All workers are affected by the health, social security, and discrimination issues that are in the public eye and are of concern to this organization.

Nominations for the Board of Directors of WSC-R have been completed and the election ballots will be in the mail to members before the end of April. Pre-retired members will receive ballots.

WEAC Executive Director, Dan Burkhalter, is scheduled to speak at the New Retirees Recognition Luncheon in October and Wi-ARA President, Leon Burzynski, is scheduled to speak at the WSC-Retired General Meeting in June. WSC-Retired has a website that can be reached through a link of the WSC website. Check the website for news and schedules.

WSC-R is very appreciative of the efforts of the WSC leadership in sustaining the memory of the untimely passing of one of our most loyal activist leaders, Evan Brickner, by initiating the tree planting and plaque on the UEP grounds.

LOBBY DAY

JUNE 19, 2007 9:00 a.m.
Monona Terrace Convention Center
Madison

Agenda:

- Pre-lobby briefing (Monona Terrace)
- Senate/Assembly face-to-face lobby visits (State Capitol)
- Postcard drop off at the Governor’s office (State Capitol)
- Cyberlobby (location TBA)
- Debrief (Monona Terrace)

Covered expenses:

- ◆ West Suburban Council will reimburse **mileage to and from** Monona Terrace for any driver transporting 3 or more individuals to Lobby Day.
- ◆ West Suburban Council will provide the first 35 members who register (through Anita Wobst) and attend Lobby Day with a **\$10 stipend for lunch!**

Why YOU should participate in Lobby Day:

- ☞ State legislation directly impacts our wages and benefits.
- ☞ State-imposed spending caps are devastating the curriculum in our great schools and leading many districts to consider dissolving or consolidating.
- ☞ Your personal anecdotes and experiences force legislators to put a human face to critical issues.

Call Anita Wobst 262-789-6000 or email her at wobsta@weac.org to sign up today!