



## Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay

*Presents*

***[www.advocatesforeducation.org](http://www.advocatesforeducation.org)***

***An independent source of information  
and discussion of issues for parents of  
children in Whitefish Bay Schools***

School funding updates    testing, budget news and many  
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***Advocates for Education.  
Your link to quality schools in  
Whitefish Bay.***



# Advocates for EDUCATION

Spring 2006

of Whitefish Bay, Inc.

[www.advocatesforeducation.org](http://www.advocatesforeducation.org)

## 35% Reduction in Kindergarten Aides WFB Schools Make \$620,000 in Cuts

The Whitefish Bay School Board approved more than \$620,000 in budget cuts May 24th, using recommendations from school administrators to make up a budget shortfall for the 2006-2007 school year.

The board reduced kindergarten aides by 35% instead of the suggested 50%, a choice made possible by a projected decline in kindergarten enrollment. Many parents objected to cuts affecting the district's youngest students, but the board determined that even with fewer aides, Whitefish Bay's kindergarten staffing will compare favorably with surrounding districts. At Richards Elementary, this means four posi-

tions will be reduced to 2.6. At Cumberland, 3.5 positions will be cut to 2.3. Fewer kindergarten students are entering the district, which will result in fewer kindergarten sections overall.

The board chose to continue funding for media center aides, which administrators had proposed cutting, and made reductions elsewhere. Savings were ordered in the Middle School ACES program, which will continue to offer organizational support to students, but will use available funding differently.

Cutbacks include loss of a social worker, use of fewer substitute teach-

*continued on page 3...*

### Q & A: WHITEFISH BAY BUDGET CUTS

The Whitefish Bay School Board is completing a 2006-2007 budget that will result in nearly \$600,000 (CHECK AMOUNT!) in cuts. Here are summaries of administrators' answers to some frequently-asked questions from parents during the budget process.

#### *Why is there a budget gap in the first place?*

Some rising costs are beyond the school district's control, like energy and health insurance. The district's ability to raise revenue is limited by state law.

The district and the board are taking actions to contain costs. Whitefish Bay school administrators have taken steps to improve the energy efficiency of district buildings. The school board and teachers agreed to some health insurance co-pays in the last contract negotiations. But given the district's inability to raise revenues, it's not enough.

*Continued on page ?*

## MISSION Statement

Advocates for Education is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that works to promote high quality public education in Whitefish Bay by:

- Informing residents about education issues and encouraging public participation in matters affecting the schools
- Fostering a social and political climate favorable to public education
- Advocating for public policies that promote high quality public education in Whitefish Bay

Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay

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## Q & A:

*Why not reduce staff salary and benefits?*

According to the school district's Budget Adjustment Plan, "Salaries and benefits determined as a result of state-mandated negotiated processes cannot be changed unilaterally within the context of a Budget Adjustment Plan. Nevertheless, the School Board will continue to monitor carefully the balance between controlling costs associated with salaries and benefits and competitiveness within the marketplace to attract and retain high quality employees."

*Why not attract more students to raise more per pupil revenue?*

The district added seven open enrollment seats for children from outside of the district in an effort to offset revenue shortfalls. Still, there is a limit to the number of children the district can take through the open enrollment program, because the payment does not cover the entire per pupil cost to educate a student in Whitefish Bay.

With respect to children within Whitefish Bay, the district pursues marketing efforts and has maintained steady enrollment even as neighboring districts face declining enrollments.

*In a time of budget cuts, why do we keep funding enrichment programs, such as Community Recreation?*

Recreation department activities are paid for from a separate fund and cannot be used directly to address the general fund budget challenge. However, \$10,000 in general fund expenditures related to Recreation Department activities will be charged to the Recreation Department fund rather than to the general fund.

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## Changes ahead in *WFB'S Gifted & Talented Program*

**W**hitefish Bay is making changes to its gifted and talented program next fall. Director of Instruction Tony Frontier says the district will be more aggressive in identifying children who show special academic potential, and working to challenge them in all subjects. Specific criteria the district uses to identify gifted children will be published on the district website and available to parents in the fall. Frontier answered questions from AFE about the gifted and talented program in Whitefish Bay:

*What is the Whitefish Bay School District's philosophy on educational options for gifted children?*

The district believes that gifted children are served by a challenging and supportive environment that

includes a continuum of services in grades three through eight. The gifted and talented (GT) curriculum is a combination of differentiated work in the classroom and "pullout groups" that meet a few times during the school year.

*How does the district identify students for the GT program?*

We identify through a combination of teacher and parent nomination and scores on standardized tests such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). The district adheres to a scoring profile that sets a certain score cut-off. If the child's score is below that point, there must be some other type of data point before the child can participate in the program.

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### *Cognitive Abilities Test scores and what they mean*

**T**he Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), given to elementary school students in third and fifth grades, is what educators call a norm-referenced intelligence test. They consider the test a frequent predictor of academic success. The "standard age scores" children receive in verbal, quantitative and non-verbal categories are meaningful to teachers and counselors when deciding whether to place them in gifted and talented programs. 150 is a top score; Whitefish Bay administrators consider a score of approximately 130 or above as a signal that a child may benefit from more academic challenges. Currently, parents do not receive the "standard age score" on the printout of their children's CogAT that comes home with the Iowa Test scores, but parents can ask teachers or administrators to provide and explain their child's score.



# Richards

eases overcrowding  
adds third, fourth grade classes

**R**ichards School will add two new sections in the fall to accommodate the growing number of students in third and fourth grades. Third and fourth graders will be divided into five classrooms instead of four, according to principal Mark Tenorio.

Last fall the district hired an extra third grade teacher to “float” among the four classes, which had grown to as many as 27 children per class. An additional teacher will be hired for fall to fill the new job.

The dilemma for district administrators was finding space at Richards School for new classrooms. Because of declining enrollment in 4-year-old kindergarten, there will be four sections of K4 instead of five (two morning and two afternoon sections), freeing up one room. Room 112, now used by Special Ed and divided by a temporary wall, will be converted into a full-sized classroom to create the second space. Special Ed will consolidate its work into other spaces it currently uses.

Tenorio says no portable classrooms or trailers will be needed. Administrators considered not renewing the contract of Milestones, the before-and after-school provider that occupies a large room in the music wing, but Tenorio says it is important to allow families who value the program to continue choosing Richards.

# Constitutional

tax limits tabled in Madison



By a 21-11 vote, Democrats and Republicans in the Wisconsin state senate voted against the so-called “Taxpayer Protection Amendment” or TPA, also known as the “Taxpayer Bill of Rights” or TABOR. For the time being, this ends the three-year push in the legislature to amend the Wisconsin constitution in a way that imposes automatic fiscal constraints on state and local government spending.

Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay opposes constitutional limits on taxes for two primary reasons. First, local control would be permanently compromised by a state-wide constitutional amendment that restrains municipalities like Whitefish Bay. Second, AFE believes that many schools, including Whitefish Bay’s, could suffer severe cutbacks as a result of such an amendment.

In Whitefish Bay’s legislative districts, State Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) supported TPA; State Representative Sheldon Wasserman (D-Shorewood) opposed it.

Advocates for Education Co-founder Meredie Scrivner gathered enough facts about Wisconsin’s complicated system of public school funding to fill a textbook, and boiled them down to this essential “cheat sheet” for Whitefish Bay parents.

**DID YOU FORGET?**

# RENEW

**TODAY!**

Advocates for Education of Whitefish Bay, Inc.

Continue to be part of the team of voices speaking on behalf of children

- Active Member(s) (WFB resident or parent/guardian of WFB School District student) @ \$20 per household
- Supporting Member(s) @ \$20 per household
- Enclosed is an additional donation to support AFE. Due to the lobbying mission of AFE, donations are not tax-deductible.
- I am interested in volunteering for AFE. Please call me.

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## Q & A: *...continued from page 2*

**Can we fund-raise our way out of this hole through the PTOs and Bay Ball?**  
Use of Bay Ball and Education Foundation funds, as well as PTO funds, is determined by the respective boards of those entities, not by the School Board. Those groups have decided to apply those funds to support enrichment and supplementary activities rather than core school district services and operations. Any decision to change that policy would have to be made by the PTOs and the Whitefish Bay Education Foundation.

**Why not use Operating Reserve Funds?**  
The operating reserve funds address one-time projects and needs while the budget gap faced by the school district relates to recurring expenses. According to the school district, allocation of reserve funds to bal-

ance the budget would likely increase budget challenges in future years.

**Can school district land be rented or developed?**

Currently, all land owned by the Whitefish Bay School District is developed. Green space is valued for recreation activities.

**Can't we reduce or eliminate some supplemental and elective courses? If they aren't core courses, could we charge fees for them?**

State law prevents the district from charging for courses held during the school day. However, some savings in the 2006-07 budget plan comes from reducing or consolidating courses where enrollment patterns make that possible.

**Are there any fees we can raise?**

The district's 2006-2007 Budget Adjustment Plan calls for some new school fees and some extracurricular activity fee increases.

**But cutting K5 aides and library secretaries? Shouldn't we keep the cuts away from the classroom?**

Nobody likes to cut programs that are so close to children. Superintendent Jim Rickabaugh says the district has avoided making this kind of cut before, but says there remains no where else to cut or to generate additional revenue.

**It doesn't sound like there's anything I can do to change our budget situation.**

**Do we have to live with continued cuts?**  
The fiscal situation this district and surrounding districts face is a result of the way our state regulates and funds schools. To learn more about how you can affect changes in the state legislature that affect local control, please contact Pam Woodard of AFE, or join AFE to get updates on what's happening in Madison.

## Kindergarten...continued from page 1

ers and a scaled-back summer class program. Fee increases at the Middle School and High School will need to generate \$14,000, instead of the \$7,000 administrators proposed. Also, the School Board is asking teachers and administrators to decrease paper use by 10%.

A complete list of reductions in the Whitefish Bay Schools budget for 2006-2007 should be available on the district website sometime in June. Go to [www.wfbschools.com](http://www.wfbschools.com) or [www.advocatesforeducation.org](http://www.advocatesforeducation.org) for more information and links.

## WFB'S Gifted & Talented Program

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**What types of gifted and talented programs are offered?**

Through its Beyond program, the district offers the Literature Experience, in which advanced readers join a small group to read a book chosen for their skill level, Writer's Workshop and the JASON Project, a national science program. The Beyond program also sponsors the district's art docent program, the Geography Bee and other enrichment activities.

gram has been under review.

Changes have been made and will be implemented for the 2006-07 school year.

**What changes are planned for next year?**

The offerings identified above will remain the core of the program and will continue to be available to the same amount of students as in the past. The change in the program involves a very small group of students who will be selected from the existing participants based on their truly exceptional test scores and school performance. These students will receive additional services. The district will also consider grade acceleration for some students.

**When will parents receive information on the changes to the gifted and talented program?**

Information on the changes to the program will be sent home before the start of the 2006-07 school year.



**How many students are currently participating in these programs?**

Twenty to 25% of all students in a given grade participate in one or more of the Beyond programs. The GT pro-

## What You Really Need to Know About

# Wisconsin Public School Finance

*There are two significant factors for every school district:*

- The amount of money the state allows the district to spend. This is most important to the district.
- The source of money. This is most important to many taxpayers.

State law determines the amount of money a school district can spend each year. There is a maximum spending cap for each district each year. This amount is essentially a price per student. The maximum a district can spend is X dollars times the number of students enrolled for the school year. For simple math purposes, X is in the range of \$10,000. X multiplied by the number of students enrolled is the spending cap.

In order to control property taxes, Wisconsin law says the X is allowed to increase by no more than 2.3% per year, regardless of variables such as energy and insurance costs.

However, another part of Wisconsin law sometimes referred to as the QEO (qualified economic offer), essentially requires a minimum 3.8% annual increase in spending on the total cost of teacher salaries and benefits. In addition, the 3.8% increase is usually the minimum raise for aides, secretaries and custodians.

*Therefore:*

- A district with a declining number of students will have a lower cap than it did the previous year. This means budget cuts.
- Every year, there will be a 1.5% squeeze in the staff salary/benefit portion of the budget, which represents 80 to 85% of the entire budget in most districts.
- As the cost of benefits rises, there is less money for salary increases.
- As the cost of energy goes up, the non-salary budget is consumed by those costs.
- Since the cost of staff can't be reduced, the only way to stay within

the cap set by law is to reduce the number of staff members. This eventually leads to fewer teachers, and can result in larger class sizes and/or elimination of subjects and programs.

Current law and enrollment trends nearly guarantee a continued budget squeeze for school districts. It is the source of school funding, however, that usually gets the most public attention because the source of funding affects taxes.

*The source of school funding is essentially two-fold:*

- state funds, paid on a per-pupil basis, with money raised mostly from income taxes
- local funds, paid through property taxes and based on property value

The ratio of state money to local money varies from district to district due to the legislature's desire to achieve a relatively equal tax rate. The formula is based on the average property value per student in each school district. The higher the property value per student, the less money the state contributes.

Each year, the state provides a certain amount of money to each district based on district enrollment and on property value per student.

The remaining dollars come from local property taxes. In Whitefish Bay, because we have a relatively high property value per student, we get about one third of our school funding from the state. The other two-thirds comes from property tax revenues.

Whitefish Bay ranks in about the 60th percentile statewide; that is, 40 percent of districts rely more heavily on local property taxes than we do and therefore get less state money per pupil, while 60 percent get more money from the state.

*Significance? Four big points:*

- State money is paid per pupil. If enrollment goes down, the amount

the state pays goes down.

Remember, the amount a district is allowed to spend also goes down.

- State money is not guaranteed.

During a state budget crunch, the state has reduced its payments.

- Any money not provided by the state, for whatever reason, must be made up by local property taxes. In recent years, spending increases for Whitefish Bay schools have been lower than the rate of inflation. Taxes have gone up because of reduced payments from the state. This puts great pressure on school boards because taxpayers generally oppose property tax increases. If taxes rise too much, school boards are often voted out and replaced by tax-cut advocates.
- Most important, any measure that limits the opportunity to set taxes locally essentially closes the door to the possibility of making up losses in revenue from the state. This is why proposed constitutional amendments freezing taxes or even statutory freezes could mean deep cuts for a district like Whitefish Bay.

*What Do Parents Really Need to Know?*

- Wisconsin public school funding is in the 12th year of a very real squeeze.
- Enrollment is declining in Whitefish Bay and many other communities, largely because of lower birth rates.
- The most desirable outcome will be the product of involved, informed citizens making the best decisions possible by balancing the needs of children and the realities of money.

