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---- Press Advisory ----

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For More Information Contact:
Supervisor Melissa Sargent (220-2273)

Dane County Board Urges State Action on School Reform

This evening the Dane County Board of Supervisors enthusiastically approved a resolution urging the Wisconsin Legislature to make comprehensive changes in the way schools are funded. The Board encouraged the Legislature to consider revenue sources other than the local property tax to support the diverse needs of students and school districts.

“I hear over and over again from Dane County residents that investing in education is a priority, said County Board Supervisor Melissa Sargent, District 18, the primary sponsor of the resolution.

“However, people tell me they do not like the overreliance on property taxes to fund education – pitting homeowners against children,” she added.

For the last 17 years, the state funding formula has produced annual shortfalls resulting in program cuts to schools. In 2009-2010, cuts in state aid resulted in a net loss of over \$14 million in state support for students in Dane County, shifting the cost of education increasingly to property taxpayers. More and more districts are forced to rely on either program cuts or sometimes divisive referenda. In fact, voters rejected school referendums in five districts Tuesday, while just two were approved.

“The future of our children and our community is dependent on the development of an equitable system for funding public education; a system the recognizes the diverse needs of our children and does not put the funding burden on the backs of our taxpayers, said Madison Metropolitan School



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Board member Arlene Silvera. “I appreciate the leadership of the County Board in raising awareness of this critical need and in lobbying our state legislators to make this happen,” she said.

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Jeffery Ziegler a Member of the Marshall Public School District Board of Education and Jim Cavanaugh, President of the South Central Federation of Labor, both emphasized the need to get the attention of state officials in statements supporting the resolution. Ziegler described how state inaction has forced Board Members to make decisions that harm education.

State legislators can apparently decide to just not make the tough decisions that need to be made. School boards have a responsibility to keep our schools functioning and delivering the best education they can under the circumstances, knowing full well that those decisions will have a negative effect on the education of the children in their community.

Cavanaugh observed that the consensus that reform is needed has not led to action and pointed to the important role local governmental bodies can play in changing this by following the lead of the Dane County Board

“ Legislators of all political stripes acknowledge that Wisconsin's system for funding public schools is broken. Yet, there doesn't appear to be the political will to address this very complicated issue. Perhaps they need a nudge from the various local units of government.”

In passing this resolution, Dane County *is* taking the lead on a critical statewide issue. Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) board member Thomas J. Mertz said that WAES thanked the Dane County Board and said that WAES will seek similar resolutions from communities around the state in the coming months.

"All around Wisconsin districts are hurting and we've been working hard to bring the need for reform to the attention of state officials," said WAES board member Thomas J. Mertz. "Hearing from local officials might do the trick," he concluded.

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