



The Manitowoc Progressive

The Voice of the Manitowoc County Democratic Party

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September 2011

Public Education



FROM THE EDGE OF THE CHAIR

Kerry Trask - Public Education

Once again we are at the beginning of another school year and should be feeling some of the optimism and expectation that has traditionally accompanied the renewal of this annual cycle. In our culture there has been no institution more important for sustaining our democracy or more influential in shaping our collective character than the public schools. More than even the move to conquer the new frontier, or the industrial revolution - public education has driven the development of our economy and provided a pathway upward for the personal advancement of our people.

There is nothing more quintessentially American than the public school. It existed *nowhere* before it first appeared in 17th century colonial New England, where public education, available to everyone, produced a society with the highest literacy rates for both men and women anywhere in the entire world. Eventually public schools moved west when the Continental Congress, in a burst of enlightened legislating, passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 which mandated the establishment of public education and set aside vast land grants for its support in the territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, north of the Ohio River. As a result, there were public schools in Wisconsin even before there was a Wisconsin, and wherever such schools existed prosperity increased and opportunity prevailed. Indeed, the benefits of American-style public education were so obvious and desirable that similar public school systems were created in Canada and then eventually throughout the Western world.

We in Wisconsin have a long and admirable tradition of public educational excellence all the way up through our technical colleges and world-renowned university system. Our schools and their students have consistently been among

Continued on page 2

Monthly Meeting

Monday, September 26th

7:00 PM

Time Out Bar and Grill

1027 N Rapids Road, Manitowoc

Public Invited



Jim Carlson

Mobilizing Wisconsin:

**Responding to Walker's Attacks on Educators,
Public Education, and the Rights of Educators
to Collective Bargain**

Carlson is the Director of Kettle Moraine Uniserve Council, the regional chapter of WEAC. The Wisconsin Education Association Council represents the public policy, labor and professional interests of its 92000 members. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education, Northern Illinois University; a Master's Degree in Industrial and Labor Relations, UW-Milwaukee; and is a winner of the Melvin Lurie Memorial Prize for Excellence in Scholarship.

This is a very important meeting! Bring a friend!

Public Education

the very best in the entire nation. This defines who we are, what we value, and reflects the excellence embedded in our way of life. But that tradition is now under the most severe attacks ever faced in its history—destructive attacks inflicted by Scott Walker and his radical right-wing wrecking crew.

It is primarily because of those attacks that we are beginning this new school year with a record loss of our most experienced teachers. This year teacher retirements have nearly doubled, increasing from 2,527 in 2010, a rather typical year, to 4,935 this current year. The attrition rate in the UW System is even more severe with the number of retirements jumping from 480 in 2010 to 1,091 this year. Indeed, the number of public employees hanging it up after productive careers increased by 93% over last year, and suddenly we are facing a substantial brain drain in all of our public institutions. ***These losses will inevitably erode this state's quality of life.***

This hemorrhaging of talent is, of course, directly related to the meat axe approach Walker and the Republicans took to the financing of public education. The carnage amounts to over a billion dollars: \$834 million cut from the public schools, \$250 million from the UW System, and \$72 million (or 30% of their over all budget) stripped from the technical colleges at a time when work force retraining is desperately needed and employers are crying out for a much greater supply of skilled workers. This was all done in the state where starting salaries for public school teachers ranks 30th in the country—the absolute lowest in the Midwest. But that was not bad enough. Walker then rubbed salt into those wounds by giving huge tax breaks and give-a-ways to corporations to alleviate the suffering of billionaires.

On top of that came the near-lethal, politically motivated body blows to the teachers' union, stripping away their rights to have some say about their conditions of employment and repealing gains teachers had struggled to achieve over the past fifty years.

But to me the cruelest cuts of all were Walkers unusually hostile, mean-spirited efforts to malign teachers and degrade the value of what they do. Stuck with the tasks of cleaning up much of the mess we have made of this society, from feeding our school children their breakfasts to healing the racial divisions that fracture our communities, public-school teaching is one of the hardest jobs a person can do and most of the people doing it desperately want to make a positive difference. Yet Walker characterized them as being some parasitic “new privileged class” and then cynically used them as scapegoats upon whom he heaped much of the blame for the state's financial woes. Then,

when UW-Madison history professor William Cronon implied criticism to some of his methods, the Republicans, in their worst Joe McCarthy tradition, tried to silence him with threats, intimidation, and insults.

Around the world it has been clearly documented many times over that in national societies with the highest performing educational systems, respect for teachers and what they contribute to society is a consistently and indispensable element in that success. Yet Walker, for selfish political gains, weakened the very foundation of public education in Wisconsin with his denigrating, cheap shots at our teachers. And, Republicans clearly like this kind of politics. It plays so well to the right wing's long standing hostility towards government and a move away from a framework for democracy. The public schools have fallen prey to their attacks, a movement that accelerated when the schools stopped praying and began teaching evolution and sex education. Indeed, many Republicans would like nothing better than to privatize the whole lot of them. And that may still happen here, in Wisconsin, unless we Democrats close ranks to defend our now badly wounded public schools. ■



Has the push to use public funds for private education ever been greater?

What's Happening with Teachers Pay in Wisconsin?

By Bob Jome

The following information is from a WEAC publication in February, 2011, stating some of the facts concerning teacher salaries in Wisconsin at that point in time:

New data just released by the National Education Association shows the average salary for Wisconsin teachers has dropped to 23rd nationally, down from 21st one year ago. That is the lowest ranking going back to 1963, the oldest data on record.

The average salary, which includes annual step increases for longevity and lane changes for educational attainment, was \$51,264. Fifty-two percent of Wisconsin teachers hold master's degrees and the average teacher has 16 years experience.

Once ranked 15th, teacher pay was capped in 1993 and has fallen ever since. Where teachers once received 103 percent of the national average in pay, they now receive only 93 percent.

In the last decade, real earnings for Wisconsin teachers declined by 2.3 percent. Teachers earn less today than they did a decade ago. Wisconsin ranked 46th nationally in salary change, with 45 states experiencing larger increases in income.

Starting pay in Wisconsin, which lands at \$33,800, lost 5 percent to inflation, so that new teachers today earn \$1,225 dollars less than they did in 1992. Wisconsin ranks 30th nationally on starting pay, lower than teachers in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Minnesota in the Midwest. Teachers in general have the lowest starting pay of any profession requiring a college degree.

Teacher pay is falling compared to standard economic measures like inflation and per

capita income, pay is falling relative to other teachers nationally, and Wisconsin teachers today are in the bottom 40 percent of all states for starting pay.

The "Tools"

Now that Scott Walker and his cronies have given local units of government the "tools" to "balance their budgets", things are going to get much worse for Wisconsin's teachers and public employees in general. The harsh reality is that local budgets are being "helped" by heaping the load on the backs of employees who now have no right to bargain the effects.

Retirement contributions made on behalf of public employees (the employee's share) were negotiated in good faith by both parties in lieu of salary – saving the employer money in that a dollar spent didn't have the roll-up of payroll tax. Those payments will now come from the take home pay of the employee – while the salary figure may stay the same, buying power in a desperate economic environment will definitely be reduced. The same scenario is reflected in increased health insurance payment – negotiated in lieu of salary as a cost saver for the employer and a benefit for the employee.

The Results????

So what will this mean for education in Wisconsin? No one can predict exactly what the outcome will be, but some early indicators are surfacing. Teacher retirements, compared to previous years, have tripled in many areas of the state – quality, experienced teachers leaving as a result of the changes – valuable mentors for young staff no longer available.

What will happen to teacher recruitment and retention?

Will the "best and brightest" opt for a profession that is moving backward in salary and benefits?

Will this be good for the education of the children of Wisconsin over the long haul?

You be the judge...

Quotable Quote:

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance!"

*Derek Bok, Harvard University President.
A remark in Ann Landers syndicated column, March 26, 1978.*

Local GOP Circulates Lies

– Black Lies

By Jim Smith

During the Manitowoc County Fair, I obtained a copy of *DON'T BE FOOLED: WHAT ARE THE FACTS, WHAT IS THE TRUTH* that was being distributed by the Republican party of Manitowoc County. The folded heavy stock paper did not have an author's name or sources for any of the "facts." And, this introductory quote was attributed to Abraham Lincoln:

"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. Thi [sic.] great point is to bring them the real facts."

Couched behind this quote however, Republicans are spreading lies—black lies.

The pamphlet claims the following statements about education are facts:

"Collective bargaining forced excessive, unsustainable spending for public employees, including teachers—purchase of very expensive health insurance through the teacher's union insurance provider (WEA), retirement at 55 with full benefits, full benefits for some part time employees, generous sick pay allowances, etc. Now benefits are more in line with the private sector. Because of the new law, our schools have opportunities they have never seen before! In many schools, class sizes are smaller, and teachers are being hired, not being laid off. Programs are being added. Budgets are being balanced with surpluses occurring in many schools without increases to our already high property taxes. The best teachers will be rewarded from the money saved!!! Teachers will be retained based on performance, not seniority. **THEY ARE NOT CUTS! THEY ARE REFORMS**"

These statements are not facts; they are black lies under the guise of assumptions, generalizations, and simplifications. They are without documented sources and are presented anonymously.

I would like to point out a few facts to clear these muddy waters:

- WEAC [Union] and WEA Trust (Insurance) are two

different entities. It is against federal and state law for the Trust to "funnel" money to WEAC. It has never done so and never will. The Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance audits the Trust's books on a regular basis.

- The WEA Insurance has seen rate increases below the national averages for the past three years.
- If any school districts went from a deficit to a surplus, it was because its employees took an 8% - 10% decrease in pay through increased insurance and retirement contributions; [and reductions in staffing throughout the school districts].
- Very few teachers retire at 55. Most retire between 60 and 65 with between 37 and 42 years of experience. This year may have been an exception. The numbers are not in for retirement by age, but this year with Governor Walker's introduction of Wisconsin Acts 10 and 32 in the spring, 4,935 public employee retirements took place—double the two previous years.¹
- Anyone who asserts that no teachers have been laid off and everyone received a raise is not living in the real world. Layoffs and positions not filled from attrition are seen in school districts throughout the state and every teacher, ESP personnel, and almost all administrators will take a significant cut in pay next year.
- If teachers are being hired, they are being hired to replace retiring teachers. I feel certain many school boards--in order to stay within the budget--will be hiring young teachers directly out of college on the bottom of the pay scale.²
- When I retired from teaching in 1999, my school allowed an accumulation of 120 days sick leave. That year there were six instructors retired and the average number of unused sick days accumulated was 116. We were not paid for unused sick days. Teachers often go to work sick because they want to stay on schedule.
- One of the grossest falsehoods in the Republican list of "facts" is the mention that there will be smaller classes. It has been reported 32.58 school positions in Manitowoc County have been cut. These positions, coupled with the large number of experienced teachers retiring, certainly will make for larger class sizes.
- Programs are being downsized, and eliminated – not added. Note, among other positions, there are reductions in special education, consumer education, Spanish, art, music Title 1, and technology.³
- The last two sentences on the Republican list of "facts" had to originate from people not in education. There at present is no workable system to rate performance of teachers. [Hiring and firing at will rather than

Continued on Page 5

seniority will allow for biases not based on merit, but along political and personal ideologies.]

Is it advantageous to increase class size, to force out the most experienced and talented teachers and support personnel from our schools, to hurt new teachers by not giving them the support they need to be successful, and to hurt the image of the Wisconsin Education System by political chicanery? And who is hurt the most?

Obviously, our children will receive less of an education than they would have received before Walker went into office.

Poor Abraham Lincoln, how he must have rolled over in his grave when he had his name connected with this Republican pamphlet. To save Lincoln further embarrassment, the Republican authors should identify themselves, support their statements, and list their sources. Calling a statement a fact does not make it a fact. Our students deserve a better society than a society based on black lies. Wisconsin needs truth—not lies.

¹ Wisconsin Retirement System. “New faces to greet students in state” Manitowoc *Herald Times Reporter* Sept 1, 2011.

² “State aid cuts make budget difficult,” by Mark Swanson in the September 4, 2011, issue of the Manitowoc *Herald Times Reporter*.

³ Ibid.

Calendar of Events

Mon, Sep 26 th	Jim Carlson, KMUC - Monthly Membership Meeting, 7:00, Time Out Sports Bar and Grill
Mon, Oct 3 rd	Executive Committee Meeting - 6:00 PM - Pizza Garden
Sat, Oct 8 th	Think Tank – 9:30 AM, St James Episcopal Church
Mon, Oct 24 th	Monthly Membership Meeting, TBA
Mon, Nov 7 th	Executive Committee Meeting - 6:00 PM - Pizza Garden
Sat, Nov 12 th	Think Tank – 9:30 AM, St James Episcopal Church

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