1) **Welcome** to the group from Ellen Lindgren, and from Jeri McGinley hosting with her group, School Funding Reform for Wisconsin from Stevens Point.

There were 46 people present. For the next meeting we will have a virtual attendance option.

2) **Introductions**

3) **History and overview**

Jeff Leverich gave a summary of the origins of the group and of the School Finance Network (SFN) that formed during the Doyle administration.

SAA, WASDA, WASB, and some community interest groups including the Wisconsin PTA, Association for Equity in Funding, the Fair Aid Coalition, MPS, MMSD, and the Institute for Wisconsin’s Future. SFN put a proposal to the then Governor but it was rejected due in large part to the economic situation. Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Tony Evers involved the SFN in creating a school-funding reform plan called “Fair Funding for Our Future.”

Tom Beebe, of IWF, and Jeff Leverich, of WEAC, looked to expand the conversation beyond simply school funding and to make it all encompassing of all the stakeholder groups in public education. This is a loose network. Different partner organizations might have a different kind of emphasis within the broad framework of the group.

The budget is going to be released on Tuesday (is now released), and we already know that the University of Wisconsin System is going to see a cut of $300 million to its budget (and we now know public K-12 schools will also see sizeable aid reductions). There are two accountability bills that have already been put out there, one in each house of the Legislature. There will be a heavy hit to public education where the expansion of vouchers will mean that money that would go to public schools will instead go to the independent and charter schools.

**We have settled on four essential elements to push in this legislative round** around which we are united:

- We need less testing
- Restore state funding for special education to one-third.
- We need a moratorium on the expansion of vouchers
- We need to restore per-pupil funding ….. at least a cost-of-living increase.
Strategy = build public awareness. There is a knowledge gap. 90 percent of people couldn’t tell you how high the stakes are for public education, so even though many people deeply care about it, they don’t know that public education is going to be so greatly affected.

How we engage in raising that awareness is up to each individual group. (see handout)

There might be some gains around the edges in this budget cycle, but it is going to be a four-year struggle because the present majority in the Legislature. Our victories are likely to be limited. This will not be a one-and-done; every action we take needs to enable us to grow and be sustainable so we can take these issues forward and be successful. Steps we can take to today need to be those that can take us further down that road.

The current membership is 170 people on this email. These are the point people.

4) Updates from the field. People are asked to say something about their group and what they have been doing. We are also going to hear reports from the workgroups and committees that have been working.

An important element of this is to document what is going on in communities so we can tell the real stories of exactly what is going on in schools and the impact of the changes that the Governor is implementing.

Stevens Point (School Funding Reform for Wisconsin) – Jeri McGinley
We put out a community survey designed to allow people to gather information, to empower groups, and to bring the problems to people’s attention. 4000 responses in less than 3 weeks. It asked about funding issues and legislative priorities. We had zip codes in the survey so we can chart where they are from in the state. We got 2000 comments, we got 1300 addresses that we can use to update people with the facts. At the end of our emails there is an ask – contact your legislature and tell them what you think. The legislature received an unprecedented level of email prior to AB1. We are looking for a way to represent these comments in a respectful way and get this out there. Bookmarks handed out at the square. Recall effort is underway in Stevens Point on the school board.

Fox Cities Advocates for Public Education - Marcia Engen
They are going to do a local survey as well as the one from School Funding Reform for Wisconsin. This went out to 1400 people. This was a great motivator not just for its impact on the state but also for growing our group.
**Wausau area - Mary Jarvis**
The survey was very educational and I passed it on to a lot of people. As a result we have Julie Mead in Wausau on Feb. 26 to talk about the impact of vouchers in Milwaukee. Her research will inform people about what the impact will be for public schools. On March 12 we have Jay Heck from Common Cause on the impact of big money in politics.

**School board members action at the education convention for WASB – Susan Fox**
We gathered another 30-some names that we can add to the building of our communications list (have been added). School Board members who are part of WPEN had a handout on resolutions that people could pass, all of which were based on WASB policies that the board has already agreed to (the handout was shared with the group), and suggestions for how to spread this beyond the legislature to our communities.

**AFT Wisconsin – Kim Kohlhaas**
We worked with the AFL to set up 1,300 phone calls to members of which 61 were translated into the patch-through calls. We had so many questions from members and a great level of engagement. We asked them to find one community member to share this with.

**Todd Price – National Louis University**
Gave testimony, but also took the step of setting up a personal conversation with the legislator. It is time to get with our representatives.

**GRumps - Nan Brien**
Group started in support of 2008 Madison Metropolitan School District referendum. Their membership is 300 older people in Madison. They encourage direct engagement with legislators and lobbying efforts. Their website has a lot of information and videos on what is going on ([www.madcitygrumps.com](http://www.madcitygrumps.com))

**WEAC Region 7 – Ted Kraig**
Blast emails 14,000 in number. We are having local leaders approach school administration and board members, as well as community members to get them involved. Lots of our members know more than the general populace, but they still are short of a sense of what the real implications are. We have two districts where we are looking to dig deeper and create a more permanent coalition of stakeholder groups as part of the Focus Districts initiative. Milwaukee teachers have a big event on February 7th. Message: attacking Milwaukee Public Schools is attacking all the public schools.

**Oregon School Board and Progressives – Charles Uphoff**
Trying to model collaborative relations between school stakeholders and the board of education. Looking at a referendum in November to fund the new compensation system for teachers that could be groundbreaking.

**Middleton – Ellen Lindgren**
Looking to set up a forum with Julie Mead in Dane County.

**Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance – Jerry Fiene**
The group has 143 school districts, CESAs, and other groups. Rural schools are at risk and we have to educate the general public. I presented to the town’s association as part of that education. I was invited to present to the state convention for the Wisconsin Farmers Union. This resulted in the op ed that their President wrote to *The Country Today* online. Emphasized how important the grassroots efforts are in the overall push for positive change. [http://www.thecountrytoday.com/opinions/guest_opinions/article_b683327e-a58e-11e4-b880-53677c4f94f6.html](http://www.thecountrytoday.com/opinions/guest_opinions/article_b683327e-a58e-11e4-b880-53677c4f94f6.html)

**Sun Prairie Action Resource Coalition - Heather Bourenane**
We have 500 members and are continuing to build on our reputation as people who care about education and the community. Our food program in the school district has been officially adopted by the Sun Prairie School District. We have a number of forums and we have a show on the community channel that we have been using to try and get information about there. A big push is about maintaining local community control. This creates a bridge we are hoping to use with the local Tea Party group. Don’t underestimate the power of a press-release. Local papers often reprint this without looking too hard at it. Even if they do, any part of it that gets in print is extremely helpful. Our perspective is rarely shown in these papers otherwise.

We have about 100 members, a website, and e-mail list. We try to advocate for our local public schools and the situation more generally to inform people. We have hosted two forums. The first was on the ABCs of school vouchers. The second was for legislative candidates to share their perspectives on educational issues. We are planning a forum with our current board members where they can talk about these issues. We also try to directly support and advocate for our teachers in small ways. We know a lot of people in the local business community and we continue to try and involve them. CAPE has Facebook page. [www.facebook.com/CitizenAdvocatesforPublicEducation](http://www.facebook.com/CitizenAdvocatesforPublicEducation)

**WEAC – Jeff Leverich**
Update on the Focus District plan. WEAC regions are: Region 1, River Falls; Region 2, Wausau, Stevens Point; Region 3, Ashwaubenon; Region 4, La Crosse; Eau Claire;
Milwaukee Public Schools; Region 5, Ripon, Reedsburg; Region 6, Beloit; Region 7, West Allis/South Milwaukee; and Green Bay.

**Port Edwards – Joe Clark**

We’re trying to help folks understand that declining enrollment in Port Edwards means declining dollars. The school board members have a consortium in the local area, and will get together to invite the elected Senator and Assembly people to learn from them and talk to them about the problems we are experiencing. Getting a dialogue with these legislators is otherwise extremely difficult. We came to the meeting here today to learn what we can do. We need to get the newspaper to come to the meetings again, as well as to broadcast the school board meetings which has lapsed. When we have an occasion to interface with elected legislators (something that every elector could do) we need to early in the conversation, ask them point blank: “Do you, as an elected official in this state, support strong locally controlled public schools – yes or no?” It is a simple question and they need to be held accountable for their answer …. and what they actually do.

**Oconto Falls School District– Dave Polashek**

We invited legislators to meet with us between the election and the start of the new legislative session. We invited them to the school board meeting and they came in part because we are newly in their districts due to redistricting. Senator Tom Tiffany told us he supported the voucher program. All of the board members asked him how that helped the people in the constituency. Of course it doesn’t. Due to the cuts two years ago we are stressing how much funding we have lost.

**Stevens Point League of Women Voters – Michele Bjella**

This group can be allies and co-sponsors as they are generally really supportive. Members contact legislators with e-mails, snail mail, and phone calls. It is a 3 for 1. For example, if there are five people they can get 15 “touches.” All of these touches are logged in the legislative efforts are logged.

5) **Update on the hiring process.** We have reached our fundraising goal and we are now in a position to interview and appoint someone to this position. We are going to go into grant writing as well as put other money that might come in into sustaining this position. Boards should be encouraged to support this financially.

6) **Legislative update.** Chris Thiel gave an update from his position as a lobbyist for MPS. We are probably a little ahead from where we thought we would be after three weeks.

   On accountability, it is imperative that we continue to communicate that all publicly-funded students take the same test. The best research out there about Milwaukee
demonstrates that students in the voucher sector that come into MPS tend to be the poorer and poorer-performing students, and yet when they are in the public schools we see those scores go up. The fight right now is whether there will be a single test. It is a simple apples-to-apples system which shouldn’t be hard for people to support.

The Legislature is using accountability as the rhetorical vehicle because they don’t want to call it “voucher expansion,” despite the fact that they passed a bill on accountability last year. It was important for them to present this as the first bill, AB1, but it was just unworkable. The person introducing it couldn’t explain it and it took two hours. It wasn’t coherent. Representative Jeremy Theisfeldt admitted that what was being proposed wasn’t what they were actually going to try and pass.

Some things that we say to the general public make us sound like conspiracy theorists, but they are true. In this situation Rep. Christine Sinicki asked whether the bill introduced opened the door to for-profit charter schools, and in this case the legislator admitted it is. So, it isn’t a ‘conspiracy’.

As Jerry Fiene, of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (and WPEN) confirmed to WASB, vouchers are not a “Milwaukee thing.”

SB1 is much better than AB1: no letter grades, no sanctions, but the battle over a single test will go down to the wire.

The budget bill will not have an increase in the revenue limit (no increase in per-pupil funding). This likely means they might pass a minimal increase and ask us to throw them a parade. Voucher expansion and special education provisions will be in the budget. A member of the Joint Finance Committee admitted that there will be a structural surplus next year. A Milwaukee plan that has a lot of the elements of AB1 in it (and they said it wouldn’t cost anything) was proposed. It opens the door for for-profit charters.

The Smarter Balanced assessment will continue to be political football. Voucher expansion advocates don’t want it because of the whole accountability piece.

Questions:
- Are they pulling back on the common core because of the cost? That is the publicly stated reason. Jim Bender is arguing this is not about comparing schools but about measuring students. This is not about whether we like testing or not, it is – if there has to be a test, let’s have all students take it. This should not be offensive to anyone, it is apples-to-apples.
• What about background checks for charter schools? This is not a big discussion. The issue that is being debated about the legitimacy of expansion is that there is no local control.

7) **Long-Term Plans.** Part of the agenda is going to be set on Tuesday night (Feb. 2) in the Governors budget speech (for example, transportation aid, which would actually only amount to $5 million for the whole state). Broadly speaking there is a consensus about the messages that we are trying to get across, the increase in per-pupil funding, as well as an increase in aid for students with disabilities. It would help to get an early sense of what the CPI increase is likely to be.

   Ted Kraig – We need to find a way to plug into peoples’ values. This could be part of our long-term message guidance piece for the network.

   We have to stay focused on the long-term and build message discipline into everything we do. The WPEN workgroup on messages has put together some tools that we should all use in all of our communities. If we can’t have better discipline than our opponents then we cannot win in the long-term. We can get this out to the group.

8) **Meeting adjourned at 1pm.**

Thanks to Stevens Point for providing this great space. The next meeting is March 6 with the venue in Eau Claire to be confirmed. Mark your calendars now.