



Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance

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NEWS

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October 28, 2008

Public School Enrollments Continue to Decline WISTAX's *SchoolFacts08* Provides Comprehensive School Data

MADISON—In 2007-08, Wisconsin public schools enrolled 863,660 students, 0.5% fewer than in the prior year. This was the fifth consecutive decline, leaving enrollments 1.2% below their 2002-03 peak. A total of 265 districts (63%) had fewer students in 2008 than they did in 1999. These and other important facts about Wisconsin's schools can be found in the newly released *SchoolFacts08*, an annual publication of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX). *SchoolFacts* offers a variety of enrollment, spending, revenue, and test-score information for every school district in the state.

Since 1998-99, statewide enrollments are down 0.5%. However, many districts have had much larger declines. Fifty-one districts had declines exceeding 20%, with the largest drops in Florence (-34.4%), Alma (-33.8%), Mercer (-33.6%), Butternut (-33.2%), and Glidden (-32.8%). Another 96 districts had enrollments drop at least 10%. In contrast, 36 districts saw student numbers rise more than 20%, and another 33 had increases over 10%, WISTAX said.

School districts budgeted to spend about \$9.94 billion in 2007-08, or \$11,522 student. That was a 5.1% increase over 2006-07 per pupil spending. Since 1999, per student spending has grown an average of 4.0% per year.

In other SchoolFacts findings, WISTAX reports that most district spending was for instruction (\$6,739 or 58%), with smaller amounts going for building and grounds (\$1,120), administration (\$867), and capital expenditures/debt service (\$791). Spending on instructional support (+8.3%) rose the most in 2007-08, followed by pupil services (6.0%) and instruction (5.5%). Spending on transportation and building and grounds each increased 4.1%.

WISTAX researchers noted that, as a result of a delayed state budget and no increase in state aids, statewide school levies climbed 7.4% from the prior year. However, district-level changes varied widely. Forty districts levied less in 2007-08 than in the prior year. Twenty-two districts had increases of 20% or more, led by Blackhawk (67.6%), Prairie Farm (53.6%), Spooner (41.7%), Maple (40%), and Elmwood (31.2%).

Total fund balances were \$1.44 billion at the end of 2006-07, an increase of \$73.1 million, or 5.3%, over the prior year. A fund balance represents dollars not currently being used by the district. The money could be reserved to fund a future capital expenditure, to solve cash flow problems arising from slow receipt of

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state aid or property taxes, or to cover unexpected costs or revenue shortfalls (a rainy-day fund). Statewide, fund balances averaged 16.5% of expenditures.

The school district of Wausaukee was unique in that it had a negative balance at the end of 2006-07. Among remaining districts, balances ranged from less than 4% of expenditures in Edgar, Independence, New Berlin, and Wauzeka-Steuben to more than 60% in Beecher-Dunbar-Pembine, North Cape, Wabeno, and White Lake.

In addition to information on school finances and students counts, ***SchoolFacts08*** provides data on district demography, test scores, and staffing. WISTAX researchers noted that the percentage of students identified as disabled declined for the second consecutive year. A total of 14.5% of students were so identified, down 0.1 percentage points from the prior year and 0.3 points lower than in 2005-06. Nearly one-third (33.1%) of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch (one indicator of poverty in a district) in 2007-08, up from 25.0% in 1999-2000.

SchoolFacts is the state's most complete published collection of Wisconsin school district data. The 164-page book contains information on school district demography, test scores, revenues, spending, staffing, and much more. ***SchoolFacts08*** also contains summary data by cooperative educational service agency (CESA) and by district size. In addition, supplemental reports by athletic conference or for a customized group of districts can be ordered from WISTAX. Printing of ***SchoolFacts08*** was underwritten by a grant from Sentry Insurance Foundation, Inc., the charitable arm of Sentry Insurance a Mutual Company, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

SchoolFacts08 can be ordered by writing the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, WI 53704-5033, by calling 608.241.9789, or by visiting www.wistax.org. The price per copy is \$29.95, plus tax. Discounts are available for WISTAX donors and members and for purchases of five or more. □

(Editor's Note: An electronic version of this release is available at www.wistax.org.)