

***Peg Coyne, a real life teacher, comments on Gov. Walker and the Republican legislative majority's attack on public education in Wisconsin and the negative effect it has on teacher's morale and our kids.***

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MADISON - I write to address the attack on teachers by Governor Walker and the Republican legislative majority. They challenge teachers' competency and integrity. As a teacher, our "so called" lack of accountability, our "so-called" Cadillac benefits, our "so-called" inflated salaries, and our "so-called" tenure for life are being unjustifiably challenged.

Teachers' wages have not kept up with increasing inflation for years, and our fringe benefits have suffered greatly under Governor Walker. Tenure and similar provisions simply provide teachers with just cause protection and due process relative to improper discharge.

The Republican legislative majority espouses that these factors are to blame for the state budget woes. In February, 2011, the Governor dropped "the bomb", as he called it. The "bomb" (Act 10) was intended to solve the State's alleged budget problems. Walker said he would destroy our unions by "divide and conquer" techniques. Eventually, Walker's bomb would be the beginning of the Republican's mission to destroy public education in Wisconsin.

As I walked the square day after day in the winter and spring of 2011, to demonstrate the challenge by thinking people of the Governor's professed strategy, I couldn't help but wonder how Act 10 would impact the education of my students?

Walker said it was supposed to be about giving school districts in Wisconsin the "tools" to control costs. He claimed that the provisions of Act 10 were to allow more money for students, facilities, and materials by reducing employee costs. This would be accomplished by cutting wage increases to an amount way below the increase in the cost of living, and by increasing employee contributions toward health insurance premiums and retirement deposits. A demoralizing fact for educators and their families, many of whom were already suffering from

the effects of the 1993 Revenue Controls on school boards, and legislated limits on wage increases.

As a teacher activist, I attended school board meetings in Madison and other districts around the state. I listened to the angst the proposed legislation was causing both new and veteran educators. I listened to new educators explain how they would not be able to afford rent, payments for their car, and student loans. I heard how these "takeaways" would cause family income to shrink drastically, and in some extreme cases, would force educators into foreclosure on their homes and bankruptcy. And, I wondered how this stress on teachers would affect students. A teacher under stress does not help education.

Act 10 was also touted as a way to assess the educator's effectiveness. After all, good teachers can make a huge difference in students' lives. But a well-intended framework that was meant to guide teaching practices becomes a system of "gotcha" or a systematic way of rating teachers as not performing well.



Next, standardized testing of all students became "the answer" to what is allegedly wrong with public education. These two worlds of so-called teacher accountability and student testing are on a collision course to destroy public education.

Tying student test scores to teacher worth is the ultimate "gotcha" for both teachers and students. Why? Because standardized tests are often false prophets or plainly just for **profit**, or both. Such tests are not culturally relevant, do not accommodate students of different abilities, and are a colossal commitment of time (taking time away from instruction) and money. After almost constant testing from April 20th through May 29th, it is painfully apparent that my students' glazed-over eyes or emotional-meltdowns are the result of too much time testing and staring at extremely unengaging formats on computer screens.

Misplaced priorities (corporate driven education reform) propose that Common Core Curriculum

and high stakes testing solve the problems of the alleged “failing schools”. Those of us who are actually education experts know that these simple “fixes” are not what our students need. What do students need? Check with educators:

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Students need early childhood education, safe and healthy daycare settings.

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Well-rounded K-12 curriculum to include art, music, physical education, school libraries, playgrounds, updated facilities and technology to meet the needs of the whole child.

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A society that addresses poverty, opportunity gaps, family health care and nutrition, social justice and equity.

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School social workers and psychologists to assist with the negative impacts of poverty, family and societal dysfunction, and improper diet.

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Hope for the future.

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To be valued in their communities.

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...no simple fixes!

It is obvious that educators are not in the profession for greed. Rather, they truly want to educate children, guide students to reach their highest potential, and provide valued service to the community. Educators find joy and intangible rewards as they watch young people grow and blossom. Educators find value in learning, and in advanced education. These described political proposals, which not only de-value college degrees, hard-earned experience, expertise in child development and classroom management, are very discouraging to educators.

Isn't it ironic, that Legislators and the Governor with little or no advanced education or classroom teaching experience think they are qualified to write educational policy? In her article in the Washington Post, "**What the heck is going on with Wisconsin public education**", Valerie Strauss quoted Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers, "
*We are sliding toward the bottom (of the states) in standards for those who teach our students. It doesn't make sense. We have spent years developing licensing standards to improve the quality of the teacher in the classroom, which is the most important school-based factor in improving student achievement. Now (with the proposed legislation) we're throwing out those standards.*
" Strauss added, "Meanwhile, Walker hasn't said anything publicly that would make anyone think he doesn't agree with the education path on which the legislature has embarked."

What do educators want for students? The same things that good parents want for their children. An opportunity for a whole, positive, and healthy childhood. Opportunities to grow their intellect and nurture their talents. For the advancement of our State, as well as the children, we must provide our students the dignity of attending well-maintained, modern public schools with sufficient funding, balanced curriculum, and progressive pedagogy.

UW Dean of Education Julie Underwood and UW Education Professional Julie Mead wrote about these legislative proposals, "*It's wrong to rewrite education policy in the budget bill. We are deeply concerned by the education policy changes approved by the Wisconsin Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance. There is no research to show that any of these proposals would improve student learning. The changes continue a pattern of shifting tax dollars out of public schools in order to create a publicly funded entitlement to pay private school tuition. And finally, they were placed into the bill without sufficient notice and debate, subverting our democratic processes* ." Hooray for these highly respected professors speaking out!

At last, we must all stand up. Wisconsin, we must raise our voices in protest. We must listen to the voices of reason. We must join together educators, parents of public school students, GRUMPS, members of school boards across the state, and school superintendents.



We must join the efforts of State Senators Kathleen Vinehout, Jennifer Shilling, Dave Hansen, Janis Ringhand and Jon Erpenbach; Representatives Melissa Sargent, Dianne Hesselbein, Chris Taylor, Terese Berceau, Sondy Pope, Cory Mason, Gary Hebl and Dave Considine – all champions of education.

**Sen. Vinehout** recently wrote that she agrees with Governor Walker's comment, "*Our #1 priority gotta be to make (sic) sure that we make K-12 schools, public education in the state, a priority to make sure that they're held whole*
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**Vinehout said she agreed that public schools must be made whole, but she questions how the Governor could make such a comment when, for the first time in Wisconsin history, the Governor proposes no increase the state-imposed revenue controls on local school boards. She said she took the Governor's comment as an indication that he would adequately fund public schools, but instead he proposed huge state funding for private and parochial schools; $12,000 per pupil ($50 million for the next year) going to private and parochial schools**
***from the budget of the local public school district.***

As One Wisconsin Now Executive Director **Scot Ross** said, "*Governor Walker and legislative Republicans have proposed the largest cuts to public education in state history, and now the voucher program (public school funds to private and parochial schools) will suck up more state money* ."

**Stand Up! Raise Your Voices! An Educated Populace Benefits All Of Us!**

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