

MEMO TO REPORTERS: Scott Walker's Continued Education Distortions
FROM: Graeme Zielinski, WisDems Communications Director

Scott Walker's Continued Education Distortions

In Scott Walker's latest television ad, he features Jeff Knutson, a 4th grade teacher at Cottage Grove Elementary in the Monona Grove School District, who said:

"We figured if we didn't get layed off, our class sizes would become unmanageable, but that didn't happen."

"Thanks to his [Walker's] budget reforms, hundreds of teachers, like me, still have their jobs."

As was the case in Walker's two previous ads, the claims of this individual do not accurately reflect the very real consequences of Scott Walker's disastrous \$1.6 billion cut to K-12 public education.

The Monona Grove School District, where Knutson teaches 4th grade, lost \$1.21 million in state aid, representing a 10.07% reduction. Since the district is considered "property-rich," meaning that they have a high property value per student and receive less general school aid per student, their cut in aid is smaller.

But that doesn't mean they did not face tough choices as a result of Walker's cuts.

Despite being in a relatively good position, the Monona Grove School District was faced with a \$3 million budget deficit after Walker's reduction in aid. To balance their budget, the District relied on \$850,000 in one-time federal education stimulus money, nearly \$250,000 in one-time savings from consolidating two schools, across-the-board spending reductions and increased employee contributions to retirement and health care.

It is important to note, however, that the increased employee contributions were not a result of Walker's union-busting bill that forced concessions on Wisconsin workers. These increased contributions, in the same amount Walker mandated, were *bargained for* at the table. Because they knew shared sacrifice was a necessity, the Monona Grove Education Association re-opened their contract and negotiated with management to include the increased retirement and health care contributions, as the bargaining process has worked in Wisconsin for nearly seven decades.

Even after exhausting one-time fixes, MGSD was still left with a [nearly \\$500,000 deficit](#) and saw the following changes as a direct result of Walker's cuts:

- Increased class sizes in Grades K-3
- Increased class sizes in Grades 4-6
- Increased student-teacher ratio
- Net loss of 9.5 staff, 6 of whom were teachers

And next year will be worse.

As reported by the *River Falls Journal*, Monona Grove School Board President Susan Fox said her district lost a lot of teachers to retirement as did many Wisconsin schools. Many of teachers were not replaced, and Fox said she's bracing for a \$2 million revenue shortfall a year from now.

["We don't know what else we can cut," she said.](#)

This statement echoes the District's response to a survey of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators - "This year was difficult - creating a budget for next year will be staggering."

The District's budget as originally presented required layoffs. So in that respect Mr. Knutson may be right about Scott Walker's budget saving teacher's jobs - Walker so demonized the profession and set such uncertainty on wages and benefits for experienced teachers that they were forced into early retirement, meaning fewer teachers had to be laid off.

Background:

Analysis by the Department of Public Instruction shows that Scott Walker's budget reduces the revenue limit per pupil by 5.5% in FY12, eliminates several revenue limit exemptions such as school nursing, pupil transportation, safety equipment, and funds for school security officers data and reduces nearly all categorical aids by 10%, in addition to eliminating some programs outright.

Scott Walker's defense of his multi billion dollar cuts to public education is centered on isolated examples that seemingly prove his "tools" are working. But data released by the Department of Public Instruction paints a different picture.

The facts from the DPI's survey of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators¹:

- 4 in 10 students attend a district with higher class sizes in elementary grades.
- 7 of 10 students attend a district with fewer teachers
- 9 out of 10 students saw a cut in staff
- Half of all middle and high school students saw course reductions or increased class sizes in Career and Technical Education. The same for Art, Music, and Physical Education.
- More than 60% of our school districts say they see more drastic cuts coming
- And, perhaps most concerning, 4 of every 10 students saw cuts in core courses – science, mathematics, English, and social studies.

¹ Department of Public Instruction Survey of Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators – available to view online at <http://dpi.wi.gov/>