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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Milwaukee Educators Call on School Board to Put Children First in MPS Budget

Milwaukee – Educators in Milwaukee Public Schools have taken a position on the proposed FY2009 Budget, which calls on the School Board to protect children and advocate aggressively for school finance reform in Wisconsin.

Specifically, the position of city educators consists of three main points:

1. Cuts should be made as far away from the classroom as possible.
2. The School Board should work to change the state's funding formula to one that recognizes the differing needs of children throughout the state.
3. The School Board must put children first – not politics.

School Board action in recent months has created enormous financial pressure on local public schools. Most schools face serious cuts to their budgets for the 2008-09 school year. The Board during the 2007-08 school year:

1. Failed to raise the maximum funds allowed by law. This action not only affected the budget for the 2007-08 school year, but affects the district's ability to raise the additional funds necessary in future years under the current law.
2. Directed the MPS administration to submit a budget for 2008-09 with an increase of only 0.25% over last school year. As a result, the district's proposed budget is \$20.9 million below the state-imposed revenue limits.

“We witnessed the political pressure the School Board was under to reduce the levy, but the results of their political decision is now being felt in our schools” says MTEA President Dennis Oulahan.

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“The budget cuts that schools are being forced to make directly impact children: reduced art, music, physical education, and foreign language classes, a decrease in extracurricular activities, and larger class sizes,” says Oulahan. “All children, including those living in poverty in Milwaukee, deserve a great school with access to activities and academic courses that enrich their lives and help them reach their potential.”

“That’s why we are calling on the School Board this year to put children first, not politics,” says Oulahan.

MTEA recently adopted a legislative agenda that includes school finance reform as one of its top priorities.

“The long-term solution to this problem is reforming the school finance formula in Wisconsin,” say Oulahan. “That’s why it is one of our union’s top priorities.”

The current finance formula is based on the false assumption that all children across the state are the same, despite differing social, emotional and academic needs.

In MPS, one out of three children live in poverty; 77% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch in the 2006-07 school year; nearly 20% of students have special education needs; and nearly 2,000 children are homeless. Research has demonstrated that children with these circumstances cost more to educate. The state’s school finance formula should reflect that fact.

“The elected Milwaukee School Board has the status and the opportunity to work with elected officials in Milwaukee and Madison to reform the school funding system,” says Oulahan, “and we will work with them on this task.

“We cannot stand by and let the School Board make our students pay for their lack of action. The Board must advocate for change, and demand that MPS students have the same opportunity to receive a great education that students in more affluent communities have.”

The MTEA is encouraging school communities to attend budget hearings to advocate for their individual schools.

The MTEA is a labor union representing 8,000 teachers and other education professionals working in Milwaukee Public Schools. The union’s mission is to improve the lives of its members and the students and families they serve.

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