

WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK RK

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Marching 60 miles from Palmyra to Madison for Public Education – Walkers covered 30 miles in two days, local stories highlight journey

*March to move through Deerfield, Marshall, and Sun Prairie
before ending in Madison with rally at the Capitol on Tuesday.*

“When did it become acceptable to have little girls in pigtails go door-to-door to ask voters to spend money to fix a leaky roof and repair gym floors in the schools?”

Tara LeRoy, a parent in the Palmyra-Eagle district, kicked off the 60-mile walk to Madison on Saturday, June 22 with this powerful question to a crowd of hundreds gathered to see the marchers off. She attended the rally with her family and their pony Charlie, who also made the first leg of the journey with the marchers all the way to Hebron.

Palmyra-Eagle, a district that exceeds state expectations, faces dissolution after a failed referendum this spring.

LeRoy was joined by Palmyra-Eagle educator and parent Joel Tortomasi – as well as a sea of parents, board members, and educators in purple proudly representing the district they love, standing side by side with public education supporters from Milwaukee to Eau Claire and beyond.

Milwaukee Public Schools superintendent Dr. Keith Posely also spoke at the rally, reminding the crowd that “we have come together – rural, suburban and urban – for children. We must fund our future in the state of Wisconsin for our young people. We must invest in our children. They are truly worth it.” Summing up the central theme of the march, Posely stressed “*All* of our children deserve the best.”

Since Saturday morning, the march has moved from Palmyra to Hebron to Fort Atkinson to Cambridge to Deerfield, stopping at each point for a warm welcome and hot meal from local teams and short kick off rallies giving local communities a chance to tell their own stories.

At the lunch stop in Cambridge on Sunday, marchers heard from Cambridge parents, county board supervisors and Superintendent Dr. Bernie Nikolay, who joined the next leg of the march to Deerfield. The lesson that public education is a basic right to all “has been lost on decision makers in Madison and we are here to remind them of the value of a strong Wisconsin education system in Wisconsin and begins with a state education budget.” “The people of Cambridge know that a strong school system is synonymous with a strong community.” “The funding system we have in Wisconsin today is one of uncertainty and inadequacy.”

At each stop, speakers stressed the need for equitable and adequate funding, mental health and bilingual/bicultural aids, and to restore Wisconsin’s commitment to supporting students with disabilities, raising the reimbursement rate for special education students back to 60% as requested by Governor Evers.

The marchers depart Deerfield Tuesday morning for the home stretch to the Capitol – and will be joined by superintendents, board members, educators, parents and community members at each stop along the way. They’ll stop in Marshall Monday for a 12:30 lunch rally, where they will be joined by Marshall

Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Dan Grady and business manager Bob Chady, and educator as well a Deputy State Superintendent Mike Thompson from DPI, who plans to join the march to his hometown of Sun Prairie. The marchers will be greeted with a 5:00 dinner (open to all) and sign-making party hosted by the Support Sun Prairie Schools team at Patrick Marsh Middle School.

On Tuesday, they march moves from Sun Prairie's Patrick Marsh Middle school after an 8:30 am kickoff with local speakers (including superintendent Dr. Brad Saron and Sun Prairie Mayor Paul Esser), and moves to Madison East High School.

The lunch rally at East is expected to be attended by Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, and features a short rally with speakers Mike Hernandez, Principal of Madison East High School and Madison Metropolitan School District school board member Nicki Vander Meulen.

The two-mile final lap to the Capitol is expected to bring many more supporters together, and they will be joined by others waiting at the Captiol for a final rally scheduled to begin at 2:30 pm. The rally will feature remarks from State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski; Jen Cheatham, Madison Superintendent; Anna Moffit, Executive Director – NAMI Dane County; Raaven-Alysa Nash, James Madison Academic Campus, Community Schools Youth Council (Milwaukee); Emilio De Torre, ACLU of Wisconsin; Megan O'Halloran, Milwaukee School Board and Wisconsin Public Education Network's Heather DuBois Bourenane.

With the Assembly set to vote on the state budget on Tuesday, says Wisconsin Public Education Network director Heather DuBois Bourenane, marchers intend to send the following message: "It's finals week at the state Capitol, and we intend to hold lawmakers accountable for their education votes. Wisconsin has spoken. The will of the people is clear. The people have demanded you invest in our children and it's time to restore funding to our public schools."

Members of the public and all who care about demanding the schools our children deserve are invited to join the walk at any point – either to march or cheer the walkers along. For more information, visit: <http://www.wisconsinnetwork.org/blog/march>

Photos credits: Joe Brusky



Palmyra-Eagle parent Tara LeRoy with her daughter and pony.

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Milwaukee Public School board members Erica Siemsen and Megan O'Halloran, the catalyst for the March for the Schools our Children Deserve.



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