



That's a Wrap!

Legislative session saw many bills passed with significant impact on public education

The 2015-16 session of the Wisconsin Legislature is in the books and, once again, lawmakers introduced many bills with significant impacts on K-12 public education. The WASB officially registered a position on more than 80 bills, not including the myriad of education-related policy items included in the state budget bill.

The advocacy efforts of school board members and administrators this session led to the passage of several beneficial bills and to the defeat of several others that would have been detrimental to school districts. The WASB Government Relations (GR) team thanks you. We work hard to support you in your advocacy efforts and keep you up to date through our *Legislative Update* blog (wasblegupdate.wordpress.com),

social media and weekly emails.

Here is a status report on some of the notable K-12 bills introduced. A summary of the bill, the WASB's position and the result is provided. If the bill is listed as "passed," that means it was signed into law or will be soon. If the bill is listed as "dead," the proposal did not make it through the legislative process.

► **Board Members as Volunteer Coaches — AB 299/SB 217**

These bills allow school board members to be volunteer coaches and extracurricular activity supervisors under certain conditions. The WASB helped draft and support the bills after delegates to the 2015 WASB Delegate Assembly approved what is now WASB Resolution 6.22.

WASB Position: Supported
Result: **PASSED**

► **Building Materials Sales Tax Exemption — AB 313/SB 227**

These proposals allow contractors to directly purchase construction materials on behalf of schools and other tax-exempt clients without paying sales tax. The WASB supported the bills and registered in favor of them at two public hearings.

WASB Position: Supported
Result: **PASSED**

► **Referenda Restrictions — AB 481/SB 355**

Under these bills, unless a school board experiences a natural disaster or fire, boards could have only scheduled a referendum vote on a spring or general election. A spring election is held annually on the first Tuesday in April while the fall general election occurs in even-numbered years on

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the Tuesday following the first Monday in November.

The bills also would have required a two-year waiting period following a failed referendum during which a district would be prevented from going to referendum or utilizing certain types of borrowing.

The WASB's stance was that school boards should continue to have the flexibility to make these decisions locally without state interference.

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **DEAD**

► **Student Mental Health — AB 664/SB 591**

These bills remove barriers to providing outpatient mental health services at school. The most recent WASB Delegate Assembly approved Resolution 16-14: Mental Health Supports in January to “provide adequate professional mental health supports in our schools.”

WASB Position: Supported
Result: **PASSED**

► **Testing Opt-outs — AB 239/SB 193**

Under current law, upon request from a parent or guardian, a school board, must excuse a pupil in grades 4, 8, 9, 10, or 11 from taking the state assessment adopted by the state superintendent that is required to be

administered to pupils in that grade. Decisions about excusing a student in grades 3, 5, 6, 7, or 12 from testing are left to local board policy discretion.

These bills, as amended, would have required a school board, upon request of a parent or guardian, to excuse a pupil enrolled in grades 3 to 12 from taking any examination required under state or federal law, except for a test required for high school graduation. The bills also prohibited the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) from considering how many pupils enrolled in a school or school district have been excused from taking assessments required under state or federal law when calculating annual school and school district report cards.

The WASB had concerns that these bills also required school boards to annually provide yet another set of burdensome and lengthy notices relating to assessments.

WASB Position: Neutral
Result: **DEAD**

► **Energy Efficiency Revenue Limit Adjustment — AB 449/SB 337**

These bills would have ended the school district revenue limit exemption for energy efficiency projects.

Currently, a school board may adopt a resolution to increase the revenue limit otherwise applicable to

a school district in any school year by an amount spent by the district in that year on a project to implement energy efficiency measures or to purchase energy efficiency products.

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **DEAD**

► **Changing Rooms/Transgender Students — AB 469/SB 582**

These bills were an unfunded state mandate dictating school restroom and locker room access.

The proposals would have effectively barred transgender students from using school bathrooms or changing rooms assigned to the gender with which they identify but is not their biological gender.

The WASB's position was that these decisions should be handled at the local level on a case-by-case basis by board members who are familiar with the individual situations and community values. These are sensitive and complicated issues that arise in school districts with a myriad of different facilities that are not amenable to a “one-size-fits-all” solution from the state. We noted that several Wisconsin school districts have addressed this situation through local school board policy-making.

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **DEAD**



► **Crime Reporting Mandate — AB 517/SB 470**

These bills would have imposed a statewide mandate on high schools to report certain crime-related incidents to the DPI.

The WASB expressed concerns that the bills placed the responsibility for reporting these incidents on school officials rather than the law enforcement agencies which collect these statistics and provided no additional funding for school districts to cover the additional costs and responsibilities the bill mandates.

We also had concerns that these bills use a local ordinance definition of “disorderly conduct” rather than the definition in state statutes. Local ordinances can differ widely in their definitions of disorderly conduct, making comparisons inaccurate or misleading.

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **DEAD**

► **Voucher Revenue Limit Authority — AB 751/SB 615**

As introduced, these proposals made technical changes to the special needs scholarship program created in the 2015-17 state budget. The WASB was neutral on the original bills but strongly opposed amendments that dramatically reduced the revenue limit authority of the 142 public school districts that currently have resident pupils participating in the statewide and Racine voucher programs.

Based on efforts by the WASB and others, the reductions were scaled back significantly. While school districts impacted by the loss of aid to voucher schools will lose revenue limit authority compared to current law, they will lose less funding authority (about \$5.3 million in the first year) than they would have under either of the two plans initially proposed by Assembly leaders (\$22.1 million and \$14.2 million).

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **PASSED**

► **Concealed Carry on School Grounds — AB 846/SB 589**

Current law prohibits a person, including a concealed carry weapon permit holder, from possessing a firearm on the grounds of a school. These bills would have opened school grounds to concealed weapons carried by permit holders but would allow a school board to continue to post certain school buildings where instruction is conducted to prohibit carrying weapons into those buildings much as they do under current law.

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **DEAD**

► **School Accountability — AB 1/SB 1**

The Senate and Assembly were unable to come to an agreement on an accountability proposal early in 2015.

Among other differences, one key sticking point was that the Assembly wanted sanctions for failing schools while the Senate pushed a version without sanctions. The WASB preferred the Senate approach of focusing on improvement rather than punishment. Since the houses were unable to agree on an approach, the much heralded accountability bills went nowhere.

WASB Position: Opposed AB 1;
Supported SB 1
Result: **DEAD**

► **Academic Excellence Scholarships — AB 314/SB 228**

Currently, each high school in the state, regardless of its enrollment, is eligible to have an Academic Excellence Scholarship recipient although the number of scholarships per school is based on enrollment size. These bills would have roughly doubled the value of these scholarships. The WASB agreed that the scholarship amount has failed to keep pace with tuition increases and

welcomed this increase. However, the WASB opposed two controversial changes under the proposal that would have: 1) added a requirement that students receive a minimum score of 28 on the ACT exam; and 2) provided that if no students in a high school meet these new qualifications, the scholarship must be reallocated to a student from another high school in the same enrollment size category.

WASB Position: Opposed
Result: **DEAD**

► **Sparsity Aid — AB 824/SB 664**

These bills alter sparsity aid eligibility to allow two school districts (Crivitz and Spring Valley) that received sparsity aid last year to receive it this year even though their enrollment (with summer school enrollment factored in) rose above the 725 student eligibility limit. There is enough money in the sparsity aid appropriation to allow these two districts to receive full payments this year without reducing payments to other qualifying districts. In future years, these bills raise the enrollment threshold from 725 to 745.

WASB Position: Supported
Result: **PASSED**

■ **Thank You**

Thank you again for all of your efforts this session on behalf of your students and schools. For a more complete list of education-related bills, you can access the WASB Bill Tracking Chart via the Legislative Update (<https://wasblegupdate.wordpress.com/>). The chart is a useful resource that includes bill numbers, the WASB’s position and relevant Delegate Assembly Resolutions.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact the GR team: Dan Rossmiller (drossmiller@wasb.org) and Chris Kulow (ckulow@wasb.org). ■