

## A Look Back at the WASB Fall Events

Here is a look at the events that the WASB held this fall. Full event recaps along with presentations can be found on the WASB website ([wasb.org](http://wasb.org)). Select “Meetings and Events” and then “Event Recaps.” Member log-in may be required.

### Legislative Advocacy Conference | Nov. 7, Stevens Point

The 2015 Legislative Advocacy Conference, held Nov. 7 in Stevens Point, gave board members and administrators the opportunity to hear from researchers, experts, and lawmakers on public education issues and provided attendees with hands-on strategies for gathering community support for their schools.

Michael R. Ford, an assistant professor of public administration at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, shared research from a study he completed last year in which he surveyed Wisconsin school board members and asked them how they define accountability. He found that when board members serving together share common definitions on accountability, student test scores are higher.

“Wisconsin school board members have diverse views on accountability,” Ford said. “There is no one correct view. What matters is that boards have a consistent approach.”

Bob Lang, director of the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau reviewed the 2015-17 state budget and its effect on K-12 education and highlighted trends in state finances that will impact funding for K-12 education going forward. Notable trends include the increasing amounts the state is spending on medical assistance and the state’s inability to address an imbalance between growing state spending on transportation projects and revenues coming into the state’s transportation fund. Those revenues have been essentially flat since lawmakers ended automatic indexing of the gas tax in 2005.

One surprising takeaway for many attendees was the realization that because lawmakers have not agreed on a way to increase transportation fund revenues, they may increasingly turn to



the state’s general fund to finance future transportation project costs, which, it turn, would mean less money would be available for public schools.

Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations director, provided a legislative update on the status of various education bills in Madison. Rossmiller also led an advocacy workshop in which attendees worked in small groups on hands-on activities designed to help them build stronger relationships with legislators and encourage community advocacy work.

The conference featured two separate legislative panels of state lawmakers: one Democratic and one Republican. Chris Kulow, WASB Government Relations specialist, moderated the panels and asked the legislators to articulate their vision for public education and to state their positions on a number of proposals pending before the legislature.

On the Democratic panel, state Rep. Sondy Pope (D-Cross Plains) and Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) sharply disagreed with the direction of majority Republicans in furthering vouchers and not providing schools with an appropriate

level of resources. On the topic of local control, both lawmakers said they support it and oppose state mandates in general. They also opposed proposed legislation to restrict school district referenda and to eliminate the revenue limit exemption for energy efficiency.

On the Republican panel, state Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), state Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt (R-Fond du Lac), Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay), and Rep. Bob Kulp (R-Stratford) made it clear that parental choice and options will continue to be a large part of the future of K-12 education in Wisconsin and across the country.

While the lawmakers all said they supported local control as a principle, Sen. Olsen made the point that it is the Legislature that is tasked with oversight of K-12 education by the state Constitution and thus lawmakers will likely always have considerable input. All GOP legislators agreed with their Democratic counterparts in opposing the referenda restriction bill and the bill to eliminate the energy efficiency revenue limit exemption as well as an effort to appoint, rather than elect, the state superintendent. □

## WSAA/WASB Employment and School Law Seminar | Oct. 15-16, Madison

The WASB along with the Wisconsin School Attorneys Association (WSAA) held an Employment and School Law Seminar Oct. 15-16 in Madison. The event featured 14 sessions presented by WASB staff and school law attorneys from across the state.

Barry Forbes, WASB associate executive director and staff counsel, discussed complaint policies, chain of command and public participation at board meetings. Forbes said it's crucial that districts establish policies and procedures for handling complaints to give the public a structured procedure to have complaints reviewed by administration and, if necessary, reviewed by the school board.

"School board members cannot resolve citizen complaints by themselves," Forbes said. "A complaint procedure is a formal process that directs citizens to the staff best able to deal with each complaint. Citizens

who feel their complaints were not resolved have an option to appeal to the district administrator and board."

Jina Jonen, human resources director for the Oregon School District, and Melissa Thiel Collar, legal counsel for the Green Bay Area Public School District, presented a session on issues surrounding the handling of pupil records. With the advent of electronic pupil records, privacy issues and questions about exactly who can view records have become hot topics for schools.

Jonen and Thiel Collar had several important suggestions for school districts. They recommended implementing a records system that sorts and retains records based on privacy and record retention requirements. In addition, they said districts should develop a centralized system for receiving and responding to directory data requests, much like



a district's system for responding to open records requests.

"It's also important to review your district's directory data policy," they added. "Does your policy provide the necessary safeguards for your students' directory information while maintaining the flexibility for your district to use directory information for its original purpose?" □

## Fall Regional Meetings | Sept. & Oct., various locations

The WASB Fall Regional Meetings took place in September and October in all 15 WASB regions and gave board members and administrators an opportunity to connect with school leaders in their region and celebrate the accomplishments of their colleagues.

Dozens of school board members were recognized at the meetings through the WASB Member Recognition Program. Board members who attended professional development opportunities such as WASB conferences and events or who had participated in other leadership capacities such as the WASB Policy and Resolutions Committee were recognized for their hard work. A complete list of names of school board members who reached Level 5 of the Member Recognition Program can be found on page 23. Level 5 is the highest level of the program and

requires a tremendous commitment on behalf of school board members.

Each Regional Meeting also included a feature presentation aimed at helping school leaders build and develop community advocates for public education. This presentation reminded school board members and administrators of the importance of supporting communication efforts (including social media), inviting community members to the table, and focusing on issues that unite, not divide. Presenters challenged school leaders to go back to their boards and ask what its goals are for advocacy and community engagement.

Before each Regional Meeting, WASB legal staff led workshops on "School Board Policy Implications of the 2015-17 State Budget." This in-depth workshop covered policy updates on a range of issues



including curriculum and instruction, governance, employment, and finance and operations. One of the changes that WASB legal staff discussed was the new civics test that students will be required to pass in order to receive a high school diploma. This requirement kicks in with the 2016-17 school year and requires all school districts to amend graduation policies to include the new requirement. □