

WASB Fall Event Recaps

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). Select “Meetings and Events” and then “Event Recaps.” Member log-in may be required.

■ Legislative Advocacy Conference

With numerous changes and challenges facing school districts, including new state assessments, teacher evaluations and more, it’s important for school leaders to be effective advocates and sources of information for their communities.

The 2014 Legislative Advocacy Conference, held Nov. 8 in Stevens Point, focused on giving school board members and administrators the information and expertise to speak confidently about key education issues that will be debated in the upcoming 2015-16 legislative session.

Presentations covered a variety of important topics, including: the Common Core State Standards, independent voucher and charter schools, school accountability, a forecast of the 2015-17 state budget and much more.

Dr. Julie Mead, educational leadership professor at UW-Madison, discussed the rise of privatized education in the form of voucher and independent charter schools. Mead pointed out that voucher schools in Wisconsin cost the state about \$171 million at the same time that Wisconsin made some of the largest cuts to education funding in the country.

“At what point, if any, does a state’s funding of private education subvert its constitutional obligation to provide adequately for public education, thereby converting a child’s right to an education to merely the right to shop for one?” Mead asked.

Dan Rossmiller, WASB government relations director, and Chris Kulow, WASB government relations specialist, provided some tips on how school board members can advocate effectively during the 2015-17 state budget discussion.



Rossmiller asked special guests, Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), chair of the Senate Education Committee; and Rep. Steve Kestell (R-Elkhart Lake), chair of the Assembly Education Committee, for their thoughts on the upcoming 2015-17 state budget debate. In particular, Rossmiller asked the pair what they thought was likely to happen with respect to adjustments to state-imposed revenue limits, state academic standards, and proposed expansion of taxpayer-subsidized tuition payments for private school students (vouchers).

Sen. Olsen suggested that additional money for schools was likely to be something that won’t be decided until the Joint Finance Committee reaches the later stages of debate over the state budget, simply because state aid for schools is such a large part of the state budget and lawmakers want to see how state revenue growth looks before deciding on increases. Olsen noted that once state income tax returns are filed on April 15, the state’s revenue picture becomes clearer.

While this gives school board members some time, Sen. Olsen told attendees they should be talking to their lawmakers now. In fact, said Olsen, the best time for school leaders to be talking to lawmakers was when they were candidates running for election.

“If they won’t listen to you when they’re running for office and asking for your vote, when will they listen to you?” asked Olsen.

The legislators also gave advice on how to contact lawmakers and testify before the Joint Finance Committee on the budget. They also stressed how important it is to build relationships between school board members and legislators. In particular, they strongly recommended regular meetings between administrators, board members, and their area legislators.

“It’s a lot harder to vote against you if they know they have to meet with you and face the music at the next meeting. It might make them think twice,” said Kestell. □

■ WSA/WASB Employment and School Law Seminar

The WASB along with the Wisconsin School Attorneys Association (WSAA) held an Employment and School Law Seminar Oct. 16-17 in Wisconsin Dells. The event featured 16 sessions presented by WASB staff and school law attorneys from across the state.

Barry Forbes, WASB associate executive director and staff counsel, presented on updating employee handbooks. Among other issues, Forbes said critical areas requiring handbook review or updating include: reduction in staff time, grievance process, same gender marriage issues, and wage and hour issues.

“Employers now must review handbooks and policies to modify rules inconsistent with decisions and ruling related to these issues,” Forbes said.

Daniel Vliet of Buelow Vetter

Buikema Olson & Vliet, LLC, and Scott Mikesch, director of human resources and legal services for the Kaukauna Area School District, addressed compensation models with the goal of attracting and retaining high-quality teachers.

Mikesch said when the Kaukauna Area School District developed its new compensation model, it made sure to include staff and community input. The model also had to align with the district’s three goals: increased student achievement, improved culture and climate, and fiscal sustainability. Mikesch said as districts delve into developing their own compensation model, there are several important questions to keep in mind:

“Does the new model provide guaranteed step movement? How is the new model tied to state or district evaluation systems? How is



the new model tied to professional practice goals or student learning objectives?” □

■ Fall Regional Meetings

Each year the WASB Fall Regional Meetings give the WASB and school board members and administrators from around the state an opportunity to connect with leaders in their region and celebrate the accomplishments of their colleagues.

Each Fall Regional Meeting included a feature presentation aimed at improving board governance in districts without stretching district’s budgets. The presentation shared the Key Work of School Boards — a framework for effective school governance. In addition, the presentation introduced the Annual Board Development Tool. Created by the WASB and School Perceptions, the tool is an online survey that allows school board members to evaluate their board’s work in 12 governing areas. In an effort to provide district’s with an effective



governance tool at no cost, the Annual Board Development Tool has been made available to every district for free for the 2014-15 school year. Passcodes were mailed to districts not in attendance.

The Fall Regional Meetings also give the WASB the opportunity to recognize school board members for their hard work. Dozens of board members were recognized at the Regional Meetings through the WASB Member Recognition

Program. Board members who had 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. You can view a list of names of school board members who reached Level 5 of the Member Recognition Program on page 28. □