



Managing Your Risk Can Enhance Student Achievement

No matter how you look at it, school districts in Wisconsin are in a period of transition. Districts are facing changes in educational standards and funding levels from the state and federal government. To meet the challenges that come with these changes, new strategies for funding and supporting classroom activities are being explored by administrators and school boards throughout the state.

During this difficult period, districts are still expected to enhance student achievement. The key metric in education is student achievement, and it is how the public judges the success of a district.

Meeting this challenge isn't just the responsibility of the districts and their leadership, but also of their vendor partners. We need to discover creative solutions to help reduce costs and improve results. This approach not only builds long-term relationships, but also a long-term, win-win environment for all stakeholders.

The first question we get as an insurance broker is, "How can you help us control insurance costs?" Obviously brokers serve the traditional role of negotiating rates with insurance carriers, but a broker also should have the perspective and expertise to help you meet your student achievement goals.

■ A Holistic Approach

In our work with districts, we have

found that a holistic approach to risk management by integrating traditional benefits, wellness programs (physical and mental) and workers' compensation can help slow down and, in some cases, reduce costs for districts. In the insurance industry this approach is referred to as "enterprise risk management" (ERM). The premise behind ERM is that coordinating the reduction of risk in the workplace will help an employer in multiple avenues.

A district that takes a holistic approach to risk will likely see overall dollar savings in the form of insurance premiums. However, there are often important ripple effects to other areas of the workplace, which can have great impact on the classroom experience. One of those effects is a reduction in teacher absenteeism.

Data shows a link between a permanent teacher in the classroom and student achievement. Healthier teachers tend not to miss a lot of class time. Studies done for Harvard and Columbia Universities show a link between student achievement and teacher absences. Anything a district can do to keep a healthy teacher in the classroom has the potential to enhance student achievement.

A reduction in sick days also has an effect on expenses. A recent study by the Oregon Health and Science University found that incorporating these programs can lead to a 25 percent reduction in overall health insurance,

workers' compensation and absenteeism costs for employers.

It has been our experience that taking the ERM or holistic approach by integrating benefit programs can lead to great success. Our experiences have shown these approaches result in reduced costs for the school district and enhanced student achievement.

■ Facing the Big Challenges

Obviously, the biggest challenge every district faces is funding, but there are other common challenges we see as well, including: the achievement gap; student health and wellness; and the need for additional mental health resources for students. Overcoming these challenges isn't just about managing your expenses, it's also about building community support for the district as an entity.

We have been working with several school districts to expand their wellness program to students and the community as a whole. By doing this, the district is helping to promote student and community health while creating a closer bond between the school district and the community. Many districts allow residents to use school buildings for community-based initiatives, such as: walking clubs, open fitness centers, hosting health fairs, and community gardens.

Much like a healthy teacher, a healthy student is much less likely to miss class time. Recently the

Data shows a link between a permanent teacher in the classroom and student achievement. Healthier teachers tend not to miss a lot of class time.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction reviewed attendance data and identified a correlation between student absenteeism and achievement. Their study found that:

- Missing school has a significant impact on the vital development of reading and math skills.
- Students with good attendance from kindergarten through second grade were twice as likely to be proficient on standardized tests in eighth grade.

Districts taking this larger approach have seen greater success in engaging the public in their initiatives, which includes passing funding referendums. A strong relationship with the community is often vital to the health of a district.

■ Moving Forward

We would advise districts to think differently about managing their

risk. Traditionally, risk management has focused on preventing losses and purchasing the lowest cost insurance. Moving forward, we believe risk management should take a more comprehensive approach to help our clients achieve their goals. In the case of schools, the goal is student achievement.

Data shows that keeping healthy teachers in the classroom can help increase student achievement. There are similar studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that show that healthy students who feel safe in school and connected to their community miss less school and score higher on assessments.

A district can use risk management techniques to keep teachers in the classroom by integrating traditional benefits, wellness and workers' compensation programs. Risk management can also help implement safety initiatives,

post-injury return-to-work, and disability management programs.

In addition, risk management can be used to help students feel safe in school by ensuring proper safety and security procedures are in place in school buildings. It can be used to develop bullying prevention programs to help students feel safe and connected. Student fitness and wellness programs will also help keep students healthy and in class.

At M3 Insurance, our ultimate goal is to partner with districts to integrate their employee benefit and property and casualty risk management so our public schools can reduce overall costs and increase student achievement. ■

Marty Malloy is an Account Executive and Practice Group Leader for M3 Insurance's Education & Government Team. M3 is an endorsed agency through the WASB Insurance Plan. For more information, visit wasb.org and select "WASB Insurance Plan."



Legislative Update

Stay up-to-date on the latest state and national legislative news by following the WASB Legislative Update website. This mobile-friendly site is updated regularly by WASB staff and features a "follow" tool so you can receive email updates when a new item is posted.

Visit the **WASB Legislative Update website** at wasb.org. Select "Advocacy & Government Relations" and then "Legislative Update".



Advocacy & Government Relations | 608-257-2622 | 877-705-4422 | Visit wasb.org