8 Pillars of TRUST

Keynote speaker David Horsager lays out the path to building trust among district stakeholders.
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Freelance writers Anne Davis, Rich Rovito and Brock Fritz contributed to this issue of the Wisconsin School News.
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Seize Your Convention Opportunities

As I catch my breath after our State Education Convention, I try to take a moment to reflect. What was the convention about, and how has it changed me?

For me, and perhaps for you, it felt like the renewal of a call to action, a challenge. We learned together, and I hope we were inspired to take that energy home to our districts and students.

As school board members, business officials, superintendents and other education leaders, you have already accepted your call to action. But our cups need to be refilled from time to time.

Our keynote speakers would reinforce that call.

When he said to “get back on that horse,” David Horsager was speaking to the personal experience of many of you. These past few years you may have felt like that young rider, knocked around by forces beyond your control.

For David, the first step toward regaining that control is building trust, and I hope you find his advice in that respect valuable.

In addition to reminding us to reflect, WASB Breakfast speaker Tom Thibodeau brought optimism and vitality into that Thursday morning breakfast hall. He took evident joy in, as he put it, reminding good people that they are good.

Schools offer their students incredible opportunities every day, but these stories too often go unshared. Later on Thursday, 2022 WASB President Barb Herzog shared more than 30 Wisconsin school success stories — including an Oshkosh food truck staffed by students with special needs — and encouraged you to continue sharing the good news.

(You can find that list under “Spotlight Resources” on the front page at WASB.org.)

Then, keynote Sarita Maybin reminded us that we must temper our passion with respect if we hope to be effective. Our convictions must not lead us away from compromise and mutual respect.

On Friday, Gov. Tony Evers called on you to continue fighting for what you believe in.

“There is far more that unites us than divides us,” he said, “and each of you is here because you want to make a difference in the lives of our kids and the well-being of our schools.”

Finally, keynote Courtney Clark told us about how her cancer diagnosis actually uncovered a brain condition that, if undiscovered, may have been fatal. Your leadership isn’t about what you experienced; it’s about what you made of it.

Say it with me: “It’s not a dead end, it’s a detour.”

Education leaders, of course, will see the wisdom in pairing inspiration with learning. I hope our breakout sessions gave you insights that you can bring back to your districts.

If you couldn’t make it this year — or if you couldn’t make all the sessions you wanted to — consider registering for our Recorded Sessions program. You’ll receive recordings of eight select breakout sessions as well as two keynote speeches. Visit WASB.org/convention to learn more.

No matter your metaphor — refilling a cup, relighting a flame — it’s a crucial time to put your passion to work for students. The next state budget will be decided over the next four months or so, and your advocacy is critical in securing a budget that works for your children.

In this and more, we at the WASB hope to be your guide. Please learn more at WASB.org about our Day at the Capitol on March 22. Our staff make it easy to get face time with your lawmaker by scheduling meetings on your behalf for that afternoon.

But it was you, our attendees, who truly made the 102nd State Education Convention a success. I know your conversations with each other are often the highlight of your time in Milwaukee. Thank you.

The next state budget will be decided over the next four months or so, and your advocacy is critical in securing a budget that works for your children.

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Board members, administrators, bus drivers, teachers. Every aspect of a school district revolves around trust, according to Trust Edge Leadership Institute CEO David Horsager.

“Can I trust you with this budget? Can I trust you with these kids? Can I trust you with this creative idea without you making me look like a fool at the board meeting? Can I trust you?” says Horsager, who gave the opening 2023 State Education Convention keynote, sponsored by UnitedHealthcare. “Everything of value is built on trust.”

Horsager, who helps build high-trust businesses, defines trust as “a confident belief in a person, product, or organization.” The author of “The Trust Edge” and trust expert in residence at High Point University says that a lack of trust is the biggest cost school districts have.

“At the root, it’s always a trust issue,” he says. “We don’t have a leader issue, the reason people don’t follow the leader is trust. The reason you didn’t pass that referendum, there was a trust issue. The reason your board isn’t moving faster is a trust issue.

“The only way to increase learning in any classroom is to increase trust in the teacher, the content, or the psychological safety or trust of the room.”

Therefore, when trust goes up, everything changes. Horsager says trust is always the leading indicator. When schools increase their level of trust, they use less resources, stress decreases, and teacher sick days decrease.

So how do schools lacking trust rebuild it? According to Horsager, trust is never rebuilt with an apology. The only thing that can rebuild trust is making and keeping a new promise or commitment.

Horsager says manipulation can allow leaders to appear trusted for a certain amount of time. But in order to truly earn trust, an organization actually needs to be trustworthy.

That’s where Horsager’s eight pillars of trust come into play. The pillars are:

1. CLARITY: “People trust the clear and they mistrust the ambiguous or the overly complex. If it’s not sharable, repeatable, and actionable, it doesn’t matter.”
2. COMPASSION: “We trust those that care beyond themselves. They can tell when you love them.”
3. CHARACTER: “We trust those that do what’s right over what’s easy.”
4. COMPETENCY: “You’ve got to stay fresh, relevant, and capable. If you’re a teacher teaching the same way you were 30 years ago, I don’t trust you.”
5. COMMITMENT: “We trust those that stay committed in the face of adversity.”
6. CONNECTION: “Unity, opportunity, and a willingness to connect and collaborate with others.”
7. CONTRIBUTION: “We trust those that contribute results. You can’t just have compassion and character and not give me educated kids. We have to deliver results.”
8. CONSISTENCY: “Consistency is the king and queen of the pillars. Same-ness is trusted. I want teachers to teach the same way in February as they did in September. I want to know you’re going to show up at the board meeting the same way and be prepared every time.”

With every interaction either increasing or decreasing trust, consistently doing the little things over time makes a big difference.

“Everything is atrophying unless you’re consistently putting the right things in,” Horsager says. “The number one way to influence a change in opinion in people is through trusted relationships.”

Brock Fritz is a contributing writer.
Say what you mean while turning uncomfortable conversations into constructive communication

**KEYNOTE**

**SARITA MAYBIN**

Sarita Maybin tries to live her life by the mantra, “Say what you mean, mean what you say, and don’t say it mean.”

The professional speaker showed attendees how to transform uncomfortable conversations into constructive communication during her keynote speech, sponsored by C.D. Smith Construction, at the State Education Convention.

“When it comes to conflicts, challenges, and difficult conversations, you can run but you can’t hide,” says Maybin, author of “If You Can’t Say Something Nice, What DO You Say?” and “Say What You Mean in a Nice Way.”

Maybin says it’s crucial to introduce difficult conversations in a productive way. That includes saying “what we mean in a nice way.” That shows up in conversations in myriad ways.

Take ownership instead of blame by saying “I need your help” rather than “You never help.” Make requests instead of demands by saying “I need you to” instead of “You need to.” And seek better solutions instead of dictating by saying “How can we resolve this” instead of “You better…”

Maybin says these conversations are important in every role at a school district, as “Much of what we need to do in communication and life is gain support from people that we’re not the boss of. That’s the real challenge.”

Therefore, conversations are smoothest when both sides enter them with a collaborative mindset. Rather than just taking a one-sided approach to a conversation, think about the person you’re talking to. What’s their deal? What makes them tick? What’s the best way to get their cooperation?

Maybin suggests approaching conversations with that mindset, then moving forward with her top 10 positive communication phrases to use with your school board and beyond.

The top 10 are broken down into the four categories below:

### Give benefit of the doubt:

10. “You may not realize…”
9. “Are you aware of the effect…”

### Seek input:

8. “Help me understand…”
7. “I need your help…”
6. “I noticed… and I’m wondering…”
5. “Would you be willing to…”

### Take responsibility:

4. “I’m concerned…”
3. “I would appreciate it…”

### Work together:

2. “How can we resolve this…”
1. “What will it take…”

As technology replaces spoken words with text, communicators must ensure that their emails and text messages are coming across the way they intend them to.

“Sometimes our personal approach and our warm fuzziness gets lost in the shuffle when we’re communicating online,” Maybin says, noting that whenever she types an email, she does a spell check and a kindness check. The kindness check includes ensuring there is a “please,” a “thank you,” or both in the email.

Those phrases are important for productive conversation. However, the words you speak or type are only half of the story. The way in which you listen to the other person is also crucial to a collaborative conversation and productivity. Being a good listener increases the chances that others will listen when you speak.

“We’re all good listeners when it’s good stuff. The minute someone gives us negative feedback, that’s the real test of when we’re going to listen. Listen in a way that people love speaking to you,” Maybin says, adding that communicating with C.A.R.E. (consultative, attentive, results, empathy) is crucial in any conversation. “How do you show that you care? You can use all the clever phrases you want, but if you don’t truly care, people know that.”

Brock Fritz is a contributing writer.
DETOURING FROM THE PLAN

‘Know what to do when your plan doesn’t turn out’

KEYNOTE
COURTNEY CLARK

Plans are a fact of life. What am I eating for dinner? What am I going to be when I grow up? Do I want to marry and have children?

Courtney Clark, the author of three books, including “ReVisionary Thinking: When You Have to Change Your Plan to Reach Your Goals,” had her life plan figured out more than once.

She was going to be a dancer. A nonprofit founder. A mother.

She attacked these plans with enthusiasm. However, life quickly showed her that plans don’t always work out, and how new plans can lead to a better destination.

“Life hasn’t turned out the way I planned,” says Clark, who gave the Friday keynote State Education Convention at the Wisconsin Center. “Of course, it probably hasn’t turned out the way you planned either. We’re told successful people have plans, leaders have plans, winners have plans. That’s true to an extent, but really successful people know what to do when that plan doesn’t turn out. They know it’s not a dead end, it’s a detour.”

Clark’s first change of plans came when her dance career was extinguished after injury issues and difficult performances during her freshman year at NYU. Then her whole life was thrown for loop when she was diagnosed with cancer at 26 years old.

Doctors removed the tumor. The cancer came back two years later. They removed the tumor again. At her five-year checkup, the scan showed a brain aneurysm that required life-saving brain surgery. The scan may have saved her life; the cancer may have saved her life.

It took some unforeseen life experiences to show Clark that people can overcome a change to their plans. That message was hammered home at a conference when she met an attendee who was meticulously taking notes.

When all those notes were accidentally erased, the attendee started to rewrite them, telling Clark, “I realized what I was writing this time was better. If I hadn’t lost version one, I never would have gotten version two. And version two was better.”

That’s how she sees her life. As her initial plans were thwarted, she continually detoured to a life she loves.

“If we can just let go of the plan, then we realize that version two is coming, and version two can be so much better than version one ever was,” Clark says. “But we’ll never know if we can’t let go of the plan.”

Finding a successful second plan requires resilience, which Clark says is “figuring out a new way to be in the world when you can’t be the person you were before.” It also requires changing your relationship to stress.

Everyone is going to be stressed at times. But Clark says individuals with an internal locus of control will feel less stress. People with an internal locus of control believe things happen to them because of their intellect, smarts or looks. Conversely, people with an external locus of control believe things that happen to them aren’t their fault. Rather, it’s due to luck, fate, their boss or another external factor.

“There’s power when you realize it’s how we deal, not what we’re dealt, that actually matters. I’m not trying to tell you what you’re dealt doesn’t matter. It does. But how you deal is what makes your outcome different than anyone else that faced that situation.

What you’re dealt is the story of your life, but how you deal is the story of you.”

Brock Fritz is a contributing writer.
Thank you for that kind introduction, and thank you all for being here this morning.

I’m going to start today with a quick science lesson — a science lesson about trees, in fact. Bear with me, I was a social studies teacher, although I do love a good metaphor, and anyone who knows me knows I’m also very curious and always looking to learn, especially about the natural world. So, naturally, I stumbled on some interesting facts about coast redwoods … and thought they were very, very relevant, so I really wanted to share my learning with you all.

Coast redwoods are the tallest trees on Earth; they can grow to taller than 350 feet.

And yet, coast redwoods have very shallow root systems — root systems that stay close to the surface of the earth and that extend up to 100 feet out from the base of the trunk. The roots of each individual redwood intertwine with the roots of other redwoods, and thanks to this shallow, intertwined root system, coast redwoods are incredibly stable during strong winds and floods.

As a community of trees, they are very, very resilient. Baby redwoods, when they germinate, often sprout at the base of a parent tree trunk. The young roots latch onto the parent roots for nutrients. Because of this, the trees grow in circles called “fairy rings.”

Coast redwoods have thick, pithy bark that provides protection and insulation, which means they are resilient and strong as individual trees as well as a community of trees. This bark gives them a (more) remarkable ability to survive — even a downed tree can live on and birth new trees.

So … why am I telling you this? Our students are young redwoods. And we — schools — can be their interconnected root system — a system that helps them develop resilience together!

We can be a root system that helps them grow their bark, their protective factors through social emotional learning and equity work. We can be a root system that provides them stability and connection, connection we know they need. We know school connectedness and the ability for children to identify supportive adults and seek help reduces mental health challenges, and is even suicide prevention.

This metaphor begs the question — what’s next? How do we ensure our root system of public schools stays strong and effectively intertwined to create this stability and interconnectedness for our students? Well, guess what? I can extend the metaphor to explain exactly that! We must protect and grow our coast redwood forests, just as we must protect and grow public education.

We know public education is perpetually under threat, and that public education as it is currently funded is unsustainable. And this is why we need to take action, we need an intervention, and first, we need to evaluate where we’re at and what we — our students, our educators, our schools and districts — really need.

All of this — the metaphor, the coast redwoods, the restoration and conservation, the innovation, and the advocacy — all of this represents an incredible, possibly even a transformative, opportunity born of unity and community. I know this is your conference theme — unity, community, opportunity. It also needs to be our marching orders, our motivational phrase, our fueling thought.

Because if the kids are our inspiration, then “unity, community, opportunity” is our call to action. Thank you, and I look forward to connecting with you throughout this conference and beyond.
Good morning, everyone!

It is a pleasure to be here today for the 2023 Wisconsin State Education Convention. I’d like to recognize and thank John Ashley and the WASB board, Mike Barry and the WASBO board, and Jon Bales and the WASDA board for their partnership in putting on this phenomenal convention.

And, of course, I want to give a shout out to State Superintendent Underly, who you heard from earlier this week, and thank her for all her good work. I’d also like to thank all the teachers, school board members, district and school administrators, parents, and education professionals for being here. Like many of you here today, I’ve devoted much of my life to education and Wisconsin public schools.

In fact, this is the 38th consecutive year I have had the honor of attending. I’ve been a teacher, a principal, a superintendent, and a state superintendent, and now, I proudly wear the title of Wisconsin’s “education governor.” I ran for governor because I knew we could do better for our kids and therefore our state. I was determined to help right years of underfunding to our education system at the hands of previous leadership, and in the last four years, I am proud that we have been able to make important progress toward that goal.

Through our state budget investments and use of federal pandemic relief aid, we increased special education funding for the first time in a decade; we made the largest investment in general aid in a decade; and we’ve provided an additional more than $300 in per pupil aid over both biennia. Just last summer, we also doubled our investment in the “Get Kids Ahead” initiative to provide mental health services in K-12 schools across Wisconsin, and we provided critical funding to give districts flexibility to meet staffing needs, keep class sizes small, and provide other necessary, direct classroom support. Now, I’m proud to report that our K-12 schools rank eighth best in the nation after falling to 17th under the previous administration.

We’ve seen the effects of years of underfunding as communities across our state have been forced to go to referenda to keep their schools afloat — this system is not sustainable, it raises property taxes, and while many districts pass needed referenda, many do not, which creates great inequities between winners and losers, and it’s not what our kids deserve.

Altogether, we’re proposing an approximately $2 billion investment in our kids’ education and futures in the upcoming budget — and we have the resources to make this happen. But we need everyone — especially those in this room today — to come together to advocate for the budget they want to see for our state. To fight for the investments we know our kids, our schools, and our educators need and deserve, together.

Folks, I’ve said before that budgets are about priorities, and we need everyone — every teacher, every school board member, every parent, and every education professional at every level — to come together and stand up for the priorities we all want to see reflected in the next budget.

This convention and the connections, professional development, and insight you will undoubtedly take home will be invaluable to that effort. None of what we do would be possible without partners like you, and together, I am excited about what we can do for our kids and schools over these next four years and beyond. So, thank you so much, everyone, and I hope you all have a great rest of the convention. Take care.
Community engagement and cooperation is crucial to the successful work of all school districts. Without community support, educational initiatives aren’t supported, referendums don’t get passed and parents and students may leave.

But many districts struggle to remain engaged with their communities because of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and a growing sense of politicization seen nationwide. Several sessions at the 2023 State Education Convention presented suggestions for increasing community engagement during these challenging times.

For the Lodi School District, it began two years ago at the height of the pandemic.

“There was a lot of conflict going on,” recalled District Administrator Vince Breunig, adding that there was a clear sense of “people talking at each other not with each other” and that “we’re all going in different directions.”

Administrators and the school board realized that the district could
not move forward until it was more aligned with the community. So, they came up with a process to bring community members together to help map out a vision and mission statement for the district.

The Vision Elements Study Team was composed of 12 members chosen to represent as many elements of the community as possible: farmers, bankers, lawyers, other business people, parents and non-parents. They were told to plan a community event, then present feedback from the event to the board and finally to come up with a vision and mission statement to guide the district for the next five years.

Almost 150 community members registered for the two-day Conversation for Our Future, which featured student musical and theatrical performances and structured group activities designed to air frustrations, identify Lodi’s strengths and map out a vision for the district and the community.

The board developed a five-year strategic plan based on the themes that came out of the sessions as well as a detailed process for measuring progress on the plan.

Breunig said the process gave the community ownership of the district, which helped the district pass a non-recurring referendum last year. The operational referendum called for allowing the district to exceed its state-set revenue limits by $5.98 million for five years, beginning with the 2022-23 school year.

“This (plan) drives what we do every single day,” he added. “I don’t have to guess what the priorities in our community are.”

Challenges to books in school libraries and classrooms have been an impetus for community conflict in many school districts. Community members have challenged books for being inappropriate for students because of content about sexual themes, including information about gender identity.

During her session, Monica Treptow, school library education consultant at the Department of Public Instruction, advised school board members and administrators on the best ways to address book challenges.

Treptow began by noting that book challenges were on the rise nationally as well as in Wisconsin. She discussed the concept of intellectual freedom, which is a “foundational philosophy” in libraries. She also reviewed the difference between school libraries, which serve all students, and classroom libraries, which are tied to specific curriculum.

Parents have the right to choose what books their students read, Treptow said, but do not have the right to make choices for all students.

“No student is required to read any of the books in school libraries,” Treptow said. “It is always a choice.” Several state statutes specifically mention a need to provide “diverse materials” in school libraries, she added. Classroom libraries are not mentioned in the statutes.

She recommended that school boards be proactive and review their district’s library policies and procedures for handling a book challenge before one occurs, making changes and updates if necessary.

Melissa Pfohl, director of teaching and learning in the McFarland School District, and Angela Wachtel, director of curriculum, instruction and assessment in the Little Chute Area School District, then shared their experiences handling recent book challenges.

Pfohl said that her district makes sure to give choices for material tied to specific curricular units and notifies parents ahead of time about the material, highlighting any that would require parental permission before a student could access it.

Parents have the right to choose what books their students read, Treptow said, but do not have the right to make choices for all students. Following a district’s policies and procedures allows everyone to be on the same page during a challenge and also takes emotion out of the process, she added.
Meanwhile, community expectations are increasingly putting school boards in the spotlight.

Diana Baker Freeman, senior manager of modern governance advocacy and initiatives for Diligent, the creator of BoardDocs, began her presentation on helping board members be more engaged and productive by highlighting a recent study that showed a low level of public support for school boards. Some even said school boards should not exist.

“When you don’t have a lot of that community support, it will be easier for legislators to chip away at the power of school boards,” she warned.

She noted that the move to virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic meant more people could easily access public meetings, which has led to a push for more transparency in discussion, deliberation and action by boards.

She encouraged board members to adopt a learning mode of gathering information and interacting with each other and the public rather than a judging mode. A learning mode is open-minded, curious and solution-focused as opposed to judging mode, which is blame-focused, dismissive and demanding.

She also pointed out that the tone of voice matters in a discussion, especially in cases where another board member may be acting in an uncivil way.

“I think you can lead from the middle,” she said. “You can change the tone of the room without jumping into the fray.”

A deliberate effort to re-engage the community in the Oshkosh Area School District paid off with support for an operating referendum and a multi-million-dollar capital referendum, said David Gundlach, Oshkosh’s deputy superintendent, in another session.

David Gundlach, deputy superintendent at the Oshkosh school district, discusses what made the district’s recent referendum successful.
president and architect with Bray Architects, detailed their efforts to turn around the community’s lack of support and disconnect with the district. Because three-quarters of Oshkosh’s school buildings were over 50 years old and badly in need of renovations and replacements, the board decided to initiate a community-led strategic plan to help guide the process.

After a facility study by Bray found that it would cost the district $104 million just to keep the current building up and running without addressing changes to reflect current educational programming, the board appointed a Facility Advisory Committee. The committee concluded that the district should hold a capital referendum and plan to reduce the number of school buildings from 20 to 15.

A community survey showed just less than 50% of those responding would support a $107 million capital referendum with a larger percentage supporting a small referendum. School board members were ready to go with the smaller referendum when community members encouraged them to change their minds and go with the larger amount. The measure passed — as did an operating referendum — and the district is now going through a multi-year process of completing the referendum projects.

Gundlach said he believed the key to the district’s success was engaging the community first, listening to its priorities and then explaining the entire plan in detail.

“Go to the community first, ask them what they want and come up with a plan that gives them what they want,” he said.

Anne Davis is a contributing writer to the Wisconsin School News.
As it set out to tackle its students’ mental health challenges, the La Crosse School District started by making observations. Identifying children with mental health challenges is a critical step, so La Crosse staff asked students who they feel most comfortable talking with about their mental health concerns.

Few students, they learned, come first to an adult at school. Instead, 60% of responding students confided in a friend, a parent (40%) or dealt with it themselves (55%). The findings were surprising, La Crosse Director of Community Services Curt Teff told attendees at their State Education Convention session.

“We knew ‘friends’ would be high, but we really did feel like kids follow traditional referral pathways; they have a concern, they go to an adult who can get them help.”

The next step was to enlist partners to help add context to their findings. Finally, their response included a survey to identify students who might be falling through the cracks.

The challenges posed by the mental health crisis can seem overwhelming, but La Crosse presenters offered a simple, three-step frame-
It’s called “adaptive leadership,” and it can be applied to a vast range of challenges, Teff told the audience. “What we wanted this to be is a chance for you to hear how we did it, and how you can do it and how you can take it back (to your district),” he said.

The first step includes data collection. They looked at measures that aren’t about mental health per se, but may be indicative of mental challenges.

Teff said signs of mental health include that “they’re at school ready to learn, that they’re safe from abuse and neglect, that they’re on track to graduate.”

The second step, interpretation, adds context to the data. Talking directly with students about trends, opportunities and challenges has been a big part of that step in La Crosse. This is where they learned that students don’t typically approach adults at school with problems. Students also hesitated to talk to a counselor if they thought it would lead to them getting in trouble with parents.

Intervention is rich with nuance. A promising idea, badly implemented, can look like a failure for the wrong reason.

“We always blame the intervention,” Teff says. “We say, ‘Oh, yeah, we tried to hire another school counselor, we tried to hire a mental health navigator, it didn’t work …’ And a lot of times, it’s related to the quality of implementation.”

Best practices in a field called “implementation science” can help avoid potential pitfalls, they said.

Several of their interventions — including the hire of two full-time mental health professionals who work in the schools — were funded by a five-year, $2.5 million Project AWARE grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The district also implemented social-emotional learning standards districtwide. “We have standards for reading and social studies. We also have standards that we are aligned to in terms of a student’s social, emotional and behavioral development,” said Director of Student Services Aimee Zabrowski. Rather than one-off lessons taught by a counselor, they are woven into the curriculum.

When a social studies teacher, say, starts a group project, they may talk about working effectively as a group. They’ve also implemented a mental health screener filled out by the parents of elementary age children and secondary students themselves.

A separate team reviews students who scored the highest on the screening test. The screener revealed that a small percentage of struggling students, about 2% to 3% of respondents, were not on anyone’s radar, Zabrowski said.

Making the grant-funded improvements sustainable is a major goal, but they can’t do it alone. “Long term, we’re working with our local health system, insurance companies, nonprofits and the school district to develop a braided funding model,” Teff said. “We actually think this is the way that Wisconsin should work.”

When trauma, illness and grief strikes your students and schools, do you have the infrastructure in place to respond effectively? “We know it’s not a matter of if trauma, critical incidences or crisis will occur in our schools, it’s a matter of when,” said CESA 1 Director of Special Education and Pupil Services Kaari Olson. “So, we do need to be prepared.”

Olson was part of a four-person team at the convention presenting about a consortium that they believe can support faculty with protocols and communication strategies to be ready when a crisis occurs. It’s called the Consortium on Trauma, Illness, and Grief in Schools, or TIG.

“TIG really is a common training or learning experience. We bring together teams of educators from diverse perspectives and roles, to have this shared learning across typically a semester,” said Amy Scheel-Jones, director of trauma responsive care & TIG at Coordinated Care Services, Inc. “We work
through seven modules. When we’re in person, it’s five full days, but not back-to-back, and it can be delivered in a virtual format as well.”

A key component of TIG is the Crisis Response Network, which creates a team of local and regional relationships in times of crisis who are all trained in the same response model. “A lot of times people think ‘oh, there’s a crisis, we’ll just call the neighboring school district.’ That’s not always helpful,” Olson said. “When there isn’t a common practice occurring... it can actually create residual grief or unintended trauma to staff and students.”

Through TIG’s evidence-based response model, efficacy and efficiency of response increases while the risk for secondary traumatic stress decreases.

“If you create a network within your region, you can put together a team of individuals who can develop some resources,” Olson said.

In addition to creating support networks, school districts gain access to a variety of tools and resources to use during a crisis such as informational handouts, checklist templates, sample communications, sample crisis response and recovery manuals.

During the 2018-19 school year, every school district participating in the safety grant had a requirement to hold trauma-informed care training for their staff. That’s initially how the Whitnall School District connected with Scheel-Jones.

Whitnall School District Director of Pupil Services Jackie Winters said the TIG training helped her district prepare for future crises.

“We have a protocol in which we can go about, we can make decisions about who we need to communicate to, [ask] what is our circle of impact?” she said. The sample letters to family were particularly helpful.

“You can take those communications that you might send and send it to other districts... and get feedback, knowing those people have the same training and same language that the people in our district have.”

CESAs 1 and 6 are currently working to create TIG regional consortiums. Learn more at tigconsortium.org.

### Building behavioral skills

Former Green Bay Supt. Michelle Langenfeld’s call to action was as urgent as it was familiar: the mental health challenges faced by today’s students dwarf their schools’ capacity to meet them.

Meanwhile, schools don’t have enough mental health professionals. The state’s schools have one school social worker for every 1,136 students. The recommended ratio is one social worker for every 400 students.

At the convention, one suburban Milwaukee district told the story about how it hired Minnesota-based EmpowerU to deliver online mental health services to its students.

Liz Stegemann, a special education coordinator at the Elmbrook School District, set the stage by describing the district’s advantages and challenges.

“We were playing a game at recess and another friend made up different rules for the game. I got mad and didn’t follow the rules that he made up. If that happened now, I could use 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and talk to him.”

Male fifth grader, Elmbrook School District
together these accommodations.”

Those accommodations could be expensive, and services are tough to deliver in understaffed schools.

“You’re busy, no one has time, staff is exhausted, how can you make something portable, scalable, that could really deliver these skills with support?” she said. In 2018, they launched EmpowerU to deliver online lessons to kids supported by a mental health coach who delivers daily feedback.

The goal is to help students in Tier 2 to return back to the first tier by creating behavior change.

For example, consider a middle schooler who sleeps with their phone and doesn’t shut their eyes until 2 a.m. Students can use the lessons and feedback to reach their goal of replacing screen time with sleep.

Dorn said the program teaches skills “in an accessible way that engages the learner as an active participant.”

The program has worked in Elmbrook, said Tanya Fredrich, the district’s assistant superintendent for teaching and learning.

“And what we really liked about it, it was asynchronous, so kids can access it at any time,” Fredrich said. “It has that direct feedback from a coach that they give. And it’s that skill instruction, because that’s what we were missing, really giving kids those skills.”

Since starting the program with grades 6-12 in 2021-22, Elmbrook has found 91% of students made significant goal progress and 96% found it helpful to their mental health and wellbeing.

In a case study, an 11th grade student said they learned to use strategies such as taking breaks to refocus and using their time wisely.

“I’ve made the most progress with my self-talk and it has affected my motivation. Before I would do things out of a feeling or fear that I wouldn’t be enough, but now I do things because I enjoy it or take pride in my work.”

Female high school student, Elmbrook School District

“Those are such great skills that will benefit this student through the rest of their life being able to find that balance,” Dorn said. The price for EmpowerU varies by intervention type and duration.

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COMMUNICATION KEY DURING REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN
Effective and strategic communication, while crucial in communicating the overall needs of a school district, takes on an even more vital role in educating voters about a referendum. Whether for operational or facility needs, referendums remain a hot topic given all the uncertainty with school funding. The outcome can often hinge on how well a district gets its message across to the public before, during and after a referendum.

Several sessions at the 102nd State Education Convention focused on communication as it relates to referendums. The session, “All Hands on Deck: Winning Operational Referendums,” delved into the key communication strategies that helped the Trevor-Wilmot Consolidated Grade School District win its operational referendum on the second try after a near miss the first time around.

“We went to an operating referendum mainly for the reason that our revenue limit has been on a historical decline,” said Bryan Kadlec, director of business services for the district, located in rural Kenosha County and with just under 500 students. They needed to make a fundamental change, he said.

In April 2021, the district held a referendum on a proposal that would have allowed the district to exceed its revenue limit by varying amounts over a five-year period. It fell short by just 12 votes.

Working on a condensed timeline, the district had worked to develop what it hoped would be an effective communication campaign aimed at getting voters to approve the referendum.

“We were starting from scratch and don’t forget that we were in the middle of a pandemic,” Kadlec said.

Undaunted, the district went back and sought approval in an April 2022 referendum to exceed the state revenue limit by $800,000 annually for five years. This time voters voted in favor of the operating referendum by a margin of more than 100 votes.

“All during the referendum failed, we continued dialoging,” said Dorreen Dembski, communication specialist and CEO of DD Communication Services, who worked with the district in developing its communication plan. Ongoing communication efforts helped spur the reversal of fortunes for the district in regard to the referendum.

“Part of what we did the second time was tell people why they should support a winning team,” Dembski said. “We got real serious about articulating their successes. We call it points of pride. That makes parents feel good about the choice of where they send their kids, and it makes the staff feel good about where they work. Now, we’ve got people who want to support us because we are doing good stuff. It’s not just about asking for money.”

Referendum-related information should be part of an overall communication plan, not the sole focus, she added.

“You have to be continually communicating with the community so that the referendum then later is just another part of your plan,” Dembski said.

All communication with the community needs to be consistent, clear and timely and not be complicated, with a focus on why the referendum is going to make a difference in residents’ lives, she added.
Communication around the referendum needs to be top of mind for all leaders in the district, Dembski said.

“It’s something that we need to make a priority and have everyone speak a clear and accurate message about it,” she said. “That includes board members. Referendums are a board decision. The leadership team implements the strategy, but it is the board’s role to get out there and help with that communication effort.”

In a smaller district like Trevor-Wilmot, it’s not at all unusual to lack an established process for external communication. Referendums present an opportunity to communicate with the community and create an ongoing process, Dembski said.

After the referendum failed the first time, the district took a brief period to lick its wounds but moved quickly to revise its communication strategy in preparation for a second referendum vote.

“Having this decision and coming so close, it shows we weren’t that far off,” Kadlec said. “We didn’t want to dwell on the loss. We wanted to focus on learning and adapting for the next campaign.”

In doing so, Trevor-Wilmot spelled out in detail what the funds would be used for in the event the referendum passed and created a sense of urgency by explaining what would be at risk if it failed.

“It wasn’t a threat. That was the reality,” Kadlec said. “We broadened our reach with mailings, media releases just to get more of the great things that are happening in the schools out there. We got out into the community, meeting with small business owners, going to each of the municipality’s town board meetings and sharing the story. We tried to spread the word as much as we could.”

The result was a refreshed campaign.

“We offered more ways to get information, we simplified the material, and we involved the entire leadership team,” Dembski said. “We really got more people to telling our story.”

Since revenue caps went into place nearly 30 years ago, 95% of school districts in Wisconsin have held at least one referendum, according to Rob DeMeuse, research director for School Perceptions, who helped lead a session entitled “Voter Satisfaction & Referendum Outcomes: A Tight Relationship.”

The session focused on tangible strategies about communicating school performance and boosting community satisfaction, which often leads to success in referendums.

There are two main types of referendums in Wisconsin.

In an operational referendum, voters are asked to approve funding above annual revenue limits to maintain programs and services, which could include staffing to maintain class sizes and student services. These types of referendums can be either recurring or non-recurring.

In a capital referendum, voters are asked to approve borrowing money to pay for major building projects. This usually involves taking out a bond that is typically financed for 20 to 30 years.

Among the many determinations stemming from School Perceptions’ research is that voters aren’t more likely to vote “no” on an operating referendum in back-to-back elections.

“If you don’t have a break between your operational referendums, the likelihood that the next one will pass actually goes up by 20%.”

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“If you don’t have a break between your operational referendums, the likelihood that the next one will pass actually goes up by 20%,” DeMeuse said.

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**A 10-YEAR HISTORY OF REFERENDA IN WISCONSIN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Debt Referenda Passed</th>
<th>Debt Referenda Failed</th>
<th>Non-Recurring Referenda Passed</th>
<th>Non-Recurring Referenda Failed</th>
<th>Recurring Referenda Passed</th>
<th>Recurring Referenda Failed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Public Instruction
Getting messages out about the referendum is essential and is a role in which all key members of the district need to take part, School Perceptions Project Manager Daren Sievers said.

“If you don’t tell the story, somebody else is going to tell the story for you, whether it’s in the cereal aisle of Piggly Wiggly or however people chit-chat around town,” he said. “I feel as board members that it’s very important for you to get the message out about who you are as a school district and what you’re trying to accomplish.”

The Slinger School District passed four referendums during Sievers’ tenure there, which included a 10-year stint as superintendent.

“I believe very strongly in getting your mission statement out in front of the public,” he said. “This is not something to just be a fancy set of words on your letterhead. I feel like it’s something you need to live and breathe every day. It’s important for you to tell your story and your mission statement is one place that you can do that.”

Leaders in Slinger spread referendum-related items and other messages at community and Chamber of Commerce meetings. But the district found some of its best success in sharing information through its annual mailing to community residents.

“As much as we think (residents) are going to go to a website or use a QR code, they like to have something in their hands,” Sievers said.

“That’s why people value our surveys, because we mail one to every home. About 75% of your community doesn’t work for the school and aren’t parents. So, the only way they can hear from you is likely an annual mailing.”

Effective communication with the community played a role in the passage of a $16 million referendum in 2022 to allow several critical long-term facility needs to be addressed in the Oakfield School District, which serves about 500 students in a community of about 1,100 residents.

“This was going to be a challenge because we are adding on debt,” Oakfield Superintendent Tracey Conners said. “We asked the community for $16 million. A small community that is based in farming and is rural and we are asking that $1.48 be added on to the mill rate. That’s a huge ask.”

Communication focused on the district’s successes and the steps being taken to improve curriculum.

“We ended up passing our referendum by 6%,” Conners said. “Our referendum was successful. Now the process is how do we continue to communicate that we are doing a good job?”

Rich Rovito is a contributing writer.

**COMMON PATTERNS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most voters aren’t connected to the school.</th>
<th>Typically, you won’t see a heavy turn-out of parents.</th>
<th>We need people to know the facts and tell your story.</th>
<th>A propensity for the negative.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than two-thirds aren’t staff or parents.</td>
<td>Every vote counts.</td>
<td>If we don’t create the narrative, someone else will.</td>
<td>If they are unsure or if something is too complicated, it breeds mistrust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The 2023 WASB Delegate Assembly was marked by spirited debate and a high number of amendments. In a session that lasted almost four hours, delegates voted on 16 resolutions proposed by the WASB Policy and Resolution Resolutions Committee, approving 15 and rejecting one. Three other resolutions were held over until the 2024 Delegate Assembly after this year's session was adjourned due to lack of a quorum.

The Delegate Assembly is the annual gathering of representatives from WASB school district members who are asked to vote on resolutions that help guide the WASB legislative agenda and the statewide education agenda for the coming year. WASB President Barbara Herzog presided over the 2023 Assembly.

Several of the resolutions that were passed also drew lengthy debate and amendment proposals. Resolution 23-02, Voter Education, called for amending the existing resolution 3.01 to add voter education to a list of subjects recognized as providing a well-rounded education. The resolution was proposed by the Oshkosh Area School Board after students called for the change, citing a lack of awareness of the voting process among their peers.

Supporters of the resolution called the need to provide students with information about the voting
process extremely important. One delegate who has been a poll worker said voter education was needed based on his experience at the polls.

Opponents were concerned about ensuring that voter education would be unbiased and also worried that teachers could introduce their own political opinions when they discussed voter education. They also felt it was unnecessary to single out voter education when civics and government were already mentioned in the existing resolution.

An amendment to change “voter education” to “non-partisan and fact-based process of voting” failed and the original resolution was approved.

Resolution 23-12: Societal Issues was also debated at length. The amendment called for changing wording in existing Resolution 6:10 to add references to harassment and “any and all forms of discrimination.”

Some delegates were concerned that the proposed language changes were too specific and offered an amendment that was turned down.

Another amendment spelled out the effect of these societal issues on schools, noting that they were “adversely impacting the ability of public schools to effectively support students and families, focus on academic achievement and provide a safe work environment for educators.” That amendment was passed.

A second amendment eliminating a reference to “extracurricular endeavors” was also passed.

There was also lengthy debate on Resolution 23-13, Weapon Possession, which called for amending the language in two parts of the existing Resolution 6.11. The changes were suggested to clarify WASB’s position discouraging or disallowing possession of guns and weapons by students at school and school-related activities and also to clarify that WASB opposed other governmental entities forcing school boards to allow gun possession at school regardless of an individual’s concealed carry licensure status.

The change also added language that stated that WASB supports efforts to align state and federal law on weapon possession to allow an exception for school-sponsored activities such as trap shooting teams.

Amendments were offered to clarify the words “school grounds” to define the scope of areas in which guns would be prohibited under the existing resolution.

The resolution that was not approved was resolution 23-15, Universal Free School Meals. If approved, the policy would have put the WASB on record for supporting using state supplemental funding to set up a universal statewide free school meal program that would allow all students to receive free school meals regardless of their family income or participation in the federal school meals program.

Proponents of the resolution called it “an issue of equity,” saying it was “absurd” to hold children responsible for their families’ economic situation. Ensuring that all children have access to school meals will pay off in terms of improvements in learning achievement, they said.

Opponents worried about the high cost of setting up such a system, especially if districts had to begin funding the program themselves if there was no longer state surplus money. They urged that the surplus funding be used for other purposes. Some argued that the state should not be subsidizing meals for children of families that could afford to pay for them. Families should take responsibility for providing their children’s meals, they added, noting that the current federal meals program functions well.

Other resolutions that sparked debate included resolutions on eliminating the FORT testing requirement for reading teachers and supporting the development of career and technical education programs in schools and state funding to help pay for them. Both resolutions passed.

The complete list of the resolutions adopted by delegates and the final wording of those resolutions can be found on the WASB website and the Legislative Update blog.

Anne Davis is a contributing writer to Wisconsin School News.
Thousands of guests visit the School District of New Berlin’s six schools — and their indoor and outdoor athletic facilities — annually. They come to cheer at their child’s basketball game, or to attend a musical or play, or to tour the school during an open house. They roam the hallways. They spend hours in a gymnasium or at a soccer field. They attend meetings in the libraries, commons and cafeterias.

The facilities are blank canvases, ripe for naming rights sponsorship opportunities and mutually beneficial district-business partnerships. And since the start of the 2021-22 school year, the district has secured nearly $300,000 in financial commitments through naming rights agreements.

“We’ve jumped into this venture with a couple of incredible partners over the last two years and we could not be more excited about the opportunities that exist with them,” New Berlin Superintendent Joe Garza said. “The financial impact of agreements such as these is a huge win for all of our stakeholders, especially our community’s taxpayers.”

New Berlin’s first key move was the development of a sponsorship guide. The 28-page color booklet serves as a “menu” for potential sponsors to choose from. It is filled with dozens of venues separated into three categories: academic, athletic and arts. The easy-to-read guide includes opportunities at both of the district’s combined middle/high schools and its four elementary schools, venues as large as a football stadium to as small as an individual classroom — and everything in between.

Once the district developed its guide, identifying and qualifying potential suitors came next. In the fall of 2021, Drexel Building Supply, which had just started building its new corporate headquarters and 130,000-square-foot showroom in New Berlin, came calling. Drexel representatives were looking for an opportunity to get involved with and support local schools.

After a handful of conversations and idea-sharing, the district proposed a naming rights commitment and shared its sponsorship guide with the growing business. A few weeks later, Drexel signed a 10-year, $150,000 agreement with the district giving the family-owned Wisconsin company exclusive naming rights to the New Berlin West Middle/High School fieldhouse.

“We take pride in being active and supporting the communities we serve, and giving back to those communities is important to us,” Drexel owner Joel Fleischman said. “The (district) provided us with a unique way to immediately give back to the New Berlin community and we jumped on it.”

The district has since announced naming rights deals with Aspen Orthopedic Specialists and Orthopaedic Hospital of Wisconsin; Optimum Crush, Waukesha State Bank, Horicon Bank and, most recently, C&M Fencing.

Throughout the process — especially as the district cultivates a financial relationship with a potential partner — it is important to ask several questions.

“What are you hoping to get out of a partnership?” “Have you ever considered a financial contribution to the district?” “Are you aware of the district’s naming right’s program?” Getting answers to those questions and learning more about the connection the company feels to the district can turn an initial interest in a banner in a gymnasium or logo on a scoreboard into something more fruitful.

Once a deal is signed, the district announces it on its website, through social media, and in various print and digital publications throughout the year. The district sends news releases to the local media and invites its partners to special events, including concerts and athletic contests. Job shadows, site visits, internships and other student-employment opportunities are also always part of the conversations.

“We are not, by any means, salespeople, but we just so happen to have a great product to sell,” Garza added.

David Cotey is director of communications and public relations at the School District of New Berlin.
With federal relief funds set to expire next year, school district leaders around the nation are worried about a fiscal cliff. But here in Wisconsin, school leaders face an even steeper and riskier fiscal cliff created by a combination of factors other than the expiration of federal funds.

During the past two decades, from 2002 to 2020, Wisconsin’s spending per pupil fell from 11th among the fifty states to 25th, the largest drop in ranking of any state in the country. And that was before the 2021-23 state budget which provided little new in state support for public education.

Instead, state lawmakers advised school districts to use federal funds to maintain school operations. During the same period, 2002 to 2020, Wisconsin’s spending per pupil fell from 11% above the national average to 5.6% below the national average.

How did we get here? Look no further than Wisconsin’s clumsy, 30-year-old revenue limit mechanism, which has consistently failed to allow school funding to keep up with inflation, among its many other shortcomings. In fact, school funding has fallen by more than $3,200 per pupil below the CPI trend line since the Great Recession in 2009. How many of the recent levy override referenda could have simply kept pace with inflation?

As to the ongoing balancing act between taxes and public funding, it’s clear where Wisconsin lawmakers stand. According to a recent report by the non-partisan Wisconsin Policy Forum, Wisconsin’s state and local tax burden fell in 2022 to its lowest level on record. Local taxes as a share of income have never been lower in more than a half century of data, and state and federal taxes on families and businesses are also near historic lows.

Tax relief is always popular, but two decades of anemic state support for public education have taken a toll on school districts. Yet, it’s hardly the only challenge school leaders face. According to data published by the DPI, 78% of Wisconsin school districts are declining in enrollment. With a school funding mechanism that ties revenue to enrollment, and which assumes that cost savings occur when enrollment decreases, annual budget cutting is inevitable for most school districts.

Statewide, the baby bust is real, with a 17% decline in births since 2007. What’s more, population in Wisconsin is concentrating, with over 70% of students located in just 30% of school districts. These enrollment trends, and the related loss of revenue, hit the smaller, rural districts particularly hard. In a small district, budget cutting options tend to be a Hobson’s choice of bad options.

Finally, did lawmakers anticipate a two-year inflationary trend averaging almost 6.5% per year when freezing school funding in the 2021-23 budget? Probably not, but now it falls to local school leaders and boards to negotiate fair and reasonable agreements with teachers and other staff without the means to do so and while facing critical staff and teacher shortages.

Given all these factors, school leaders have grounds to insist upon a recovery in school funding in the 2023-25 state budget. Yes, many districts have chosen to take their funding case to local voters, with tax levy override referenda winning at nearly a 75% passage rate. However, not every district is positioned to win a referendum, causing the gap to widen between highest- and lowest-resourced districts.

Today, Wisconsin has a historic $7 billion budget surplus and the lowest taxes as a percentage of personal income in over 50 years. This adds up to a rare opportunity. We can mount a robust response to the post-pandemic needs of public-school students while still investing in the state’s many other key priorities. But it’s up to lawmakers to act.

Mike Barry is executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials.
Transitioning into adulthood is daunting for students with individualized education plans, or IEPs. The transition team at the Oshkosh Area School District supports our students and families by helping them to develop skills for post-secondary life. Our goal is to make sure that we give our graduates the skills they need to be college, career and community ready.

We have developed several programs and initiatives that help our students to develop independent living and employability skills. Programs layer on each other so that our students build skills in succession and receive opportunities for growth and independence. The level of support that we offer is contingent on individual needs and goals and is carried out in tandem with the goals of their IEP.

Typical curricula are not equipped to teach our students the skills they need to become independent or employable, leading us to seek out specialized curricula from national transition-to-work organizations Project LIFE and Project SEARCH. We have replicated these programs within our district.

Project LIFE is a comprehensive national program that gives individuals with disabilities the opportunity to develop, practice, and strengthen skills that are high predictors for increased adult independence and successful integrated community employment. Project LIFE offers a targeted course of study in combination with participation in experiential life skills education and authentic work-based learning experiences within the local community.

Students may participate in this program in their junior or senior year or both. Project LIFE is held at our community YMCA site for classroom instruction. A typical day at Project LIFE includes classroom learning focused on the course of study and two to three hours of work-based learning under the supervision of a special education teacher and job skill trainers.

Project SEARCH is another nationally recognized program designed for new graduates with disabilities to improve employment and educational opportunities. This nine-month program focuses on young adults who have completed their graduation requirements and have been assessed and accepted into the program.

Total immersion in the workplace reinforces daily instruction as interns receive continuous feedback and gain employability and competitive work skills. This program has been successful because of our long-standing partnerships with our host business, DVR, job developers, and our long-term care agencies.

Another significant employment training resource we have developed is our school cafes. The cafes in both of our high schools offer authentic work experience for students, who receive hands-on training in customer service, communication, teamwork, money handling, personal responsibility, and task analysis, among other skills. Our cafes serve the entire student body and staff daily, and last school year, our student employees served 68,000+ people.

As a result of the success of the cafes, the district recently purchased a customized and fully accessible food truck. Our Brewing Futures mobile café is another opportunity to give our students real-life employment training while integrating into our local community.

“Unfortunately, preconceptions are often a barrier to employment for people with disabilities. Brewing Futures is one way we can show our community that our students are incredible and that they can be an asset to any business,” said Special Education Director Linda Pierron.

The student employees earn credit during school hours for their work and are paid employees on evenings and weekends.

Since initiating these programs in our district, we have seen a significant increase in our post-graduation survey outcomes, especially in the area of competitive employment, defined as 90 consecutive days in a community setting, working 20 hours or more per week, and earning minimum wage or greater.

We find value in offering our students authentic work experiences and curriculum focused on independent living.

Mary Beth Connors is transition coordinator, Patti Kimball is transitions skills manager and Kris Steinhilber is transitions skills assistant at the Oshkosh Area School District.
Six years ago, four school districts — Arcadia, Blair-Taylor, Independence, and Whitehall — united under the belief that cooperation was necessary for their districts to offer their students a world-class education.

The Trempealeau Valley Cooperative 2.0 develops future-ready students by providing high-caliber learning experiences in pathways that will help maintain regional stability. To that end, the four school districts have developed numerous partnerships with area businesses and colleges and universities in the region.

These partnerships have allowed our four school districts to offer opportunities to students that we would not otherwise be able to offer. Four small, rural districts would not be able to offer numerous dual-credit courses, Advanced Placement courses, or other upper-level courses. Each of us, independently, would not have enough students enrolling in these courses to offer them, but through cooperation and having students travel between districts to take courses allows for us to fill sections of courses to be able to offer them.

An example of this is shown by the fact that the four districts combined have 1,168 enrollments in dual-credit courses during the 2022-23 school year. In addition to the course opportunities students have available, the four schools also work cooperatively to provide a robust youth apprenticeship program.

This program started as a two-school cooperative between Arcadia and another neighboring school district, Gale-Ettrick-Trempealeau, in 2019. Eleven students were placed in a youth apprenticeship experience. In the 2020-2021 school year, Blair-Taylor, Independence and Whitehall joined to make the youth apprenticeship program a five-school cooperative and the program continued to grow. During the 2022-23 school year, the four districts maintained the youth apprenticeship coop and, at the time of the writing of this article, had 51 students placed in apprenticeship experiences, with another 41 students in process.

Again, this is another great opportunity being provided to students that otherwise may not be possible if any of the four schools tried to offer this on their own. It is just another great example of how cooperation rather than competition can make a difference for students.

We believe there are seven takeaways from the work that Arcadia, Blair-Taylor, Independence and Whitehall are doing.

1. Determine your “why” for doing this work.
2. It is about cooperation, not competition.
3. Build strong relationships between districts, businesses and post-secondary educational institutions.
4. This work could not be accomplished alone or in isolation.
5. Working together allows the ability to build a system that prepares our kids for a globally competitive environment when none of us could accomplish this alone.
6. The work is difficult but vitally necessary.
7. It’s the right thing to do for kids.

The Trempealeau Valley Cooperative 2.0 is building on that work to continually grow and expand opportunities for students in our four districts and in the region. We all know that our future communities are currently in our schools.

Rural Wisconsin needs to ensure that communities remain strong and viable and one of the ways to do that is through a strong educational system that helps build the foundation for students to become the best versions of their future selves. The cooperative will continue to find ways to ensure our communities remain strong through the opportunities provided to the students in our districts.

Lance Bagstad, Lynn Halverson, Mike Beighley and Paul Franzwa are district administrators in Arcadia, Blair-Taylor, Whitehall and Independence, respectively.
What We’ve Learned and Where We’re Going

2022 WASB President Barb Herzog reflects, looks forward to horizon

It has been such an honor and privilege to be your 2022 WASB president.

I have been reflecting on our public education journey of the last three years attending the Joint State Education Convention. What a transformative time it has been!

What have we learned from these last three years, and where are we going next?

We have learned many things. We have learned that the WASB staff under the leadership of Executive Director John Ashley is an extraordinarily dedicated, resilient and entrepreneurial group who have taken their technology skills to new heights. The WASB staff have learned new skills and ways of connecting with constituents while finding opportunities to enhance the learning and professional development of our members.

The WASB is a member-driven association: it is your association. In 2022, WASB staff and directors developed a member survey. The feedback was generally positive while providing lots of ideas for opportunities for better serving our members.

WASB members have learned of the exceptional dedication, resilience and innovative capacities of our teachers, administrators and other staff members to address academic, social and emotional needs of our students. WASB staff, WASB members, teachers, administrators and other staff have sought opportunities to examine the “what” and “how” things were being done, and to seek new, better and a wider variety of ways to support all of our preK-12 learners. School board members have sought opportunities to address concerns and questions of constituents with patience, grace, openness, civility and transparency.

As WASB president, I believe that I have learned much and have become a better WASB board member and a better member of the Oshkosh board. I shall always be grateful for what I have learned from all of you on my life’s journey.

I have learned of countless ways that Wisconsin public school districts have sought to provide significant opportunities for student learning and growth and for engaging our communities in serving all students. My full list of examples, available at WASB.org, only touches the surface of successes in our public schools.

I am most familiar with the Oshkosh example of the initiation of a Brewing Futures Food Truck staffed by students with special needs for developing employability skills and for promoting community outreach and engagement. We are so proud of these students and our staff who support them.

Where are we going next? As David Horsager told us, it is time to get back on the horse and to build trust. We will continue as WASB members to tell our stories of the countless successes of public education, to inform our lawmakers of the value of public education in serving all learners, to advocate for the priorities of the Delegate Assembly, and to seek new and better ways to enhance learning and growth for all students. As John Ashley has stated in the Wisconsin School News, we have a “moral imperative” to educate all students.

Last year, I introduced you to my paternal grandmother, Mollie, a high school dropout, second language learner and teen parent. Nonetheless, Mollie was a strong advocate for supporting public education as she knew that public education was essential to the success of her three boys. Let us be the advocates for today’s “Mollie’s boys” and provide opportunities for all students to learn, grow and achieve their potentials. It is a moral imperative.

I want to thank all of you for the honor and privilege of serving as WASB president as I take with me many fond memories of the opportunity to serve the WASB and its members. I am most grateful for the support of my Oshkosh district, Region 7 colleagues, WASB staff and Board of Directors, and especially, WASB Executive Director John Ashley. Thank you all very much.

The full version of Barb Herzog’s speech is available at this link: bit.ly/3RWkHwg

Let us be the advocates for today’s “Mollie’s boys” and provide opportunities for all students to learn, grow and achieve their potentials. It is a moral imperative.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS & RECOGNITION

The educators, administrators and school board members honored at the State Education Convention represent the thousands of education leaders who are serving children every day.

Please join us in honoring this year’s award recipients.

School Board Honorees

Janet Giovannetti of the Lake Geneva-Genoa City UHS School Board (right) is congratulated by WASB 2022 President Barb Herzog and Executive Director John Ashley for serving for 30 years on her school board.

The following board members were also recognized for serving at least 20 YEARS on their local school boards:

- K. Terry Burhans, South Shore
- Lyle Cherry, Crivitz
- Joseph Como, Waukesha
- Lori Dufek, Lena
- Larry Dux, Pewaukee
- David Gallianetti, Sheboygan Area
- Theresa Hasz, Granton Area
- Lisa Kaiser, Glenwood City
- Blaine Koxlien, Blair-Taylor Community
- Lyle Lang, Fennimore Community
- Paul Lorge, Grafton
- Cathleen Lundgren, Suring
- Rick Pedretti, De Soto Area
- Cheryl Ploeckelman, Colby
- Sandy Schick, Oconomowoc Area
- Christina Scott, Stevens Point Area
- David Scott, Ripon Area
- Denise Slater, Dover #1
- Dudley Smith, Augusta
- Eric Stone, Cumberland
- James Swart, Oostburg
- Priscilla Swoboda, Algoma
- Steve Thompson, Menasha
- Rozanne Traczek, Osseo-Fairchild
- Karla Walker, Pardeeville Area
- David Westmayer, Horicon
- Rebecca Whalen, Melrose-Mindoro

These four board members were recognized for serving at least 30 YEARS on their local school boards:

Bernard Christman, Elmwood | Janet Giovannetti, Lake Geneva-Genoa City UHS
Willard Griesbach, Hortonville | Dawn Van Ess, Union Grove UHS
Hahn Assumes WASB Presidency for 2023

Rosanne Hahn of the Burlington Area School Board has been selected by the WASB Board of Directors as the president of the association for 2023.

The board also selected Mike Humke of the Dodgeville School Board to be the 2023 1st vice president and Andrew Maertz of the Reedsville School Board to be the 2nd vice president.

All three will serve a one-year term.

2023 WASB Board of Directors

Back row, left to right — Mike Humke, Dodgeville (Region 9); Brett Hyde, Muskego-Norway (Region 11); James Bouché, Wausau (Region 5); Andrew Maertz, Reedsville (Region 8); Randy Erickson, Prentice (Region 2); Alan Tuchenhagen, River Falls (Region 4)

Front row, left to right — Rosanne Hahn, Burlington (Region 13); Cherie Rhodes, Slinger (Region 15); Sandie Anderson, Wild Rose (Region 10); Sue Today, Sevastopol (Region 3); Barb Herzog, Oshkosh (Region 7); Sequanna Taylor, Milwaukee (Region 14); Mary Jo Rozmenoski, Black River Falls (Region 6); Linda Flottum, Turtle Lake (Region 1)

Not pictured: Tom Weber, Sun Prairie (Region 12)

Teachers of the Year

School Business Manager of the Year
Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials Executive Director Mike Barry (left) and State Superintendent Jill Underly (right) honor business managers of the year: Jerrud Rossing (second from left) of the Middleton-Cross Plains School District; Kris De Bruine (second from right) of the Oostburg School District; and David Ziegelbauer (center) of the New Holstein School District.

Superintendent of the Year
Dan Olson (center) of the Monona Grove School District is recognized as superintendent of the year by Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators Executive Director Jon Bales and State Superintendent Jill Underly.

Principals of the Year
State Superintendent Jill Underly (left) and Association of Wisconsin School Administrators Executive Director Jim Lynch (right) honor principals of the year: Stephanie Filter, Madison Elementary, Janesville School District; Anuradha Ebbe, Cherokee Heights Middle School, Madison School District; and Misa Sato, Reagan High School, Milwaukee School District.
The 2023-24 legislative session is underway in Madison and some of the most important committees to follow for K-12 education-related bills are the Senate and Assembly committees on education. For the first time in many years, we have two new chairs this session, Sen. John Jagler (R-Watertown) and Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay). We also have a new ranking member in the Assembly in Rep. Kristina Shelton (D-Green Bay). Only Sen. Chris Larson (D-Milwaukee) as ranking member has prior experience in his role. (Note: Chairs of committees are from the majority party and decide when hearings are scheduled and what bills are heard. Ranking members are the leading members on the committee from the minority party.)

With new faces in these important roles, we decided to give them the opportunity to introduce themselves to WASB members and share some of their background, why they decided to run for the legislature, and why they have interest in K-12 education policy. The following are their responses (Sen. Jagler’s is taken from the specified sources and was approved by his office).

**Sen. John Jagler:** Chair — Senate Committee on Education

“John was elected to the State Senate in April of 2021 after being elected to five terms in the State Assembly. John and his wife Heidi have three children and have lived in Watertown for over thirty years. Prior to being elected to the legislature in 2011, John worked as communications director for then-Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald. Before that, John had an award winning 20 year radio career, the last 15 at Newsradio 620 WTMJ in Milwaukee.” (votejagler.com)

“Since being elected to the state Legislature, one of my main focuses has been to improve our education system by empowering parents to make the best choices for their children. The last two years have put this issue front and center for so many parents across the state. Every day, we hear requests for more options and more accountability in our schools.

“Sitting on the Senate Education committee is one of the greatest privileges in my time in the Legislature. Working on reforming our schools and educational system is an honor and I will continue to keep this important issue at the forefront of everything I do as your State Senator.” (Reforming education, empowering parents — By State Senator John Jagler Mar 21, 2022)

**Sen. Chris Larson:** Ranking Member — Senate Committee on Education

My pathway to politics was from the environmental movement. I ran for state Senate against an incumbent of my own party because while Democrats controlled the assembly, the senate, and the governorship, they didn’t advance legislation to tackle climate change, mass transit, and much more. Also, the incumbent was a voucher guy. Since then, I’ve been fighting for those same values against the gerrymandered majority that works to thwart the will of the people of Wisconsin.

“I believe that the key to a strong, functioning democracy is having a strong, functioning public education system.” — Sen. Chris Larson
I believe that the key to a strong, functioning democracy is having a strong, functioning public education system. By ensuring every child has a quality education, we ensure that everyone has a pathway to success, regardless of where they started in life. I have been a member of the Senate Public Education Committee for 10 of the last 12 years and now have two kids in a Milwaukee Public School.

Rep. Joel Kitchens: Chair — Assembly Committee on Education
In my previous life, I was a large-animal veterinarian. My grandmother was a teacher in Appalachia who had a missionary zeal for education, so the importance of education was ingrained in me from an early age. When the Sturgeon Bay school district faced challenging times in the early 2000’s, I saw it as an opportunity to repay my community, and I ran for the school board. I found it to be a very rewarding experience, as we were able to regain the trust of the community and get on solid financial footing. I ended up serving for 14 years, 12 of those as president.

I was encouraged to run for this office when it opened up by a number of people who appreciated my work on the school board. It came at a good time in my life and I saw it as a chance to better the lives of the people in my area on a larger scale. From the beginning, education has been a primary focus of mine. I was vice-chairman of the Education Committee for my first four terms, before assuming the chairmanship this term. America is still the place where a child from the humblest beginnings can rise to the highest level of success. Education is key to that and I want to continue to work to increase opportunities for our young people.

America is still the place where a child from the humblest beginnings can rise to the highest level of success. Education is key to that...” — Rep. Joel Kitchens

Rep. Kristina Shelton: Ranking Member — Assembly Committee on Education
I started my career as a physical and health educator. From sports to yoga to nutrition, I loved connecting kids with the skills, knowledge, and passion needed to live healthy, fulfilling lives. I left the classroom to work for a non-profit where I led a national school wellness coalition to advance strong policies and practices around healthy classrooms and communities. As a mom of two in the Green Bay district, I served on the Green Bay school board from 2018-2021. At the board table, I saw how the legislature shapes our educational system. I ran to represent the 90th because I believe every kid deserves the freedom to attend a fully funded, thriving public school.

As a teacher, I quickly realized that compounding factors — many outside of my control — were influencing academic outcomes. A lack of funding, staff turnover, violence and hunger severely impacted my students. For their success, I had to educate the whole child but also support the whole school community. The Healthy School Meal for All Act, a bill I authored to provide free meals to all students, demonstrates how academics are connected to basic needs and economic insecurity. I continue to believe that what is best for our kids is what is best for our state. Our public schools are the center of civic life and democracy. Let’s invest in them.
4 Common Questions About Employee Social Media Use

Employee social media use continues to be common. School board members might encounter posts from district employees and wonder, “Is this allowed?” This Legal Comment will answer some common questions about employee social media use and discuss the relevant legal issues.

1. Can an employee post to personal social media during work time?

A school board can approve a policy prohibiting employees from posting to personal social media during work time. Proving a violation generally requires a district to look at the time stamp on the social media post and track it to the employee’s schedule. However, the district should verify that the employee was not on a break during the time of the post. Additionally, the district should enforce such a policy consistently to avoid claims that a teacher is being singled out for discipline due to some legally protected class (race, sex, religion, etc).

2. Can an employee use district technology to post?

A school board can approve a policy that regulates employee use of district technology resources, typically called an acceptable use policy or an acceptable use of technology policy. A school board would be within its authority to prohibit all personal use of district technology, but such a policy might be challenging to enforce if, in practice, many employees use district technology for personal use and the district develops a history of non-enforcement of the policy. That is one reason why some policies allow for limited personal use of district technology during non-work time. Wherever a school board draws the line on personal use of district technology, the district needs to be consistent in enforcing that line.

There are other ways to regulate personal social media use on district technology without creating an outright ban of all personal use of district technology. Some school boards prohibit the use of school email addresses to create personal social media accounts. Some boards allow limited personal use of district email accounts but prohibit personal social media use.

Any acceptable use policy should clearly establish that employees have no expectation of privacy in their use of district technology, including when employees are accessing personal social media through district technology. This allows the district to monitor and track personal social media use, which will allow the district to enforce the policy.

3. What restrictions can districts place on employees posting outside of work hours?

As long as an employee’s social media use is not protected by legal principles, districts may discipline employees for off-duty social media use when a connection exists between the district’s interest and the employee’s social media use. There are two primary legal restrictions on districts regulating employees’ personal social media use outside of work hours: protected concerted activity and the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Protected concerted activity

Under state law, municipal employees have the right to organize and to engage in concerted activity for mutual aid and protection, including the right to speak out on behalf of fellow employees. Districts may not interfere with, restrain, or coerce municipal employees in the exercise of this right. While the legal definition of municipal employee includes most school district employees, the definition excludes supervisors, managerial employees, and executive employees. Therefore, certain district employees, such as administrators, cannot rely on this law for any protection.

Concerted activity involves two or more employees working together to address matters involving wages, hours, or other terms and conditions of employment. This can include when a single employee acts on the authority of other employees or works to initiate group action. The right to engage in lawful concerted activity is in addition to the employee’s First Amendment rights.

For example, a teacher posts on social media that the elementary grade teachers were talking at school today, and they believe it is completely absurd that the district pays elementary level teachers less than high school teachers. The post continues by stating that the reason for this is because the district administrator is a former high school teacher that doesn’t value the work of elementary school teachers. The teacher “tags” his fellow elementary school teachers in the post.

Such a post could easily spread throughout the district community. It could divide the teaching staff by grade level and could undermine the district administrator’s ability to
lead. It might not even be a completely accurate statement. However, this post is an example of protected concerted activity. The teacher is expressing the opinion of a group and is advancing further collective activity by tagging fellow teachers. Therefore, the district could not discipline the teacher for this post.

**First Amendment**

Speech made pursuant to an employee's ordinary official duties is unprotected by the First Amendment. Social media posts are generally a form of speech. Therefore, any social media post that an employee makes as part of their job duties, like maintaining the social media accounts for the school band, can be regulated by the district. In this role, the employee is essentially speaking as the district, and thus must stay within the contours of the district’s policies and perspectives.

Speech which is not on a matter of public concern is unprotected by the First Amendment. Therefore, speech that is merely of personal concern to an individual employee is unprotected. For example, if a teacher says that they hate their third period class, that is a personal complaint, which is unprotected by the First Amendment. By contrast, a comment that students today lack respect for authority might be closer to a matter of public concern than a personal complaint, depending on the context.

Finally, even speech which is made as a citizen on a matter of public concern will only be protected if the employee’s First Amendment speech rights outweigh the district’s interest as an employer. This is called the “Pickering Balancing Test” after the U.S. Supreme Court case establishing this test. Factors that a court will consider when applying this balancing test include:

- Whether the speech would create problems in maintaining discipline or harmony among co-workers;
- Whether the employment relationship is one in which personal loyalty and confidence are necessary;
- Whether the speech impeded the employee’s ability to perform his or her responsibilities;
- The time, place and manner of the speech;
- The context in which the underlying dispute arose; and
- Whether the matter was one on which debate was vital to informed decision-making.

The Pickering Balancing Test is highly fact specific. However, in general, it provides fairly robust protection for employee social media posts. Unless the application of the Pickering Balancing Test “factors” dictates otherwise, it allows employees to criticize their school districts, even when such criticisms are not well received by administrators, board members, and the community.

For example, assume an employee makes a post that states students from a certain country should not be entitled to an education. This post goes viral, and the outroar from the community (and from outside the community) is strong. This employee has to teach students from that country as part of their job, and the district has a non-discrimination policy in place. This post might fail the Pickering Balancing Test because it prohibits the employee from doing their job, and indeed, might prevent the district as a whole from doing its job given the extent of the backlash.

4. **Can a district require an employee to add a disclaimer that their posts reflect their personal opinions and not those of the district?**

Yes, such policies have become increasingly common. However, these policies are not a “cure-all.” For example, this policy is only effective if employees know about and follow the policy. Otherwise, a district might find itself in a situation where no district employees follow this policy, and the only time the district wants to enforce the policy is against an employee who engaged in controversial speech that would otherwise be protected by the First Amendment. While, technically, the employee omitting the disclaimer has broken the policy, many other employees have done
so, as well. The only difference is that this particular employee engaged in protected speech that upset the district. That can lead to legal challenges.

Additionally, even the employee’s use of this disclaimer does not mean that their speech is automatically protected by the First Amendment. The district should still do a full analysis of the speech to determine if it can regulate the speech by disciplining the employee or forcing the employee to take the post down. This disclaimer might slightly weigh in favor of the employee in the Pickering Balancing Test, but it is not dispositive.

Conclusion
Employee social media use is a complicated issue. Board members, administrators, and the community should remember that the law provides strong protection for certain employee social media posts. If an employee’s social media post is potentially causing a disruption in the district, contact legal counsel for a full analysis of the issue. Even if the district can’t take action against the employee, the district might still be able to explain to upset community members that certain employee speech is legally protected. In certain situations, the best response for employee social media use is educating others about those employees’ rights. The incident can become a “teachable moment.” Finally, boards should review their employee social media and acceptable use policies to ensure that they reflect the board’s policy judgment and comport with the law.

*This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka and Brian P. Goodman of Boardman Clark, WASB Legal Counsel. For a related articles, see Wisconsin School News: “Employees’ Lawful Concerted Activity and First Amendment Protections” (June 2020), “Recent Cases Address Employee Speech Rights” (Mar. 2013), and “Misuse of Technology in the Workplace” (May 2010); WASB Legal Notes: “Elements of an Effective Acceptable Use Policy” (Fall 2008).
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2023 WASB DAY
AT THE CAPITOL

Advocate for your students and schools!

You’ll get the latest information and updates on the 2023-25 state budget and other legislation and hear directly from state budget experts and legislative leaders. And you’ll meet with your legislators in the afternoon where you can discuss your district’s top issues/needs. With school leaders facing unique challenges, this is your time to have your voices heard.

Visit WASB.org or scan the QR code below for the complete schedule, registration and hotel information.


We look forward to seeing you in Madison in March.