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Chronic Absenteeism Rises Statewide

Wisconsin's preK-12 schools reported a troubling surge in absenteeism in the 2020-21 school year, the Wisconsin Policy Forum reported.

In 2017, 12.4% of the state's public school students were considered chronically absent, but by 2021 there was a nearly 4 percentage point increase to 16.1%.

It's still unclear whether this increase is a one-time, COVID-19 pandemic-related surge. New absenteeism rate data for the 2021-22 school year are set to be released soon.

Research has linked high rates of chronic absenteeism to lower achievement, decreased mental health, higher dropout rates and more challenges in adulthood.

The Wisconsin Policy Forum found absenteeism was highest in schools with large numbers of students from low-income households and students of color.

While urban schools experience the highest absenteeism rates, the Wisconsin Policy Forum found the 2021 increase was a statewide problem. □

Washington Island Teacher Awarded National Grant

Miranda Dahlke, a teacher from the Washington Island School District, won a \$1,000 research kit from the STEM Research Grants program, the Green Bay Press-Gazette reported.

Dahlke, who teaches seventh through 12th grade, will use the kit to extend learning beyond the classroom and incorporate its use across all grade levels.

"This grant will keep my students engaged with STEM learning into the future through a sustained connection with Gathering Ground, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and as we establish an area as a school forest," Dahlke said in a press release.

Dahlke is one of 52 teachers from 24 states and the commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to receive a grant from the Society for Science this year. □

Report: State Losing New Teachers

A Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction report has found the state's schools are losing early-career teachers and finding it difficult to hire certain areas of licensure.

The report identified a trend of higher enrollment by Wisconsinites in schools of education compared with neighboring states, but lower rates of completion. The report did not contain data to explain this difference.

Teacher retention rates — which stand at 67% after five years — are seen as another area to improve.

Hard-to-fill licensure areas include

special education, language arts, math, science, career and technical education, art and music, and English as a second language.

Finally, the report found that declining passage rates in the Foundations of Reading Test are a barrier to prospective teachers. Pass rates for the test declined from 75% in 2014-15 to 60% in 2020-21.

Pass rates also varied widely by race and ethnicity.

Find a full copy of the report here: bit.ly/3J3yFbJ. □

STAT OF THE MONTH

54%

First-time passage rate for the Foundations of Reading Test, a requirement for elementary teachers, special education teachers and others.

Source: DPI Educator Preparation Program and Workforce Analysis Report

Online Learning Replacing Snow Days

After the COVID-19 pandemic provided schools with new online learning capabilities, more districts are replacing snow days with at-home learning.

On February 22, at least two dozen southern Wisconsin school districts held an online learning day instead of closing school. Statewide, at least 70 districts used online learning in some capacity, the Wisconsin State Journal reported.

The Portage School District has begun implementing an online learning day rather than canceling school due to bad weather, as long as there is enough notice.

"Obviously everybody had to go virtual during the initial stages of the pandemic. And so, we have the infrastructure built in," Portage District Administrator Josh Sween told the newspaper.

Online learning days provide continuity in learning, Sween said, while avoiding makeup days later in the year.

In the past, when a school goes over its allocated snow days, those hours are usually made up by adding school days or adding minutes on to class periods. □



Building Opportunities for Kids

In the first few decades of this magazine's history, through the mid-20th century, virtually every month's cover featured a picture of a new Wisconsin school.

Around the state and nation, enrollment was soaring as the Baby Boomers entered school. At the same time, districts were consolidating quickly, sometimes creating the need for a new school.

The pride our districts and residents feel in their schools hasn't changed over the decades. I still enjoy helping our members celebrate their renovations and new schools.

We are no longer building schools as quickly, but we've learned much more about the role of school buildings in being environments for learning.

This issue of *Wisconsin School News* focuses on school facilities. These are investments that last a half-century or more, often serving as an anchor to a community or neighborhood. School boards are a critical link between a community and the decisions about its school buildings.

Sometimes, these decisions can be charged, as when a school board must balance taxpayers' financial interests with a community's desire to keep a school.

On page 10, read about how the Oshkosh School District is carrying out a long-term plan to consolidate from 20 to 14 schools. Similar discussions are taking place in Wausau, Superior, La Crosse and other communities around our state.

Recognizing the intense community interest in school buildings — and the need to keep voters informed about school budgets and potential referendums — school boards are thoughtful about how they prioritize their limited funds.

On page 14, learn about how the Greendale School District developed a process to collect guidance from their community to create a new way to rank facility projects. Their process quickly prioritized a wide range of projects, from money-saving LED lighting in the auditorium to an outdoor education space.

Meanwhile, more districts are learning about the potential for infrastructure itself to be a teaching tool.

It doesn't have to be expensive. As you'll read on page 7, Token Springs Elementary School in the Sun Prairie Area School District has painted its ducts and pipes according to their function, with hot water supply pipes painted red and cold water pipes blue.

By taking infrastructure that was hidden and putting it on display, this school and others are captivating our future architects, engineers and tradespeople.

Finally, our schools are increasingly being built to suit modern educational needs. This issue includes stories about technical academies in Appleton and Fond du Lac that are addressing the ever-growing need for qualified workers.

School boards will welcome new members this month, and mainte-

nance budgets and long-term capital plans are one of many areas for them to learn.

If you're looking for quality onboarding resources at WASB.org, check out the April 2020 episode of the WASB Connection Podcast or the September 2022 issue of this magazine.

Additionally, our New School Board Member Handbook answers your common-sense questions (like "Who do I go to for information?") in everyday language. Find it and other resources by using the "Search" option at the upper right of WASB.org.

The WASB divides Wisconsin into 15 regions. Every year, we hold New School Board Member Gatherings across the state in these regions to give new school board members a chance to network, learn about their duties and hear what we can do for them. We will also provide a live virtual session on April 27. Find details in Association News on page 26.

Then, in May, the WASB will hold another series of Spring Workshops that go more in-depth on the governance practices that make you effective as boards — and help students succeed.

We hope to welcome our members to these events and encourage them to take advantage of the resources their association offers.

I'd like to also recognize our departing school board members. Thank you for your service to your communities and children. ■

School boards are a critical link between a community and the decisions about its school buildings.

SUSTAINABILITY ON DISPLAY

How three
Wisconsin
schools use
their green
infrastructure
as teaching tools

Lake Mills Elementary School students use an interactive touch screen to learn more about the building's sustainable features.



The best way to show value is **putting sustainable systems on display** and allowing teachers to use them as real-world examples in STEM-related lessons.



Dale Garfield, PE
senior HVAC engineer,
Eppstein Uhen Architects
(EUA)



Juli Simonet, DES
senior plumbing designer,
project manager and
associate, EUA



Mike Schwindenhammer,
AIA, LEED AP,
senior design architect
and associate, EUA

Conversations about sustainable school infrastructure typically focus on the performance of systems like geothermal heating and cooling, solar panels and green roofs. The potential energy and financial savings offered by these systems are incentives for going green. According to the United States Green Building Council, green schools use 33% less energy than conventional buildings, saving districts thousands of dollars annually in operating costs.

Another harder to quantify benefit is just as significant: green infrastructure helps students understand the value sustainable building features bring their schools, communities and the planet. The best way to show value is putting sustainable systems on display and allowing teachers to use them as real-world examples in STEM-related lessons.

While designing K-12 schools throughout the state, Eppstein Uhen Architects has worked with districts that find value in using their buildings as teaching tools. Three stand out.

Lake Mills Elementary School, Lake Mills

Lake Mills Elementary School is the first public K-12 school in the United States to achieve a platinum certification by the United States Green Building Council's LEED rating system. The school made strategic decisions with its sustainable design solutions, including solar panels, a closed-loop geothermal system, a green roof and vegetable gardens, ensuring each provided learning opportunities for students.

Several learning opportunities stem from the green roof framed by the building's second-story windows. From multiple classrooms, students can look out over the vegetated trays and see the roof. Visually more interesting than a rubber membrane or stone ballast, the roof also helps plants absorb rainwater by routing it away from the sewer system. Furthermore, the roof surface also stays cooler during the summer, reducing the demand for cooling inside the building. Finally, the roof attracts birds, bees and other insects.



Windows overlook a green roof at Lake Mills Elementary School, allowing teachers to use the roof as a teaching tool for their students.

Teachers can point to the roof and discuss its benefits for the building's energy consumption and stormwater management. When the flowers bloom and pollinators come alive, they can use it to demonstrate a plant's life cycle and discuss the pollinators' role in the ecosystem.

More learning opportunities are available in the school gardens.

"Each student in the school participates in taking care of the garden," says former Lake Mills Elementary School principal Amanda Thompson, who is now the district's director of teaching and learning. "We use the harvest in our school lunch program."

■ **Waunakee Intermediate School, Waunakee**

When building its new intermediate school, the Waunakee Community School District committed to an energy-efficient, cost-saving project.

The school's sustainable features include a geothermal system, rooftop solar panels, a green roof and a bioswale (a channel with vegetation to catch and filter rainwater).

Each sustainable feature includes a window graphic with text and diagrams explaining how the systems work. For example, the geothermal graphic explains how the system uses the Earth's natural properties to help heat and cool the school, saving energy and reducing pollution from fossil fuels. The graphic also includes a simplified map showing the distance between the geothermal pump room and the field of deep wells.

The school's principal, Tim Mommaerts, said teachers and students engage with the visible systems and signage.

"Our sixth-grade science curriculum has a unit on renewable energy," he says. "Our teachers walk their classes around the building to look at the

geothermal room, the green roof and the solar panels on the site."

On the tour, teachers and students stop to reflect on the signage and discuss each system's environmental and energy impacts. Teachers encourage students to ask questions, addressing any misconceptions about the systems.

"Having these features displayed on our site enhances both student engagement and understanding of how each system functions, as well as the importance of renewable energy systems," Mommaerts says.

■ **Token Springs and Meadow View elementary schools, Sun Prairie**

Geothermal systems require many pipes. Rather than hiding these in a basement mechanical room, the Sun Prairie Area School District displays them in high-traffic areas of two elementary schools built in 2018. The geothermal pump rooms are

next to the schools' main corridors, and the pump equipment is painted bold colors to attract attention.

When students look through Token Springs' large windows into the pump room, they see motors attached to pipes with circumferences the size of basketballs. Students can follow the pipes up and over the wall to the adjacent corridor, where the ceiling has been removed to expose more mechanical systems.

Ducts and pipes in the corridor are painted according to their function. For example, hot water supply and return pipes wrapped in bright red insulation run parallel to blue cold-water pipes. Each pipe is labeled to help students understand what they carry.

Visible infrastructure ideas for existing schools

New buildings gave Lake Mills, Waunakee and Sun Prairie an opportunity to incorporate these displays. But only some districts have a construction project on the horizon. Schools can still leverage their buildings as teaching tools by using their

existing infrastructure or adding simple equipment.

For example, a section of a school's existing ceiling could be removed to reveal the building's mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. Similar to Token Springs, the infrastructure could be painted according to function — all the air supply ductwork might be painted green, and the air return ductwork painted yellow.

On the wall, a sign (or, better yet, an interactive screen) could feature a diagram of the building's HVAC system. The interactive screen could show students real-time data about when and how long the system runs, and how much energy it consumes. Students could trace the conditioned air as it originates at the handling units, flows to classrooms through the green ducts and travels back to the equipment room through the yellow ducts.

To maximize the effectiveness of these displays, the ceiling could be removed in a few areas around the school so that students get a complete picture of the system. This is a relatively

low-cost building adaptation, as the modifications are cosmetic and the building's infrastructure does not change. The most significant expense would be painting the ducts.

Another option is installing a rain-water collection system at the school. With the help of an engineer, one roof drain could be rerouted to a cistern before entering the sewer system. This display could help students understand how a stormwater management system works, allowing them to track the water as it lands on the roof, flows into the tank and exits the building. Elevating the tank would introduce pressure in the system, which could help students understand the fundamentals of plumbing. If the tank has a spigot, students could harvest the rainwater for the school's garden.

There are even simpler options. The vegetated trays at Lake Mills Elementary School do not have to be on the roof to offer lessons. Instead, the trays could be placed adjacent to the school's parking lot. Students could insert a thermometer into the trays' soil and mount one on the pavement to witness



Waunakee Intermediate School students can peer into the geothermal pump room and learn more about how the system works from the nearby window graphic.



A part of the ceiling at Token Springs Elementary School has been removed to reveal pipes that students can trace into the adjacent geothermal pump room.

how vegetation absorbs heat compared to the impervious surface. This could complement a lesson on the “heat island effect” that plagues many cities, showing the benefits of introducing greenery in urban areas.

■ Planning a display

Schools considering a sustainable infrastructure display in a new building should connect with their architect and engineers early in the design process. The design team will meet with teachers to understand how the displays can enhance what they already teach, or how visible systems might offer new lessons to the curriculum. The team will help districts plan appropriate locations for their display and design the mechanical systems to ensure the geothermal pump room, for example, is located next to the cafeteria instead of the library.

Architects and engineers also help districts decide the aesthetics of the exposed infrastructure, which can affect how students understand the systems. For instance, the design team might

specify bolts instead of ground (and nearly invisible) weld joints where structural beams join the floor to highlight the connection for students.

Students do not need to constantly engage with visible building infrastructure for the displays to be valuable. A tour of sustainable features or a module taught once a year can be enough to get students excited about their buildings.

These brief moments might be the starting points for future architects, engineers, tradespeople and sustainability experts. Seeing and revisiting the features throughout the school year is much better than the alternative; infrastructure that is out of sight will also be out of mind.

■ Toward a greener future

Sustainable building infrastructure benefits more than a district’s bottom line. When made visible, it helps students understand the value these systems provide their school, community and planet. Putting sustainable features on display also helps students get excited about possible career paths.

When planning a renovation or new construction project, districts should consider ways to make the inner workings of their buildings accessible to students. But they don’t have to wait for their next referendum. Through small-scale remodeling projects or adding simple equipment, schools can immediately show students the value of sustainability. ■

Dale Garfield, PE, is a senior HVAC engineer at Eppstein Uhen Architects (EUA), an architecture, engineering and design firm headquartered in Milwaukee. Dale has over twenty years of experience designing mechanical systems for projects ranging from K-12 schools to industrial facilities.

Juli Simonet, DES, is a senior plumbing designer, project manager, and associate at EUA. She has over 25 years of experience helping K-12 school districts across the state integrate efficient and sustainable plumbing systems into their buildings.

Mike Schwindenhammer, AIA, LEED AP, is a senior design architect and associate at EUA. He specializes in K-12 learning environments, helping Wisconsin’s school districts design spaces that improve student learning and teacher satisfaction.



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A Consolidation Roadmap

Oshkosh convenes community panel to guide transition from 20 schools to 14

Declining enrollment and aging facilities are continuing to put school consolidation on the agenda of many Wisconsin school districts.

It's a weighty decision. Schools can feel like the heartbeat and soul of the community, where frequent events or activities bring people together. Neighborhoods may even take the name of their local school.

The importance of a school makes a difficult community conversation even more challenging.

The Oshkosh Area School District's 20 K-12 schools are primarily within city boundaries, forming the traditional hub of many neighborhoods. The few that exist outside of the city are integral to housing developments that extend to the north, south and west of the city proper.

Consolidation discussions can

quickly turn to questions of loss and uncertainty. For a community or neighborhood, change can mean a loss of identity, tradition and place. For families, this change leads to feelings of uncertainty — they may wonder whether the school district is making the best choices for their student or for the bottom line.

District staff may question their tenure within the school and the hard work they've done to produce a great educational environment. In Oshkosh, these concerns impacted discussions about consolidation and stalled multiple efforts.

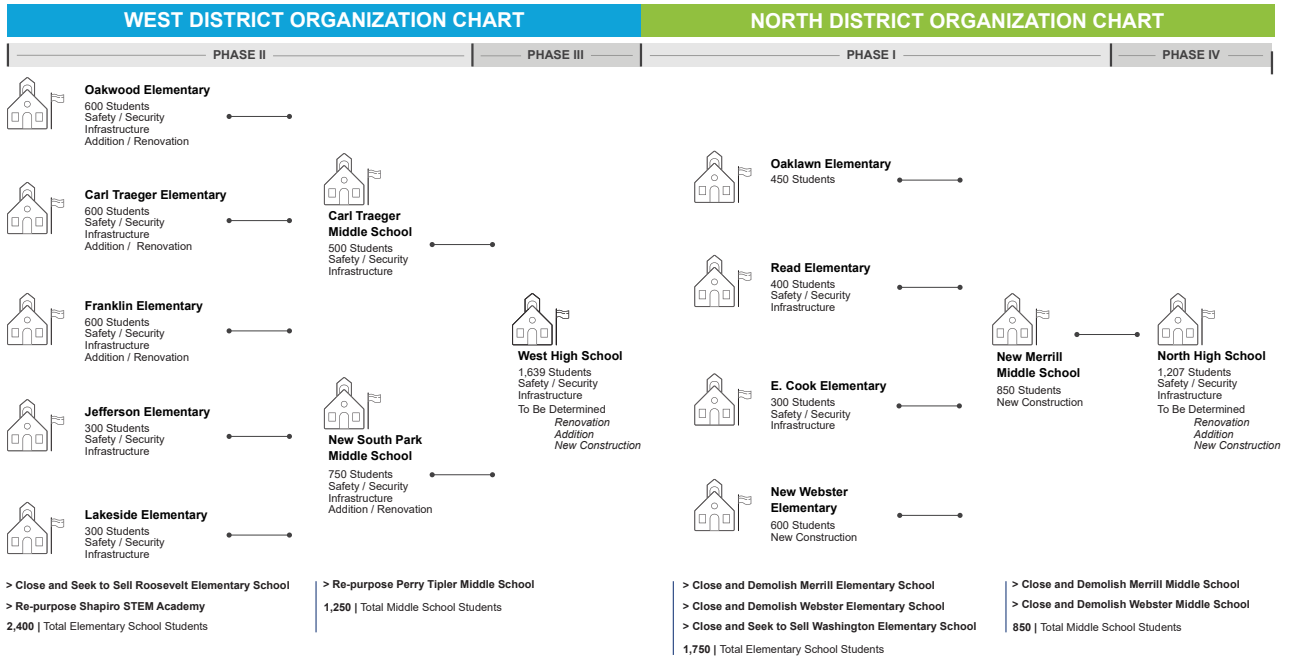
"Consolidation is a difficult decision," Supt. Bryan Davis says, "but it can be a powerful tool for ensuring that all of our students have access to the best possible education. Honoring the past while investing in the future is critical to our success."

With all the challenges inherent to "right-sizing" a school system, how can a school district navigate the path of a consolidation plan without starting off on the wrong foot? In the case of Oshkosh, the answer was: do your homework first.

■ Making a plan

David Gundlach, deputy superintendent in Oshkosh, credits community-based strategic planning efforts for the district's success. In 2017, the district worked with the community to lead a strategic planning process. The process did not discuss or consider consolidation, but rather tried to identify how the district should seek to make improvements to their curriculum, programs and facilities on a macro level.

One of the biggest takeaways



from this process was that the community saw a clear need for facility improvements to meet goals for student improvement, operational efficiency and safe learning and working environments.

“One of the most impactful steps was to reach out to the OASD community and ask them what they wanted the district to focus on. The results were overwhelmingly in favor of facility improvements which figured prominently in our plan,” said Gundlach.

The district conducted a facility condition assessment led by Bray Architects to address and determine facility needs. The assessment reviewed the condition of existing buildings including site, roofing, ADA accessibility, plumbing, heating, cooling, ventilation and electrical.

Through this process, it became clear that Oshkosh had approximately \$104 million in capital maintenance needs across their 20 buildings. The average age of the buildings was 66 years, with three-quarters of them

being more than 50 years old. With these significant costs, it was necessary to create a process to determine what their schools should look like in the future. The district had to decide whether it was worth continuing to invest in many aging facilities. Or should they consider broader change?

During the facility study, the district conducted a separate student population study that was completed by the UW Applied Population Lab. This study reviewed data from several different projection models to determine if current trends of enrollment decline were expected to continue in the future. The final report determined that Oshkosh should expect to lose an additional 75-100 students per year through 2028.

Building a vision

With a strategic plan, facility study and enrollment projection, the homework was complete; it was time for the district to discuss and develop a vision for the district.

To lead this process, the Board of Education created a Facility Advisory Committee charged with evaluating options or pathways for the district. All future planning decisions were to be determined based on three criteria:

- Proposed solutions that support learning environments that are safe, accessible, efficient and equitable.
- Purposeful spaces that inspire innovative learning, accommodate evolving technology, and promote collaboration among students, staff, parents and community.
- A solution that maximizes use, reuse and/or replacement of existing facilities and is cost effective for the taxpayer, providing for an enduring end-product that is energy efficient and adaptable for decades.



One of the early discussions the committee tackled was defining what an “ideal” elementary and middle school should look like. Bray Architects and district staff led the committee through a process of understanding how the size of a school can boost learning for students, create equal access to programming, and improve efficiency by minimizing staff travel and duplication of services.

It was determined that an elementary school should have three or four classes per grade level, for 450-600 total students. The ideal number of middle school students was set at 800-900. This provided the district with the most efficient building model to best meet the needs of the

students and staff. The committee agreed that the existing two-high school structure was the best delivery model due to student enrollment numbers and the geography of Oshkosh.

With this structure in place, the committee had a template to assess consolidation. The group evaluated current building sizes, infrastructure needs, location, site size and many other factors in determining how to

best use current facilities in the future.

The committee also considered the idea of having new buildings to replace aging schools. This committee focused their work on the north side of town, where some of the

oldest facilities with the most significant needs were located. While this first phase was the starting point, community members told the Facility Advisory Committee that they would not support a capital referendum without knowing all the subsequent phases.

“We heard loud and clear that our community wanted to know the beginning, middle and end to the story before they would support a referendum,” Gundlach says.

“We heard loud and clear that our community wanted to know the beginning, middle and end to the story before they would support a referendum,” said Gundlach.

The process started with the question,
“What do we need to do to make education better in Oshkosh?”
They continued to build a framework from there.

Keeping this in mind, the committee worked to flesh out all four phases of the consolidation plan. It was ultimately determined that, through the first two phases of the master plan, the district would be able to consolidate from 20 to 14 schools. Each building consolidation referenced the planning criteria and the process used to verify their use, reuse and/or replacement.

A recommendation was made to the Board of Education to pursue a referendum for the first phase of this plan that would consolidate five current schools into a new elementary and new middle school.

Following the successful November 2020 referendum, the district is anxiously awaiting the completion of the Bray-designed projects, while looking forward to preparing for the next phase of work toward their goal of modernizing facilities while providing more effective services to students.

■ Lessons learned

As the district went through this multiyear process, they learned a great deal.

Before creating a plan, it's critical to reach out to the community. Too often, districts (with the best intentions) create a plan without engaging the public to get a read on their priorities. Also, with most voters not having children in schools, it's important to gather community input to determine the focus.

Gathering meaningful community input and turning it into a plan of action is not something that a district needs to do on its own. Having worked on dozens of facility assessments and master planning projects in the last five years, Bray Architects served as a guide.

Being prepared to develop a comprehensive plan that reviews all facilities as opposed to just those

that may need the most attention is crucial. Many voters want the whole story before approving referendum funding. Considering both the district's debt structure and any options around defeasance of debt to smooth out levy impacts for taxpayers is also important.

In many ways, the consolidation process was successful because it didn't start out merely looking to close schools. The process started with the question, “What do we need to do to make education better in Oshkosh?” They continued to build a framework from there.

When facing aging facilities and declining enrollment, the solution to consolidate often seems obvious or

inevitable. To successfully navigate consolidation, districts need to be purposeful in their process by clearly defining why consolidation is needed and how it will improve conditions for students and staff.

“Our community-developed, board-approved long-range facilities plan represents a shared vision for our future,” says Davis, the superintendent. “By continuing to engage with our stakeholders and foster a shared understanding of our reality, we can build a stronger, more responsive education system and community.” ■

Clint Selle is vice president and architect at Bray Architects. David Gundlach is deputy superintendent in the Oshkosh Area School District.



Outdoor Education Space: This space was enhanced by an Eagle Scout working with local contractors and was one of the projects prioritized by the Greendale process. The addition of outdoor furniture and A/V equipment will transform this space for outdoor education and recreation.



Focus Your FACILITIES FUNDS

Changing population requires Greendale Schools to reprioritize resources

Every school district faces some flavor of this challenge: With limited resources and urgent demands, how do districts prioritize facility needs?

Capital project prioritization is the process of evaluating and ranking proposed projects based on their potential impact and feasibility. The goal is to determine which projects should receive funding and be implemented.

In the last few years, Greendale Schools has rethought how it aligns school and community facility prior-

ities. Their process engages community members, district staff and a hired consultant.

It started in 2021, when the district had recently completed work on a \$33.8 million facilities referendum project and was adopting a new strategic plan. In the long-term viability of these new facilities the district wanted to answer two questions:

1. How does the district provide facilities that meet the needs of students and families with the resources available?

2. How do the facilities projects support our new strategic plan?

An equally important step was learning more about community demographics and understanding the needs of district families.

A district-commissioned study showed the Greendale population was changing. Original and aging families in the community were moving out and selling homes to younger families, bringing an influx of new students to Greendale.

To meet the needs of the evolving

community base, the district reimaged how it prioritizes resources for capital projects.

Evaluating facilities

The district contracted with vendors that could assist in its post-referendum facilities review. These firms helped assess electric, plumbing, HVAC, roofing, building exterior, roofing, pool and other facility components.

This work included spaces that were not touched by the recent capital referendum. The study, which took 12 to 18 months, involved local custodians and maintenance staff assisting the consultants.

The district advanced the process by networking with facility directors and leaders of other schools to identify the best practice. After discovering a tool with a scoring rubric,

AFTER DISCOVERING A TOOL WITH A SCORING RUBRIC, facilities department team members scored potential improvement areas by balancing strategic plan priorities with infrastructure needs.

facilities department team members scored potential improvement areas by balancing strategic plan priorities with infrastructure needs.

Building a community team

Engaging a community team of construction and trades workers was necessary to build the scoring rubric.

“We are grateful that we have a supportive community that steps up and volunteers their time when we have an important project to do,” says Jonathan Mitchell, the district’s director of business services. “We knew that this would be a new

process, so the district partnered with an outside consultant, Cadence Consulting, that was equally interested in helping to build an innovative scoring tool for project prioritization.”

With the team in place, the next steps included sharing a video presentation of the current state of the facilities, explaining the goals of the team’s work, developing a six-month meeting schedule and conducting public tours with community listening sessions.

Monthly meetings included visits to all school buildings to discuss the recent renovations and debate cri-

Asset Condition Assessment HIGHLAND VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Highland View Elementary School			Asset Age and Life Expectancy						Asset Condition Assessment		Additional Asset Information
Asset	Asset Description	Area Served/Located	Average Life Expectancy	Asset Installation Date	Actual Age of Asset	Percent of Life Expectancy Used	Projected Remaining Life	Projected Replacement Year	Asset Condition Assessment	Age-Adjusted Asset Condition	Concerns / Issues / Notes
Mech - Boilers - HW Modular	Thermal Solutions	Whole Building	20	2009	12	60%	8	2029	Caution	Caution	
Mech - Hot Water Distribution	HHW Piping	Whole Building	50	1986	35	70%	18	2039	Caution	Caution	
Mech - Hot Water Pumps	Taco Inline HHW Pumps	Whole Building	30	2020	1	3%	29	2050	Excellent	Excellent	
Mech - Condensing Units	Samsung VRF Units	Original Classrooms	20	2020	1	5%	19	2040	Excellent	Excellent	
Mech - Air Handling Units	Kenard-Nelson AHU	Gymnasium	30	1958	63	210%	0	2021	Alarm	Alarm	HW Coil is almost completely plugged.
Mech - Rooftop Units	RTU-1 Aaon	Multipurpose Rm	15	2020	1	7%	14	2035	Excellent	Excellent	
Mech - Rooftop Units	RTU-2 Aaon	Classroom Addition	15	2020	1	7%	14	2035	Excellent	Excellent	
Mech - Rooftop Units	RERU-1 Renewaire	Admin Offices	15	2020	1	7%	14	2035	Excellent	Excellent	
Mech - Unit Ventilators	Original Unit Ventilators	Classrooms	20	1958	63	315%	0	2021	Alarm	Alarm	Units are original and are limited in providing appropriate ventilation.
Mech - Unit Ventilators	New Unit Ventilator	Rm 94	20	2009	12	60%	8	2029	Caution	Caution	Unit is not providing appropriate ventilation.

Asset Condition Assessment results: Outside vendors aided by custodians and maintenance staff assessed facility components, whose conditions were then ranked using a scoring rubric.

MONTHLY MEETINGS INCLUDED VISITS TO ALL SCHOOL BUILDINGS

to discuss the recent renovations
and debate criteria for prioritizing
future facility projects.

teria for prioritizing future facility projects. In addition to this monthly work, the group hosted two open community work sessions to gather feedback from all community members on their areas of concern and interest. Those sessions were recorded and posted online, allowing the district to reach a wider audience and gather feedback from those who could not attend in person.

■ Communicating with board, community

It was vital for the district's community facilities team to ensure its prioritization tool worked in alignment with the board's vision for strategic plan implementation. Two representatives of the committee presented their work to the school board in summer 2022 to help the board and the community understand the district's process for con-

sidering facility updates.

The next step was implementing the new scoring rubric tool. To get started, the heads of business services and buildings and grounds spent time with principals ensuring that they had a list of every potential project.

Once the projects were compiled, each was scored using the tool. Individual scores were compared to ensure projects were ranked consistently. After completing the task, scores and rankings were returned to leadership and the district safety team for review and adjustments.

■ Ranking facility projects

With facility project scoring complete, the district used the ranking list to plan annual capital projects.

The list allowed the planning of summer 2023 capital projects to begin in October 2022. By accurately prioritizing the highest needs of the

district, projects were bid as early as possible to meet supply chain needs and attain the best possible pricing. Top-ranked projects were selected, as well as those that met the guidelines for federal stimulus.

Three projects stood out and are being prioritized this year:

- 1. Auditorium lighting** — The use of LED lighting in Greendale High School's auditorium improves the functionality of the space by improving light quality. The project, installed in 2022, also saves energy costs, paying for itself in less than 18 months.
- 2. Outdoor education space** — In partnership with local contractors through a student Eagle Scout project, the district is expanding the functionality of an outdoor education space that had been unused since the construction of the high school in the 1960s. The project creates an outdoor learning space for use by students and staff. This Eagle Scout candidate fundraised for more than two-thirds of the cost to excavate and grade the space, add concrete walkways and patios, and build a covered structure. The addition of outdoor furniture and A/V equipment will transform this space for outdoor education and recreation.
- 3. Wood shop dust collector** — As a wood shop dust collector rose to the top of priority ratings, a solution was proposed that would save Greendale Schools tens of thousands of dollars on the cost of replacement equipment. A vendor provided information on a piece of equipment

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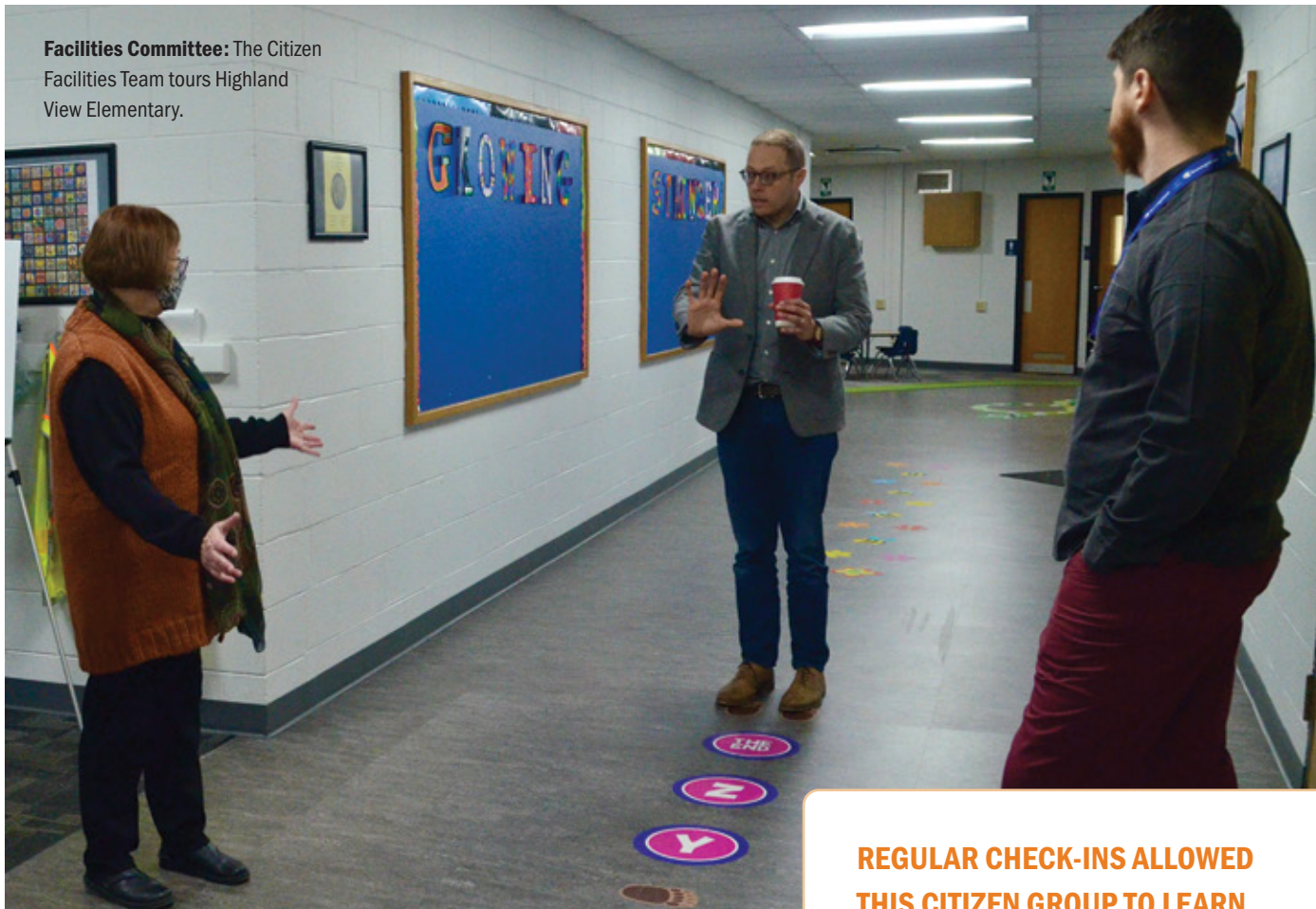
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Facilities Committee: The Citizen Facilities Team tours Highland View Elementary.



that was being resold due to a renovation at a local school. The partnership helped the district save significantly and the project is moving forward.

Review. Report. Repeat.

An important component of the process was engagement with community stakeholder groups. The district team kept citizen teams apprised of the work at specific intervals, reviewing the criteria, reporting scoring decisions and reviewing the implementation model with the Citizen Facilities Team.

The Citizen Facilities Team's insight was integral in reviewing the priority projects through a new lens. Regular check-ins with this citizen group allowed them to learn about

the project rankings and funding sources, increasing their advocacy on behalf of the district.

The development of the facility scoring tool allowed Greendale Schools to affirm its relationships with stakeholders by engaging with a wide range of community members to focus on priority areas and discuss facility needs.

As part of the continuous improvement process, Mitchell says district leadership "will meet again with our Citizen Facilities Team in May 2023 to share information, refine our prioritization tool and discuss how we will continue to engage our community on this subject." ■

Jonathan Mitchell is director of business services at Greendale Schools.

REGULAR CHECK-INS ALLOWED THIS CITIZEN GROUP TO LEARN about the project rankings and funding sources, increasing their advocacy on behalf of the district.

LEARN MORE

Greendale's team is sharing this process with other districts around the state.

To learn more, visit the Business Services page of the Greendale Schools website: www.greendaleschools.org. The district is pleased to share samples from the work and collaborate with others who want to engage in similar work.



Mike Mahon
executive vice president,
McMahon Associates, Inc.



Kevin Chevalier
senior architectural
designer and project manager,
McMahon



Ashlee Prochnow
architectural designer,
McMahon

Adapting Infrastructure for STEM LEARNING

Adaptable classrooms better prepare
students to join the changing workforce



Mezzanine view of the catwalk at the Brillion Elementary School STEM Center.

The demand for trade and technology-driven positions in the workforce is expected to grow over the next decade. This has led Wisconsin school districts to renew their emphasis on cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving and analytical reasoning.

Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects also equip students with the technical literacy necessary to understand the increasingly complex media landscape. All these skills are essential for success in an ever-changing world that's becoming more reliant on technology and science-based solutions to address global challenges.

Changing the design of classrooms and other spaces is one way schools are adapting to this new world.

■ The STEM classroom

STEM spaces are designed to foster collaborative and creative learning. The learning environments promote collaboration among students while increasing access to technology and hands-on learning opportunities.

Many STEM classrooms focus on disciplines like engineering and computer science. These spaces feature a variety of furniture, allowing students to work together in groups or break away into smaller areas. The furniture can also be reconfigured for interactive experiments or group discussions. STEM spaces often have an abundance of wall space for posting student work, interactive boards and other visual displays.

Many school districts are introducing specialized facilities for technical education by building

dedicated centers devoted to teaching welding, computer numerical control (CNC) machining, small engine repair and other related activities. This kind of facility exposes students to theoretical concepts and practical experiences, giving them a more complete understanding of a particular trade. The classroom may be designed like any other laboratory or workshop, but it is outfitted with all the necessary equipment required for each field.

■ Getting started

Adding STEM-focused facilities to schools can seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. With the right engineering and architecture partner, any district can identify areas that need improvement and the STEM activities that should be included in



One of two classroom areas in the Brillion Elementary School STEM Center, featuring moving partitions, a mobile sink, display surfaces and catwalks used for gravity-driven experiments.

the space. For some districts, this may mean a new addition. For others, it means assessing an existing space for potential areas to grow within it.

McMahon, a full-service engineering, architecture and consulting firm headquartered in Neenah, has seen a steady increase of K-12 schools interested in STEM-focused facilities. The firm helps districts assess and incorporate infrastructure to support STEM programs.

The process begins with analyzing a district's existing curriculum to determine if new STEM components can be incorporated. There are often synergies in a district's current program that can translate to a full STEM curriculum. For example, if a school district currently has a metals classroom, McMahon may recommend adding CNC, welding and other related activities into the overall STEM curriculum.

Next, districts must identify what type of space best suits their goals and objectives. Engineers can develop engaging plans that promote critical

thinking within the classroom, lab or maker space. This includes incorporating elements such as furniture layout, lighting plans, color schemes and technology integration.

Brillion's tech center

Brillion Elementary School sought to turn an under-used multipurpose room into a STEM center that would benefit kindergarten through fifth grade students. McMahon worked with school staff to create a design that would meet their needs, not just in terms of curriculum but also by creating a functional, interactive and technological space where students could learn and explore.

The STEM center was designed to be highly flexible. It offers numerous areas of interaction, including two classrooms with custom workstations and adjustable-height tables, one central demonstration area, and a mezzanine equipped with a catwalk. The catwalk is a unique design feature that allows students to change elevation within their classroom,

expanding their curriculum to include gravity-driven projects. It also gives students an opportunity to make observations from an elevated viewpoint and gain insights they might not otherwise have access to in a normal classroom setting.

The space also features adjustable partitions that serve as display surfaces and white boards, as well as an interactive giant mobile sink for experiments.

Appleton's tech ed expansion

Appleton School District's dedicated space for Appleton Technical Academy, a new charter school, offers students a comprehensive hands-on learning experience in manufacturing and industrial technology.

Appleton Technical Academy was originally developed to address the growing need for qualified workers within the manufacturing industry, specifically in northeast Wisconsin. McMahon reconfigured an existing space to include classroom spaces dedicated to auto,



Machining shop space in the metals shop at Appleton Technical Academy in Appleton West High School.



metals, woods, engineering and electronics, and graphics and media programs.

The project design included space for a variety of equipment, including a plasma cutter; band saws; mills and lathes; welding booths; table, panel and sliding saws; sanders; jointers and drill presses.

Visual surveillance, an essential part of the design, provides a safety measure for staff and students. Each classroom is visually connected to its respective shop area. Additionally, a central office gives staff members views into the classrooms and shop spaces.

The ventilation, air filtration and gas distribution systems were also updated to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment.

■ Funding STEM infrastructure enhancements

A referendum may be an excellent way for districts to fund STEM infrastructure additions or enhancements, but there are other avenues schools can pursue to fund such projects.

One way is financial support from community businesses and organizations. By forming strategic partnerships with companies that are already established in these industries, schools create a mutually beneficial relationship in which they get access to much-needed resources, and the companies become recipients of a qualified workforce. A partnership can be achieved by naming a STEM facility after the company or committing to creating an annual product for them. Additionally, local businesses may provide scholarships to further incentivize students to pursue STEM-related studies.

Schools can also apply for grants from a variety of sources. Federal,

state and local governments are often willing to invest in educational institutions that are working to improve their curriculums, and there may be specific grants available for STEM initiatives. Nonprofit organizations may also offer similar opportunities.

No matter how funding is secured, the changing workforce is creating a critical need for STEM infrastructure enhancements, and engineering and architecture firms have stepped up to develop modern K-12 school designs to prepare students for success now and in the future. ■

Mike McMahon is an executive vice president at McMahon with a 38-year career that includes extensive experience in architectural design for K-12 schools and higher education institutions.

Kevin Chevalier is a senior architectural designer and project manager at McMahon with extensive experience in architectural design for K-12 schools.

Ashlee Prochnow is an architectural designer at McMahon who has widespread experience in working with K-12 schools in her 10-year architectural career.



COMPANIES PARTNER to Offer Trades Experience in Fond du Lac

At Fond du Lac High School, more than 48 local companies provide hands-on learning and real trades experience through the Architecture Construction Engineering, or ACE, Academy.

In 2022, Associated General Contractors of Wisconsin recognized Fond du Lac School District with the Horizon Award for enhancing learning experiences with positive impacts on Wisconsin's construction industry.

C.D. Smith Construction has taken a leadership role in the ACE Academy. The company helped implement the academy program in 2016, built its facility in 2018 and continues to donate time, talent and materials.

“Throughout the building process, we were able to share our love of the trades with students as they shared in partial parts of the build, masonry, roofing and finishing,” C.D. Smith President Justin Smith says.

While Fond du Lac's Architecture Construction Engineering Academy is the largest in Wisconsin, there are seven similar high school-based academy spaces in the state.

Many general contractors and industry professionals feel compelled to help schools share quality trade-based opportunities with students. Creating opportunities for students to interact directly with skilled tradespeople is vital to the success of

the academy.

Young people are exploring the trades as one alternative to a traditional university education. High school graduates earning a certificate from the ACE Academy can pursue employment opportunities in the construction industry, apply for apprenticeship programs or attend college.

Three quarters of construction firms in Wisconsin report a shortage of skilled tradespeople. The academy is intended to lessen the shortage, enhancing the marketability of graduates while increasing the caliber of job candidates.

“We're taking Fond du Lac to be our model to all the high schools

(Preceding page) **C.D. Smith and other businesses** sponsor the supplies for the ACE Academy students to construct an ice shanty each year. The shanty is raffled off and proceeds benefit the academy.

(Right) **The 5,500-square-foot Architecture Construction Engineering Academy** features a construction shop with areas dedicated to teaching roofing, siding framing, plumbing/HVAC and electrical work, as well as a classroom, restroom and storage space.

(Below) Fond du Lac School District Superintendent **Dr. Jeffrey Fleig** (left) and technical education teacher **Vern Widmer** hold the 2022 AGC Horizon Award.



around the state,” says Bob Barker, executive vice president at AGC of Wisconsin.

Fond du Lac Public School District Jeffrey Fleig credits a large part of the success to Vern Widmer, a technical education teacher since the Fond du Lac ACE program began.

“In the beginning, we had only 35 students sign up,” Fleig says. “Today, more than 180 students participate in the program. And it’s growing.”

The Fond du Lac trades commu-

nity collaborates to make the ACE Academy successful. Many companies participate in training students, donating materials and offering apprenticeship opportunities to expose students to real-world construction industry experiences. The technical expertise and classroom mentoring allow students to use cutting-edge equipment and learn directly from professionals.

With a three-track, hands-on architecture, construction and engi-

neering curriculum, the students receive an introductory course exploring the educational and professional paths available in those disciplines.

Beyond career exploration, each introductory class also covers terminology, processes, skills and industry-specific content to provide students with a snapshot of trade discipline and how all the construction industry disciplines work together to build communities. ■



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by Jenna E. Rousseau

Key Considerations in School District Real Estate Transactions

A school district contemplating a real estate transaction — such as selling property that is no longer needed or purchasing property for future development — has important issues to consider.

These include elector approval requirements, options when selling school district property, and important provisions in real estate transaction documents.

For common and union high school districts, elector approval requirements may apply. Elector approval at an annual or special meeting of the electors is generally required to authorize a school board to acquire real estate for school district purposes; designate sites for school district buildings and provide for the construction of school district buildings; lease buildings for school district purposes; and exercise an option to purchase real estate.

By contrast, elector approval generally is not required when a school district is selling property that is no longer needed for school purposes; accepting donated land; or entering into certain agreements with another governmental body. In unified school districts, the school board has the powers the school board and the annual meeting have in a common school district.

A school district considering selling real property that is no longer needed has several methods from which to choose. If a specific method is not required by policy, a school district may use one of the following methods: implement a request for proposal process; list the property with a real estate broker; or negotiate with one or more specific potential buyers who have shown interest in the property.

Each method for selling school district property offers advantages and disadvantages depending on the circumstances. The best method for a school district to use may be based upon the real estate market conditions at the time. In addition, a school district may start with one method, but if it fails to generate much interest, may choose to use another method.

If there is little to no interest from potential buyers, the school district may be better suited using the property for other purposes temporarily or leasing the property; alternatively, a school district may decide it is principally motivated to sell the property and avoid continuing costs of ownership.

School districts should also carefully review real estate transaction documents. For instance, if the school district will be listing the

property with a real estate broker, it should consider negotiating to remove certain provisions in the listing contract related to property condition representations. Relatedly, when a school district receives an offer to purchase, it must be mindful of standard language contained in offer to purchase forms related to property condition representations. This is especially true when a school district is selling property in an “as is, where is” condition.

When a school district is purchasing property for future development, it is often advisable to include certain contingencies in the offer to purchase. For instance, school districts may wish to include a broad due diligence provision. In addition, school districts may include contingencies regarding elector approval and referendum approval. Further, school districts should ensure sufficient time to review title work and to object to any title issues.

Real estate transactions can be complex. It is advisable for school districts to develop a plan early in the process and carefully review real estate transaction documents to place the school district in the best position possible to ensure a successful transaction. ■

Jenna E. Rousseau is a shareholder at Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c.

The 2023 WASB/WSAA School Law Conference was held Feb. 22 in Wisconsin Dells.

Session recordings from the event, including this one, are available for purchase as a package at WASB.org.



New School Board Member Gatherings

■ **APRIL 18-20** | 15 Locations | Complimentary

Online Statewide Meeting: **APRIL 27**

If you have a newly elected or appointed school board member, encourage them to attend a WASB New School Board Member Gathering, which will provide an informal orientation to:

- Discuss essential information for their first board meeting.
- Meet their WASB regional director.
- Network with new and experienced school board members in their WASB region.
- Learn about WASB services that can help them in their new role.

Experienced board members and district administrators are encouraged to attend and offer input and guidance.

All gatherings are scheduled for 7-9 p.m. There is no cost or need to register. Visit WASB.org for more information.

There will be a statewide online meeting for new school board members on Thursday, April 27. This meeting will be recorded and available for viewing at any time afterward.

■ **Tuesday, APRIL 18**

- Region 1: CESA 11, Turtle Lake*
- Region 3: CESA 7, Green Bay
- Region 6: CESA 4, West Salem
- Region 8: Reedsville Elementary School
- Region 10: Gerstenkorn Administration Building, Portage

■ **Wednesday, APRIL 19**

- Region 1: CESA 12, Ashland*
- Region 4: Menomonie Middle School
- Region 5: Marathon High School
- Region 9: CESA 3, Fennimore
- Region 11: Muskego-Norway District Office
- Region 13: Elkhorn School District Administrative Building

■ **Thursday, APRIL 20**

- Region 2: Lakeland Union High School, Minocqua
- Region 7: CESA 6, Oshkosh
- Region 12: Oregon High School
- Region 15: Pewaukee High School

* There will be two gatherings for Region 1. The content covered will be the same each evening, so please choose the meeting most convenient for you.

Spring Workshops

The Essential Elements of Governance



■ **MAY 9-11 and 16-18** | 6 Locations

Online Statewide Meeting: **MAY 23**

Networking: 6-6:30 p.m. **Dinner:** 6:30-7 p.m.

Presentation: 7-8:30 p.m. (All in-person locations)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tuesday, MAY 9
CESA 1, Pewaukee ■ Wednesday, MAY 10
CESA 4, West Salem ■ Thursday, MAY 11
CESA 10, Chippewa Falls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tuesday, MAY 16
CESA 6, Oshkosh ■ Wednesday, MAY 17
CESA 2, Whitewater ■ Thursday, MAY 18
CESA 9, Tomahawk |
|--|---|

As school boards and superintendents, you're working together to help children succeed. Understanding how your roles and duties work together — culture, policy, accountability, to name just a few — can be daunting.

The WASB has created a new framework, a way to better conceptualize and carry out your governance roles. This governance framework enhances and structures the professional development services the WASB has long offered members.

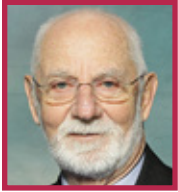
With one overarching goal — ensuring that all children learn at high levels — and five broad areas of focus, the framework offers simplicity and clarity. At the same time, it is as complex as your mission, diving into dozens of action steps, strategies and other guidance.

At Spring Workshops, held in six locations around Wisconsin in May, we'll provide the first introduction to this framework. An experienced WASB consultant will cover:

- All five areas of focus, including the many elements that comprise each
- Importance of the moral imperative
- Common challenges boards face with good governance

Visit WASB.org for more information and to register. Members are welcome to attend a workshop in any location.

The **ONLINE SPRING WORKSHOP** will be held on Tuesday, May 23, from 7-8:30 p.m.



Thank You, Captain Terry McCloskey

The WASB would like to recognize the service of former WASB President Terry McCloskey, who passed away in February.

McCloskey, who achieved the rank of captain in the U.S. Navy and was often referred to by that rank, joined the Three Lakes School Board in April 2007.

He joined the WASB's Board of Directors in 2012, serving as president in 2017. In that role, he galvanized our association by emphasizing legislative advocacy.

He met with legislators across the state and also lobbied in Washington, D.C. He was proud of the district's accomplishments, in particular their leadership as one of the premier fab labs in Wisconsin. His spirit and service will be missed.



WASB Connection Podcast

A recent episode of the WASB Connection Podcast updated listeners on the upcoming state budget and gave tips on how to advocate for students.

.....
"I think what you want to do is personalize this so that they can get a sense for how this impacts real people, actual students, actual teachers and classrooms, and your community."

— WASB Government Relations Director Dan Rossmiller, on how to be an effective advocate for students with lawmakers

.....
Find the episode on the WASB website or wherever you find podcasts.

Upcoming Webinars

■ ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS

APRIL 11 | 12-1 p.m.

Presenter: Bob Butler, Associate Executive Director and Staff Counsel

School boards are required to hold their organizational meeting on or within 30 days of the 4th Monday in April. This presentation reviews requirements for the organizational meeting and the orientation of new school board members.

This webinar is complimentary, and no registration is required. It will be recorded and placed on the "Online Events" page.

Please note: These webinars, and all previous ones, are recorded and available on demand. WASB members can purchase any webinar and watch when their schedule allows. Upcoming live and pre-recorded webinars are listed on the WASB Webinars page at WASB.org. In addition, links to past webinars are available in the Policy Resources Guide.

■ RECURRING WEBINAR:

WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

APRIL 12, MAY 17, JUNE 21 | 12 p.m.

WASB attorneys and government relations staff provide a complimentary, monthly update on recent legal and legislative issues to answer members' most pressing questions. No registration required. Visit WASB.org for the link.

■ RECURRING WEBINAR:

CAPITOL CHAT

Each Friday at noon during the budget season, WASB government relations staff will give you the latest news on the budget and other legislative developments so you can serve as an informed advocate for children. These webinars are complimentary and no registration is required.

SAVE THE DATE...
Summer Leadership Institute
JULY 14 – 15
HYATT REGENCY, GREEN BAY

WASB TO JOIN COSSBA

The WASB Board of Directors has voted to join the Consortium of State School Boards Associations, or COSSBA.

The WASB will be the 24th state school board association to join COSSBA, which includes neighboring school board associations in Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan and Illinois. COSSBA services include leadership training, federal advocacy and professional development.

Looking Back to Understand Today's Referendum Landscape



Lack of inflation adjustment since 2009 puts districts in recurring budget bind

On April 4, 50 Wisconsin school districts will ask voters to dig deeper into their pocketbooks and approve referendums to allow districts to continue to operate.

Across the state, 249 school districts (nearly 60%) already depend upon voter-approved referendums to maintain their programs and services for students. Some referendums enabled districts to thrive, but increasingly referendums enable districts simply to survive. While each district's circumstances may differ, the need for additional resources is a given.

It is hard to comprehend that this is occurring at the same time the state holds a \$7 billion budget surplus, especially in a state that has long prided itself on the quality of its public schools.

How did we get to where so many school districts must beg voters to tax themselves more heavily to keep the school doors open or maintain adequate staffing levels?

The answer lies in "revenue limit" provisions tucked into the 1993-95 state budget without a single public hearing. Revenue limits cap the annual increase in a school district's revenue on a per-pupil

basis. Because a district can't spend money it can't raise, "revenue" limits effectively restrict school district spending. Originally meant as a five-year experiment, revenue limits were quickly made permanent in the 1995-97 state budget and have been in place ever since.

Each district has its own unique per-pupil revenue limit based largely on its pre-1993 spending level. That figure is then multiplied by a rolling three-year average of district enrollment to calculate the district's overall limit.

Linking the limit to enrollment means a district's revenue gathering authority rises and falls with enrollment changes and any per pupil adjustments allowed by lawmakers.

Apart from growing its enrollment, the only way for a district to take in more revenues than its unique dollar limit allows is to ask voters to approve raising local school property tax revenues via a districtwide referendum. Not surprisingly, with inflation at a 40-year high, we're seeing statewide growth in school referendums.

Districts that were low spenders back in 1993, are losing enrollment, or can't get voters to approve referendums now particularly struggle to

find the resources to attract and retain teachers, update curriculum, and do routine maintenance. This occurs despite language in our state Constitution since 1848 directing that the Legislature "provide by law for district schools, which shall be a uniform as practicable."

An escape valve, called the low revenue ceiling, allows the lowest-spending districts to raise their per pupil revenue authority to a fixed amount (currently \$10,000) without a referendum; however, any district that tried but failed to pass an operating referendum in the previous three years can't access this escape valve. Raising the low revenue ceiling and eliminating the penalty for a failed referendum are necessary steps to prevent gaps between the state's lowest spending districts and its higher spending districts from continuing to widen.

Enrollment trends also play a role. When revenue limits were enacted in 1993, school enrollments were generally increasing statewide fueled by the "baby boom echo." Revenue limits grew along with enrollments. Lately, however, as birthrates have declined and many regions of the state have lost population, enrollments have dipped. In

Apart from growing its enrollment, the only way for a district to take in more revenues than its unique dollar limit allows is to ask voters to approve raising local school property tax revenues via a districtwide referendum.

This year, the April election is the last chance to ask for additional revenue gathering authority. The alternative is to wait until February or April 2024 to ask.

school districts with declining enrollments, district revenues are decreasing faster than school costs, triggering referendums.

The failure of revenue limits to keep pace with inflation is another huge factor. From 1998-99 to 2008-09, per pupil revenue limits were adjusted for inflation annually. However, since 2009, revenue limit adjustments have been decoupled from inflation and often have not occurred at all.

No adjustment occurred in six of the last eight school years. Despite inflation rates at 40-year high levels, revenue limits were not adjusted for inflation last year or this year. Per-pupil categorical aids — a more recent though less significant resource for schools, were also frozen.

If one compares what per pupil adjustments would have been in each year if inflation indexing had continued with the actual annual resource changes granted to school districts since Act 10, an astonishing pattern emerges.

The non-partisan Legislative Reference Bureau finds, since 2011, allowable school spending under a combination of revenue limits and per pupil categorical aid — the two major sources of spendable revenue of school districts — trails inflation by \$2,236.60 per pupil.

No wonder so many districts find themselves reliant on referendums to stay afloat. Wisconsin school districts placed 92 operational (revenue limit) referendums on the ballot in 2022, the highest total ever.

Complicating matters, operating referendums can be approved by voters either on a short-term basis (nonrecurring) or permanently (recurring). Although voters are more likely to approve a short-term increase in their property taxes, when that term ends, districts often wind up back in

front of voters asking them to approve yet another referendum, typically for an amount greater than the previous ask. Many districts find themselves in a never-ending cycle of planning for referendums and making contingency plans in case voters turn down their ask.

This planning is complicated by state laws limiting when school referenda can be placed on the ballot to only regularly scheduled elections. This year, the April election is the last chance to ask for additional revenue gathering authority. The alternative is to wait until February or April 2024 to ask. Since property tax bills are only issued once a year, any additional revenue authority granted in April 2024 won't generate any additional revenues until December 2024 property tax bills are issued.

The state budget also plays a role. Historically, every adjustment in

revenue limits has been made via the state budget process; however, the 2023-25 state budget bill likely won't be signed into law until July, leaving school districts to piece together their budgets without knowing what adjustments lawmakers will provide them. Little wonder many districts are forging ahead with referendums this spring. It's either that or wait until January 2025 for any additional revenues voters may approve.

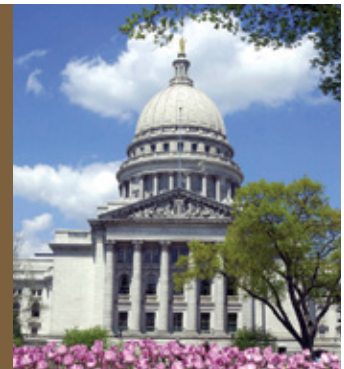
Most school board members did not seek office so they could decide which school programs to cut due to insufficient revenue, but that is what unstable, unpredictable school funding brings about. It's time to follow, without delay, the top recommendation of the 2019 Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding and adjust school district revenue limits annually to the rate of inflation. ■

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What School Board Members Need to Know About Open Enrollment

On February 6, 2023, Wisconsin's full-time open enrollment program application portal opened for the 2023-2024 school year, broadening the scope of parental choice with respect to their child's public education. This inter-district public school program allows parents to apply for their children to attend a nonresident district, meaning a public school district other than the one in which they reside. For school districts, this program can mean more than a flux in enrollment. It can mean changes in state aid and increased costs for special education. Board members should understand the fundamentals of the open enrollment program because it may impact budgeting, school facilities expansion, school facility closures, hiring and reductions in staff. The purpose of this Legal Comment is to explain open enrollment generally and identify considerations for policies including projected enrollment and space determinations, preferences and guarantees and special education.

Full-time open enrollment

Under the Wisconsin open enrollment process, any Wisconsin resident in 4k (four-year-old kindergarten) through 12th grade may apply to attend a

nonresident school district through the regular or alternative application process. The regular application period begins in February and ends in April. During this period, students apply for enrollment during the following school year. The alternative application process is open year-round. Students who apply under this program apply for immediate enrollment. School districts must have policies in place governing full-time open enrollment and any changes to such policies must be made before the regular application period begins.

Open enrollment is funded by an increase in the state aid payment for nonresident school districts and a decrease in the state aid payment for resident school districts. This is commonly referred to as an aid transfer. Funding for each regular education student participating in open enrollment is transferred by the Department of Public Instruction from the student's resident school district to the new school district that the student is attending.

Historically, the basic amount of state aid transferred for each regular education open enrollment student was equal to the average per student cost for regular instruction, co-curricular activities, instruction support services, and student support services in the previous school year. However,

since the 2015-2016 school year, the regular open enrollment transfer amount is equal to the sum of the amount in the prior year, plus the revenue limit per student adjustment for school districts in the current year, and the change in total categorical aid funding per student from the prior year to the current year.

For this school year, this means districts gained an added \$8,224 for every student open enrolling in regular education, and \$13,076 for students open enrolling in special education programs. Conversely, students leaving the district can have a direct impact on their resident district's bottom line, as the resident school district's aid payment is reduced to make the aid transfer. However, if the school district's aid payment is insufficient to cover the reduction in state aids, the school district's other state aids are reduced.

With respect to special education students, the first year in which a pupil with disabilities is open enrolled, the payment is the basic aid amount for pupils with disabilities (the per pupil payment amount). For pupils with disabilities who are open enrolled for their second or subsequent year, the open enrollment payment is either the basic aid amount for pupils with disabilities (the per pupil payment amount) or

Open enrollment is funded by an increase in the state aid payment for nonresident school districts and a decrease in the state aid payment for resident school districts.

the actual costs to the nonresident district of providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the pupil in the previous school year, up to a maximum of \$30,000.

Regular open enrollment applications

Space determinations. Each January, before the regular application period opens, school boards must meet to decide the number of open enrolled students they will admit for the following school year in both general and special education. If a school board wishes to deny an open enrollment application based on space, board policy must specify space criteria which may include class size limits, pupil-teacher ratios or enrollment projections established by the school board. In addition, board policy must specify whether currently attending applicants (e.g., students whose parents move out of the district and who therefore need to apply for open enrollment to stay in district schools) and/or siblings of currently attending applicants will be granted preferences or guarantees, and whether the district will establish a waiting list. Families with students who are currently open-enrolled in a nonresident district do not need to reapply each year as long as they notify the nonresident district of their intent to attend the following year.

In setting criteria for special education, board members should note that they may not make space determinations based on specific disabilities. Instead, they may consider class size limits, pupil teacher ratios, caseload or staffing capacity limits including services needed, intensity of

pupil needs and type and number of staff needed. A board need not set space limits if the board contracts outside the district for special education services because the programs are not available in the district.

A school board's actions at the meeting in January must be reflected with detail in the meeting minutes. That is, the actual number of spaces in regular education by grade and by special education program or service for which a caseload or class size can be established, must be specifically stated in the minutes. The minutes may not include only a general statement that the board set space limits for open enrollment.

Space determinations made in January are applicable for new applicants only and are good through the third Friday in September. Space limits do not apply to a continuing open enrolled student who is referred for special education or whose IEP is reviewed and revised during the student's enrollment.

Reviewing applications. Boards must ensure that district policies include all the relevant criteria that aligns with state law, and whoever reviews the applications must apply the criteria consistently. A nonresident district school board may deny a regular education application if space is not available in the schools, programs, classes or grades in the district or if the other provisions in the statute related to expulsion and truancy are applicable. An application for enrollment in special education may be denied if the district has no space in the applicant's program and/or grade or if the district does not have the special education and related services required by the student's IEP.

Although extremely limited, the resident district may also deny the open enrollment of a student to a nonresident district. For example, if the resident school district does not offer the same type of 4K program to which the student has applied at the nonresident district, then the resident district may deny the open enrollment. However, the deduction in state aid associated with a transferring student is not a valid reason for a resident district to deny open enrollment.

Important dates for regular application period. Regular open enrollment for the 2023-24 school year began on February 6th and will end at 4 p.m. on April 28, 2023. The following are important dates for open enrollment:

- Nonresident school districts must mail notices of approval or denial by June 9, 2023. If the application is approved, the school district must notify the parents of the specific school or program to which the student is assigned. If the application is denied, parents have 30 days to file an appeal.
- Resident districts must notify applicants if the application is denied by June 16, 2023. If the application is denied, parents have 30 days to file an appeal.
- Parents of accepted applicants must notify the nonresident district if the student will attend the nonresident district in the 2023-24 school year by June 30, 2023. If the parent does not make this notification, the nonresident district may refuse to allow the student to attend the district.

Each January, before the regular application period opens, school boards must meet to decide the number of open enrolled students they will admit for the following school year in both general and special education.

Alternative open enrollment applications

Students who meet certain statutory criteria may apply to attend a non-resident district outside the regular application period. The ability of a nonresident district to accept an alternative application is dependent on the date the application is received and the space determinations for the following school year made by the nonresident board at the January meeting. A nonresident

district’s denial of an alternative open enrollment application is final and may not be appealed.

Conclusion

Beyond expanding upon a parent’s choice in their child’s education, open enrollment may have a critical impact on a school district’s funding as students shuffle in and out. School board members must ensure that they are creating policies regarding space limitations for open enroll-

ment. District officials must then apply these policies consistently across regular education and special education programs. If any district has questions concerning the open enrollment process, they should consult with legal counsel. ■

This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka, Brian P. Goodman, and Sarah Ghazi-Moradi of Boardman Clark, WASB Legal Counsel. For a related article, see Wisconsin School News: “Open Enrollment” (Dec. 2002).

Legal Comment is designed to provide authoritative general information, with commentary, as a service to WASB members. It should not be relied upon as legal advice. If required, legal advice regarding this topic should be obtained from district legal counsel.



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