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High School Sports and Activities: A Road Map to Success

Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association Communications

The benefits of high school sports and activities extend into the classroom and beyond.



Confidence Under the Spotlight

Adam Jacobi

How speech, debate, theatre and film activities prepare students for college and career.



WASB Business Honor Roll 2023 Anne Davis

Schools and businesses partner up to support and create opportunities for students.



What Would You Do?

Excerpt by John Quiñones

Words of wisdom about doing the right thing.



Federal Funding **Opportunities to Aid School Energy Improvements** Focus on Energy

By learning how to navigate the world of grants and finances, districts can effectively secure funding for future projects.



A Q&A with Tom Bertrand

The executive director of the Consortium of State School Boards Associations talks about his goals.



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Brookfield Principal Earns National Honor

A ndrew Farley, principal of Brookfield East High School, has been named the 2024 National Principal of the Year for his work on student mental health and suicide prevention, Wisconsin Public Radio reported.

Farley established the state's first "hope squads," which enlist students to support their peers in a group setting. The concept was pioneered in Utah.

"That's an amazing student leadership group that works at building mental health, physical health and a total, comprehensive approach to wellness for kids," Farley told WPR. "And we know how important that is."

Student leadership is a priority at Brookfield East, where more than nine in 10 students participate in at least one club, activity or sport.

The school, part of the Elmbrook School District, was also recognized this year by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School for its work closing achievement gaps. Farley said teachers at Brookfield East earned that honor by helping students "achieve academic excellence at rates that maybe they didn't think were possible at the start of the class."

In addition, Brookfield East offers more than 25 Advanced Placement courses. □

Wisconsin Schools Adapt to Football Declines

A fter experiencing the nation's largest drop in 11-player football in recent years, Wisconsin schools are adapting by fielding smaller squads Wisconsin Public Radio reported.

Wisconsin experienced a nearly 25% decrease in participation in 11-player football from 2009 to 2019, the largest in the nation, according to data from the National Federation of State High School Associations.

In 2013, some Wisconsin schools started fielding eight-player teams,

which can be a way to maintain a sport amid lower participation.

What caused the decline? Experts quoted by WPR pointed to several potential explanations, including anxiety about concussions. In addition, high schoolers may be choosing screens over sports, according to the article.

Football isn't only declining in Wisconsin. The 2021-22 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey found that 11-player football was down 3% across the country, while six-, eight- and nine-player football saw a 12% increase. \Box

STAT OF THE MONTH



Decline in participation in Wisconsin 11-player football from 2009 to 2019 Source: National Federation of State High School Associations via WPR

Enrollment Declines Raise Question of 'Missing' Students

A fter plunging in fall 2020, enrollment in Wisconsin's public schools has failed to recover, dropping again in fall 2021 and 2022, the Wisconsin Policy Forum reported in October.

The state's falling birth rate means that some decrease each year is to be expected.

However, the report states that the degree of the declines "has exceeded some projections and raises the question of whether the state's schools have recovered the students lost during the peak pandemic years."

The Wisconsin Policy Forum's analysis shows that most of the decline in enrollment can be traced back to the declining birth rate, private schooling and homeschooling. But there are roughly 4,500 to 11,600 students not captured in state data — between 0.5% and 1.2% of the state's school-age population.

Where did these students go? "These students would be missing either because the data on them was not collected or, worse, because they disconnected from the education system in Wisconsin entirely," the report states.

However, private and home schools are not held to the same standards as public schools when it comes to reporting enrollment data, suggesting that some private and homeschooled students are not captured in the data, the report states. □

DAN ROSSMILLER

Connecting the Pieces of the Educational Experience

s we approach the holiday season, many of us take time to give thanks for the blessings in our lives.

One of the blessings in my own (now long-ago) schoolboy days was participating in extracurricular activities in my school, particularly athletics.

As a rather hyperactive youth, I imagine I drove my neighbors to distraction. My long driveway was a hub of activity, as were the elementary school grounds directly across the street from my house.

During the fall and winter, spirited afterschool games of touch football on the playground and basketball and street hockey in the driveway kept me and my friends busy — and kept my driveway cleared of snow and ice. Rarely did my father have to shovel, prompting him to declare the basketball hoop he put up one of the best investments he ever made.

Although I focused mainly on sporting activities, many of my friends found their interests were nourished by activities from theatre and drama to forensics and mock trial teams. The friendships kindled in those activities bonded them to their classmates and school, kept them motivated, and built a sense of school pride and belonging.

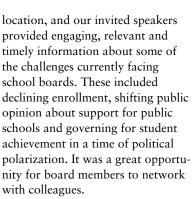
Extracurricular or co-curricular activities are an extension of the classroom and school day specific to each respective school or district and its offerings. These programs intertwine with the traditional classroom to provide an entire educational experience. You can read more about how extracurricular activities engage and enrich students on pages 4 and 8.

Throughout our state, school districts and businesses partner up to create and support opportunities for students, whether through career and technical education opportunities or enhancing educational programs and environments in our schools. Each year, the WASB invites school boards to nominate local businesses to be recognized for their efforts to support public education. We're proud to share just a few of these stories as we highlight the 2023 Business Honor Roll nominations.

Reflecting the resolution adopted by the 2022 Delegate Assembly calling on the WASB to maintain a national presence and/or membership in a national association, the WASB joined the Consortium of State School Boards Associations, COSSBA, in July of this year.

Founded in 2021, COSSBA is a non-partisan, national alliance dedicated to sharing resources and information to support, promote and strengthen state school boards associations. Already, 25 state school boards associations are COSSBA members. We are pleased to introduce WASB members to COSSBA through a Q&A interview with Dr. Tom Bertrand, COSSBA's new executive director, who was previously the executive director of the Illinois Association of School Boards. Find it on page 22.

I want to thank the many school board members and administrators who attended the WASB Fall Legislative Conference in Green Lake. The Heidel House was a lovely



And speaking of networking, I'm looking forward to seeing many, many of you at the State Education Convention in Milwaukee in January as you join colleagues from around the state to learn and be inspired. Here's a sampling of what you can expect: Convention keynote speaker John Quiñones will tell a compelling story of how perseverance took him from a household of migrant laborers to the heights of broadcast TV.

Turn to page 16 to read an excerpt from his book, "What Would You Do?: Words of Wisdom About Doing the Right Thing," to learn more about the people and values that led John to where he is today. You can also listen to a podcast interview of John in the latest episode of the WASB Connection Podcast.

Finally, I'd like to thank WASB President Rosanne Hahn for sharing some of her insights and lessons learned as a board member. Find her column about 10 ways to be the best board member you can on page 25.

See you in Milwaukee!



HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES A ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS

The vision and leadership of school boards is essential to recognize the benefits of interscholastic athletics

by Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association Communications

DEFORES

ducators do so much for youth in academic and athletic classrooms throughout the state. At the same time, the vision, principles and leadership of local school boards play a vital role in the culture and total educational experience of a district.

The experience extends well beyond the classroom. Morale

improves in districts that encourage student engagement and support interscholastic athletics and activities.

The National Federation of State High School Associations' "The Case for High School Activities" illustrates the value of extracurricular activities in the educational experience. It's referenced often when districts are asked to justify support for athletic programs, facilities and referendums addressing these opportunities.

Photos: Visual Image Photography

There are numerous reasons for supporting education-based athletics, and the report identifies several ways interscholastic activities enhance, change and even save young lives.

Research indicates students involved in school-based activities are more likely to experience:

- Better educational performance
- Positive development of lifelong skills
- Healthier behaviors
- Stronger citizenship
- Enhanced engagement in school and sense of belonging

According to "The Case for High School Activities," studies have found student-athletes of diverse backgrounds earn higher grades, graduate at a higher rate, drop out of school less frequently and score higher on state assessments than non-athletes. Their participation also teaches lifelong skills such as discipline, work ethic and emotional control. In addition, students involved in educational activities often exhibit healthier behaviors and decision-making, leading to better physical and mental health.

Moreover, research indicates participation in interscholastic athletics extends beyond high school. Studies have shown a positive correlation between participation in sports and success in college and career aspirations, community engagement and volunteering, physically active lifestyles, greater self-esteem and satisfaction toward goals in the family domain. These benefits expand across diverse student populations regarding socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, ability levels and educational aspirations.

Benefits to socialization, mental health

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of engagement and belonging. Studies revealed the mental and emotional toll sports cancellations and school closures had on teenagers. That lack of connectivity showcased why extracurricular programs are essential.

Interacting with peers, adult leaders and mentors are important social aspects of the maturation process, especially in the mental and emotional development of teenagers. The pandemic significantly altered many students' interpersonal behaviors for a long period of time relative to adolescents' lives.



Research collected by University of Wisconsin-Madison Distinguished Scientist Dr. Tim McGuine in May 2020 revealed 65% of student-athlete respondents reported anxiety symptoms, and 25% of those were moderate to severe. Likewise, 68% reported depression symptoms, with 33% being moderate to severe. That was 3.5 times higher than historical data prior to the pandemic.

Meeting the challenges to participation

To increase high school sports participation numbers, it's essential to emphasize the importance to all stakeholders - students, parents, coaches, administrations, school boards and communities. If parents don't encourage involvement or fail to recognize the value and benefits of participating in school-based sports, their children may be less likely to participate. It's imperative to actively engage in creating and sustaining these opportunities, which shouldn't be taken for granted or dismissed by those that question their positive impact on young lives.

They also have a limited financial burden, typically costing 1-3% of a school's budget.

Some high school sports are experiencing decreased participation, however. There can be any number of reasons to explain this decline. Are districts actively assessing participation rates in comparison to enrollments to verify if engagement in activities is meeting the goals of the district?

If the participation rates are healthy within a district, opportunities should be created within conferences and associations to share what influences and policies are in place to provide an inviting environment for participation in various sports and activities. If participation rates are not



at a level conducive to sustaining healthy, viable and successful programs, identify the obstacles preventing desired participation numbers.

Club coaches in pre- and early-teen years may be impacting participation at the high-school level. Heightened attention may be placed on young athletes with advanced skills or family ties to the sport, potentially deterring future participation for others still developing skills and physical maturity. The perceived chasm may be contributing to abandoning the opportunity to participate prior to reaching ninth grade and beyond.

Transportation to and from school activities has also been a recent concern in a number of districts. Some students may be unable or unwilling to participate because of the inconvenience of not having timely transportation.

Other potential participants may not have time due to community

involvement or employment, while societal changes, gaming or social media may also take students' attention away from interscholastic athletics. Finally, some sports may see reduced participation due to increased popularity of other sports, or because student-athletes choose to specialize in a single sport.

Additionally, are parents and students aware of the physical, emotional and psychological values of participating in sports and activities, especially if they did not engage or did not have a great experience when they attended high school? If parents don't recognize the value and benefits of participating in school-based sports or don't encourage involvement, it may stand to reason it is far less likely their children will choose to participate.

Without sportsmanship, 'we really don't have anything'

Those who participate in education-based athletics and activities receive a lesson in sportsmanship, with longtime Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association staff member Matt Otte saying, "Without sportsmanship we really don't have anything worth having in school sports."

If we believe it's important to teach respect for others, expecting sportsmanship at events with the emotionally charged and tension-filled nature of sports is a great place to start. The culture and sportsmanship expectations need to permeate throughout the district, starting with the school board and school administration. By working together, districts can build a positive learning environment at school events, which serve as extensions of the traditional classroom.

Supporting sportsmanship coincides with supporting officiating. The local and national shortage of officials has been widely publicized. The WIAA

Without sportsmanship we really don't have anything worth having in school sports."

continues its effort to recruit and retain licensed officials, and school districts and officials' associations should be joining in this crusade.

A survey of officials leaving the profession revealed a lack of sportsmanship among fans and coaches as the top reason they quit. The equation, whether at school events or other non-school youth activities, is simple — without officials, there are no games.

In addition to supporting sportsmanship initiatives, school boards and school administrations may consider sports officiating education as an elective part of the curriculum or have materials and school announcements available to bring awareness to how students and school personnel can become licensed officials. Bringing greater awareness to education-based initiatives within districts can assist officials' recruitment efforts.

The vision and leadership of school boards throughout the state have a significant impact on the success and culture of a local district. When presented with the significant benefit and bargain of interscholastic athletics, it's imperative they are embraced as an important component of a complete education.

School board members and district personnel can access "The Case for High School Activities" at www.nfhs.org/articles/the-casefor-high-school-activities/.

The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association is a voluntary, unincorporated and nonprofit organization. The association membership has a diversified membership of public high schools, nonpublic high schools, public middle schools, and nonpublic middle schools. The association is governed by its member schools.



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CONFIDENCE UNDER THE SPOTLICE

How speech, debate, theatre and film activities prepare students for college and career



by Adam Jacobi, Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association

hat do former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Paul Ryan and former U.S. Senator Russ Feingold have in common? They both participated in interscholastic debate at Janesville Craig High School — about 10 years apart. Despite representing opposing political parties when they served in Congress, they were both distinguished by their independent thinking and willingness to find common ground — important skills for every debater. Both Speaker Ryan and Sen. Feingold were beneficiaries of extracurricular programs facilitated by associations established long before they participated.

Wisconsin's legacy

In 1895, Wisconsin became one of the first states in the country to start organizing interscholastic contests in public speaking, or "forensics," through what is now the Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association. As with many states, public speaking and debating contests were organized even before interscholastic athletics were formalized.

In 1925 at Ripon College, the National Speech & Debate Association was founded as an honorary society. It now runs the largest academic competition in the world, attracting participants from every state, several territories and international delegations. In addition to WISDAA's contest series, coach-run organizations provide additional contest opportunities, and most WIAA athletic conferences also hold their own speech championship.



Adam Jacobi

Activities offered

• **Speech:** With separate middle and high school contest series, students work individually or in small groups to write and deliver original speeches. They also perform works of literature, such as poetry or short skits.



The Darlington High School forensics team was awarded the Excellence in Speech Award at the State Speech Festival.

Speech runs from January through April.

- Debate: Individuals or teams of two or three students develop carefully researched cases about important issues debated in a head-to-head format or in a large assembly format that models the U.S. Congress. Debate runs November through April.
- Theatre: A school produces and travels to a performance of up to 40 minutes (either a short one-act or a cutting of a longer play/musical). Participants can also opt to perform a work solo, as a duet or in small groups. Finally, individuals present a technical portfolio of their work. Theatre runs October and November.
- Film (debuted in 2021): A school may enter any number of short films to be appraised for how they meet certain criteria. Screening has been online-only, with an in-person screening component in development for late spring 2024.

Virtual opportunities

In 2019, the National Speech & Debate Association began piloting virtual speech and debate contests to

LEARN MORE AT CONVENTION

To hear more about debate, attend Adam Jacobi's breakout session at the State Education Convention, "Interscholastic Debate: Balancing Perspectives and Boosting Achievement."

bring students together from different parts of the country. When the pandemic hit in spring 2020, the national association leveraged this new technology to hold its entire national championship event online, which it did again in 2021. WISDAA and other organizations took advantage of these platforms and continue to offer virtual contests to provide greater accessibility and flexibility.

Virtual contests have allowed schools in remote, rural or geographically challenging areas (such as Washington Island School) to participate; as well as entirely online schools, such as Rural Virtual Academy in the Medford Area Public School District, which held a contest with other online schools in spring 2023.

Beyond curriculum and campus

The National Federation of State High School Associations, which sets standards for interscholastic athletics, also provides standards and resources for speech, debate, theatre, music and academic contests. Where music solo and ensemble contests are almost always co-curricular, few Wisconsin schools have formal classes in theatre, speech and debate.

Wisconsin statutes require instruction in music and visual art, yet arts like theatre and dance are relegated to electives — offered on a limited basis, if at all. Most Wisconsin students who experience theatre do so through extracurricular productions of plays and musicals. Such productions also can be performed in interscholastic contests to hone educators' and students' skills through critique and refinement over a series of performances. Young participants also get to see the work of their peers from across the state.

While technology has expanded opportunities, licensure of speech communication educators at Wisconsin colleges and universities has diminished in recent decades, to the point that school districts have often discontinued high school speech courses. Despite communication evolving as a distinct academic field and department at most universities, teachers of English language arts and social studies have been expected to fill the gap, asking students to deliver presentations, give oral reports and engage in interviews and small group dynamics, despite lacking formal training in these skills. Reading and writing are often emphasized, while listening and speaking literacies are regularly glossed over because of a lack of specialized training for educators. Fortunately, activities like debate and speech — still referred to as "forensics" in many Wisconsin schools

- provide instruction and experience in those essential 21st-century skills.

The interscholastic nature of such activities as contests requires that students meet schools' eligibility requirements, including attendance, grades and conduct. This helps

incentivize achievement and provides a platform for students who may not be inherently athletic but are looking for a creative outlet.

College and career readiness

Research about academic speech, debate, theatre and film activities shows numerous benefits, including:

- Confidence. Considered an important "soft skill" for college and career readiness, these activities prepare students for interviews, class discussions, presentations and collaboration. Confidence comes from practicing and honing a skill over time, and the more a person speaks, the less apprehensive they become.
- Competition. Students are motivated by the prospect of earning awards for their achievements, which they can list on their applications and resumes.

- Information literacy. As students research to prepare speeches, debate cases or understand the background of a play or film concept, they learn to appraise the quality and validity of various sources.
- Science, technology, engineering and math in theatre. We see actors on stage, but a crew of technicians and designers work backstage and in booths to create the world in which the actors play. The science of color influences choices made in scenery, costumes and lighting — and how those elements work together. Lighting and sound technicians program cues in software on modern computers. Mathematics determines geometry of audience sightlines, how lights are hung to achieve optimal illumination, and dimensions for scenery and set pieces. Managers of performing arts

At the middle school level, Neenah eighth-grader Nina Bhattacharjee earned national runner-up in joint Congress. Bhattacharjee and De Deker have served as student representatives to the Neenah Joint School District Board of Education.

In 2021-22, WISDAA Executive Director Adam Jacobi was recognized with the National Federation of State High School Associations' National Citation Award for Speech, Debate, and Theatre education.

In 2021, Kenosha Unified School District Theatre Director Holly Stanfield was recognized by the Educational Theatre Association (Thespians) as the Stephen Schwartz Musical Theater Teacher of the Year. She also was recognized with the NFHS Theatre Educator Award for Section IV (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan).

Top photo: From left, Neenah coach Andie Peterson-Longmore, students Isabel Hoffman and Parker De Deker and Adam Jacobi attend the 2022 National Speech & Debate Association's National Tournament.

Bottom photo: WISDAA Executive Director Adam Jacobi receives the NFHS National Citation Award.

At the high school level, then-junior Parker De Deker was named national champion, national leadership award winner and final session presiding officer in the House of Representatives.

RECENT NATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS In 2022, Neenah Joint School District had two top achievements in Congressional Debate at the National Speech & Debate Association National Tournaments.

"I learned the importance of debating objectively and understanding both sides of every story," De Deker told the WISDAA Board of Control in an August 2022

presentation.





facilities often require as much, if not more, technical training as information technology staff at schools — including the know-how to network various light and sound controls and devices. Extensive safety training is required in auditorium spaces with many moving parts.

 Film provides exposure to media literacy and leverages new digital technologies that are more accessible than ever before.

The Florida Department of Education rolled out the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative in 2019 to bring speech and debate activities to as many students as possible, while emphasizing civics literacy. About 10 years ago, the People's Republic of China saw the benefit of interscholastic speech and debate activities as valued for admissions to competitive colleges and universities, particularly in the United States, and to encourage innovation and creativity as companion skills to STEM subject areas.

What's in a Name?

Activities in speech, debate, theatre and film previously were referred to as "forensics," but as crime scene investigation became popularized, activities and organizations across the country were reframed, renamed and rebranded with modern, plain terminology. Likewise, the academic field of theatre uses the British spelling to denote the discipline and the American spelling to denote the place — a theater — where performances happen, and "drama" to refer to the literature that's performed.

A need to rekindle interest

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 10,000 Wisconsin middle and high school students participated on school teams competing in public speaking, theatre, debate and film. That number dropped to about 4,000 during the 2022-23 school year, with fewer schools involved.

Debate has dwindled to less than two dozen schools and 100 students. School districts can invest in speech, debate, theatre and film activities at a modest level and still give students meaningful experiences. WISDAA can help support schools that wish to start programs.

Visit www.wisdaa.org/get-started for details.

Adam Jacobi is executive director of WISDAA and a member of the National Speech & Debate Association Board of Directors. He previously taught speech and theatre at his alma mater, Rufus King High School in the Milwaukee Public Schools. He also taught speech at Ripon College and taught speech and debate in Changzhou, China.



WASB Business Honor Roll 2023

by Anne Davis

EACH YEAR, THE WASB INVITES SCHOOL BOARDS across Wisconsin to nominate local businesses to be recognized for their efforts to support public education in their communities. This year, 47 school districts nominated 140 businesses that provided a wide range of services and support for their local schools and students.

The WASB is proud to share just a few of these local stories. The complete 2023 Business Honor Roll list is available on the WASB website.

Nominations for the 2024 Business Honor Roll will open May 1, 2024.





Hustisford School District

X-CEL TOOLING

or a small rural school district like Hustisford, it can be challenging to find the money to keep up with the latest in technology education. Enter X-CEL Tooling, a local metal stamping tool and die manufacturer that stepped up to help the district meet that challenge.

After a tour of Hustisford High School's technology education facility revealed a lack of up-to-date equipment, X-CEL donated \$7,000 so the district could purchase two computer-controlled cutting machines called CNC routers.

"Students were immediately on the machines and making some real neat things," Superintendent Heather Cramer says. "Working with X-CEL, we have grown our tech education program into something our students are proud of and something we are proud of."

X-CEL has also partnered with the district for a youth apprenticeship program. Hustisford High School Principal Clint Bushey recalls one student who blossomed while apprenticing at X-CEL. The company provided training and opportunities that gave the student exposure to a career he had not previously considered.

The company hopes to encourage students to consider a career in tool and die manufacturing.

"Our goal is to find those young people who might be interested in this type of work," X-CEL Vice President of Marketing Dave Van Krey says. "Maybe eventually we might get an employee out of it."

Stoughton Area School District

BLUE MOON COMMUNITY FARM

At Fox Prairie Elementary School in Stoughton, it grows very well thanks to the efforts of Kristen Kordet, a local parent and farmer.

Kordet owns Blue Moon Community Farm, a diversified vegetable farm that offers community supported agriculture programs. She had worked with local schools in the past and began volunteering her farming expertise at Fox Prairie when her son started kindergarten there.

Before Kordet came, the school's garden had been somewhat neglected, with Fox Prairie Principal Krista Huntley saying, "We were trying to figure out a way to get it going."

Kordet volunteered her time, helping students grow seedlings inside until it was time to plant them in the garden. In addition to zucchini, strawberries, beans, basil and tomatoes, they planted milkweed and native flowers.

It was the first time many students had gardened, helping them realize food doesn't just come from grocery stores.

"It was cool for them to see that tomatoes aren't always red," Huntley said. "A lot of kids don't have gardens, so this was something different."

School families helped tend the garden during the summer, and Kordet helped clean it out in the fall. She's also volunteered in other ways at the school and donated some proceeds from a seedling sale at the farm.

Kordet is happy the garden is

being better used now, noting that teachers don't have the time to take on that responsibility, too.

The school is hoping to build a greenhouse that would enable gardening lessons in cold months.

"The majority of the growing happens when the kids are out of school," says Kordet, who believes gardening teaches children important lessons about healthy bodies, healthy food and how to care for the land.

"Growing food and seeing food being grown is one of the best lessons young people can take with them," Kordet says.



Stevens Point Area School District

EXCEL PRESCHOOL

earning is personal at Excel Preschool, where small classes and a low student-to-staff ratio ensure individual support for young learners with varied educational needs. The school, formed through a partnership between the Stevens Point Area School District and Arrow Academy, was created to meet the needs of students with autism.

Excel is located in the same building as Arrow Academy, which offers early intervention, consultation and respite services to autistic students and their families. Before the preschool opened, students would attend classes at a district school then be transported to Arrow to receive services. Brittany Printz, owner of Arrow and a board-certified behavior analyst, created a time-saving solution: offer classes and services at the same site.

"It provides the best of both worlds for the students," Stevens Point Early Learning Principal Sherrie Stanczyk says. "It offers them access to all of those things in one location."

Printz, who opened Arrow in 2017, wanted Excel to be a community preschool option that offered a general learning center for students with or without special needs. There are a variety of schedule options available for students in 2K, 3K and 4K classes. Students with an individualized education plan receive support in the classroom. Those who also receive services at Arrow Academy can walk next door for their sessions.

Printz says classes combining students with and without special needs is beneficial for all. For many students, it's their first introduction to peers with special needs, giving them an opportunity to see that everyone doesn't learn the same way.

"I like to open that door of explaining," Printz says, noting students also step up as role models and mentors, encouraging their peers with autism to participate fully.

Stanczyk believes Excel's partnership with the district has been "so collaborative" because both share a common vision of creating an inclusive space where students and staff can be successful.



Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District

BRIDGING BRIGHTER SMILES

ome students in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District are flashing big smiles thanks to a longstanding partnership between the district and Bridging Brighter Smiles.

The nonprofit works with school districts across Wisconsin, bringing essential dental care during the school day to students who couldn't afford it otherwise. Teams of hygienists and dental assistants set up a dental clinic in a classroom and offer examinations, cleanings, fillings, and fluoride and sealant applications.

"This is a tremendous service to our students and the community we serve," says Debbie Kennedy, principal of West Middleton Elementary School.

Providing this type of preventative care helps students avoid serious dental issues, which can interfere with their ability to learn.

"It has a huge impact in terms of learning," Kennedy says. "If students have tooth pain, they can't focus on learning."

Bridging Brighter Smiles has been working with the district for 10 years. Christine Wolff, executive director of the agency, said the number of students served has steadily increased, including at Middleton High School, where the number served jumped from 18 in 2021-22 to 23 in 2022-23. Last year, 212 students were seen by Bridging Brighter Smiles teams.

Schools typically schedule one or two days once or twice a year with Bridging Brighter Smiles. Christina Conroy, administrative assistant in the Middleton High School health office, says the need is so great that they may need to schedule additional sessions in the future.

In addition to their preventative services, Bridging Brighter Smiles works with students on basic dayto-day dental care, explaining why they should brush their teeth and showing them how to do it. Wolff says the goal is "breaking the cycle" of poor dental care and ensuring that students practice good habits throughout their life.

She said students and families are very grateful for their service. One hygienist told Wolff a story about meeting a grateful student and his mother at a local store. The student ran up to her and couldn't wait to introduce his mother to the woman who had brushed his teeth.



Racine Unified School District

HARIBO OF AMERICA, INC.

tudents participating in the engineering and manufacturing pathway at The Academies of Racine at Horlick recently had a sweet design challenge: design and manufacture a new type of gummi bear. Students rose to the challenge and came up with an assortment of designs for the iconic candy made famous by HARIBO of America, the international candy manufacturer. They showed off their products during a presentation to representatives from HARIBO's nearby plant.

They were impressed.

"It's been exciting to see what the students came up with," HARIBO Director of HR Operations Toni Hansen says.

The project — and the new engineering and manufacturing pathway — would not have been possible without the support of HARIBO in partnership with SME Prime. A national initiative, SME Prime works with local businesses to set up engineering and manufacturing programs at schools. SME Prime provides the curriculum, professional development and other support while looking for business sponsors. The pathways allow high school students to prepare for careers in a specific field with opportunities to earn college credits, experience apprenticeships and receive certifications.

SME Prime helped create manufacturing and engineering pathways at two other Racine high schools — Case and Park — with help from several local business sponsors. At Horlick, HARIBO donated \$250,000 to pay for training and equipment to set up the pathway as the only business sponsor.

"HARIBO is very intentional and wanted to be part of the whole process," explains Alex DeBaker, executive director for the Academies of Racine.

HARIBO representatives plan to come to the school to talk with students three times this year. The gummi bear project will be repeated each year, while the company is helping plan a new project for seniors. Students will also tour the HARIBO facilities to see its state-of-the-art equipment. The facility opened last year.

"They're going to see what manufacturing looks like today," Hansen says, believing the experience will help dispel preconceptions of manufacturing plants as dirty, unpleasant places and encourage students to consider careers at HARIBO and other manufacturers.

"They're going to see what manufacturing looks like today," she said.

Anne Davis is a freelance writer who has been covering public education in Wisconsin for over 30 years.

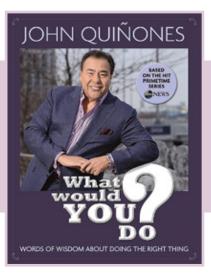
Thank you to the school districts that nominated businesses for the 2023 WASB Business Honor Roll. The full list is available at WASB.org.

If your district is interested in reviewing sample policies on encouraging schoolbusiness partnerships, contact the WASB.



What Would 2

WORDS OF WISDOM ABOUT DOING THE RIGHT THING



ohn Quiñones is the Thursday keynote speaker at the 2024 State Education Convention, held Jan. 17-19 in Milwaukee. To learn more and register, visit WASB.org/convention.



Where it all began

What would you do if you were a shy, scrawny little dark-skinned boy who lived in poverty, and because of that, the odds of "making it" in the world seemed stacked against you? Well, you would dream big dreams.

And that is exactly what I did growing up in the barrios of San Antonio, Texas. Back then there wasn't much else my family could afford to do but dream. And since I was a very curious and adventurous character, I would always fantasize about someday traveling the world, meeting fascinating people and telling their stories.

Well, for more than thirty years, that is exactly what I have had the privilege of doing for ABC News. It's been the greatest job in the world. As a network correspondent, I've had a front row seat to some amazing world events. I've covered everything from wars in Central America and the Middle East, to the American space program, to the disappearing rainforests in the Amazon and Africa. I've interviewed everyone from Fidel Castro to Jane Goodall.

I have traveled to virtually every country on the planet. And along the way, I have witnessed firsthand both the good and the bad people can do to each other. As a reporter, I have challenged evildoers and celebrated heroes.

I guess you can say that, in many ways, I have been studying and training for "What Would You Do?" my entire life.

My mother, Maria

Our very first influences in life and usually the most powerful are our parents. Good or bad, they set the stage for our moral and ethical behavior in those early, formative years.

And so it was in my case. My sisters and I had an exceptional mother, Maria Garcia Quiñones, who, without a doubt, was solely responsible for planting those What Would You Do? ideas in my young, curious brain so many years ago.

Maria was the most loving, caring, sensitive person I have ever known. She didn't have much formal education — she had to drop out of school in the eighth grade to help support her family — but in my eyes, she had a doctorate in love, empathy, and social responsibility.

Our small two-bedroom home on the poor side of the tracks in San Antonio was a lifesaving haven for abused women, runaway kids, even stray dogs and cats. No one in trouble or need was turned away. Maybe it was because she, herself, had suffered poverty and discrimination.

Or maybe it was a result of her strong Catholic upbringing. Whatever it was, Maria could connect with and relate to victims of all kinds of misfortune and injustice. And she did it by simply following the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would want to be treated yourself.

My mother worked very hard cleaning the homes of rich folks on the north side of San Antonio. As a housemaid, she was paid twenty dollars a day. Of course, she couldn't afford a babysitter, so while my older sister, Irma, was at school, my little sister, Rosemary, and I would jump on a city bus and go to work with my mom.

Back at our own little two-bedroom bungalow on Arizona Street, Maria cooked every single meal, washed our clothes, and kept the place as tidy as possible. Every night, after my father got home from work — he earned fifty dollars a week, first as a tree trimmer with the Asplundh tree company, and then as a janitor — we all had dinner together. We didn't have much in material goods, but we were tremendously rich with the blessings of love and family.

Maria was an incredibly compassionate, giving person. Whenever anyone would turn up on our doorstep in need of a meal or a shoulder to cry on, she would turn to my sisters and me and ask, "If you were in the same shoes, what would you do?" ¿Qué harias tu?

I would like to think that her concern for fellow human beings rubbed off on her son — the kid who dreamed of someday becoming a journalist.

Today, as a network correspondent, I frequently interview people who have suffered loss and heartache — the victims of domestic violence, war, or natural disasters — and I always try to put myself in their shoes. That always leads to a better understanding of someone's plight and, in the end, a truer, more complete story for the viewer.

Never give up hope

Life can be a tough struggle — especially when you start off at a disadvantage. You're born into poverty, or with a physical disability, or to a single parent with barely enough time and energy to put food on the table. And then, because of any or all of that, you're the target of ridicule and bullying.

That's when the going gets really tough.

How in the world can you aspire to bigger and better things when it seems the odds are stacked against you? How do you keep your chin up when you feel all alone and there's no one to lend a helping hand? I know the feeling. When I was a child, we were so poor I had to wear the same clothes to school every Whenever anyone would turn up on our doorstep in need of a meal or a shoulder to cry on, she would turn to my sisters and me and ask, "If you were in the same shoes, what would you do?"

other day. I had to endure the stares of kids who made fun of me because all I brought for lunch were beanand-tortilla tacos while most of the other kids had their fancy white bread and bologna.

Again, it was my mother, Maria, to the rescue. She constantly reminded my sisters and me that it didn't matter on what side of town we were born. She would get very animated and point to my head.

"What really matters is what's in here ... in your brain," she would say. And then, pointing to my chest, she would add, "What matters is what's here... in your corazón your heart."

Those little reminders gave me hope, but I was still incredibly frustrated — and often felt defeated by all the negative messages the rest of society kept sending my way. When I was a teenager, reading the local newspapers or watching TV news, it seemed like there was nothing but bad news about Latinos. Anyone reading or watching from outside our community would get the idea that we were all illegal immigrants, members of street gangs, and criminals and drug dealers.

Now, don't get me wrong. The west side of San Antonio was a scary

What Would **YOU DO**

place to grow up back in the 1960s and '70s. Several of my classmates were stabbed to death because they happened to walk through a rival gang's turf. Three of my own cousins were heroin addicts and drug dealers who spent most of their lives in federal prison. So it was no surprise that society as a whole kept presuming and expecting the worst of us.

But I knew there were also many positive stories to be told about Hispanics in my neighborhood and, for that matter, in the barrios all across America. Stories about our strong work ethic, our love of family, our entrepreneurial spirit — all American success stories.

And I knew just the right person to tell those stories. At the age of thirteen, I dreamed of someday becoming a television reporter. Yet it was tough to visualize that dream, because there were very few Hispanic faces on television — hardly anyone who looked like me.

In fact, no one except my parents believed that I could even make it to college. In middle school, whenever I asked my counselors about college prep courses, they would say, "It's wonderful that you have such great dreams, John. But we think you should enroll in vocational courses like metal and wood shop. Maybe auto mechanics."

There's nothing wrong with those trades. Many people make a good, hard living doing that kind of work. But I wanted to go to college, and my own counselors — the very people who are supposed to encourage students — kept dissuading me, telling me I would probably never make it in college.

I endured the same kind of reactions and biases we often get when we stage our scenarios on WWYD: John Quiñones will sign copies of his book after his general session appearance on Thursday, Jan. 18. Find copies at the book signing or in the convention bookstore.

people judging each other by the color of their skin and the accent in their speech.

It was defeating and depressing. Several times I was so down that I considered dropping out of school.

But then, one day, in the hallways of Jeremiah Rhodes Junior High, I met Louie Rodriguez, a recent immigrant from Mexico. Louie lived in public housing; his family was barely scraping by. And his Mexican accent was even stronger than mine. But to

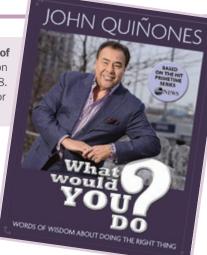
Today there would be no John Quiñones at ABC News if it had not been for that [Upward Bound] federal program.

hear Louie talk, he — and I — was destined for success and greatness. He was the lone voice of positivity in a world where everyone else was telling us we would never amount to much. Louie became my best friend.

Whenever I felt down and out, there he was, always pushing me to carry on, always seeing the glass not as half empty but as half full. I can still hear his wonderfully optimistic voice: "We can do it, Johnny. I know we can!"

It was Louie who first came up with the idea that instead of going to the high school in our neighborhood, where virtually all the students were Latino, we should enroll at Brackenridge High — a school that was located outside our district. The students there were much more integrated — Hispanic, African American, and white. The academic standards were also higher there, and we would be forced to perfect our English.

It was also at Brackenridge that we



learned about a federal anti-poverty program called Upward Bound. It provided advanced classes to innercity kids in high school, to improve

their chances of getting accepted to college. We signed up for interviews with the program's counselors who were visiting my high school. A few weeks later came the startling but great news that we had been chosen as two of the ten Upward Bound students from my high school.

Today there would be no John Quiñones at ABC News if it had not been for that federal program. Some might call it a government handout. For me — and for Louie, who, after graduating from college, became a successful businessman — Upward Bound was a lifesaver. And so it has been for hundreds of thousands of other high school kids who have soared to new heights with a little push and a helping hand.

The reverend Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." So true, because after that, you can take another step. Then another.

My advice is simple: Don't listen to those negative messages that society often lobs our way — particularly to people of color. Surround yourself with people who believe in you. Shoot for the stars. Take advantage of every single opportunity you get. And never, never give up.



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Federal Funding Opportunities to Aid School Energy Improvements

by Focus on Energy

oday's U.S. K-12 school districts have amassed nearly \$8 billion in annual energy costs. Considering the large number of aging facilities and limited operational budgets, schools have been left with deferred maintenance plans with billions of dollars needed for upgrades and repairs. Clean energy funding can help schools earn savings while building toward energy independence. With improved access to funding, schools today can more easily accomplish energy efficiency and renewable energy projects than in previous years.

Whether schools have plans to improve their buildings, incorporate renewable energy or provide staff with more training, financing is available to take districts to the next level in their energy efficiency journey. By learning how to navigate the world of grants and finances, districts can effectively secure funding for future projects.

Here are some examples of federal funding opportunities currently available:

1. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

To encourage clean energy improvements in K-12 public schools, \$500 million has been set aside for a new grant program. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes opportunities for schools to make necessary energy upgrades. These facility improvements will benefit schools with lower utility costs, improved indoor air quality, and safe and healthy learning environments for students and staff.

A. Renew America's Schools grant program

Included under this law is the Renew America's Schools grant program, which gives schools an opportunity to improve aging buildings through eligible energy projects that include:

- Upgrading to energy-efficient lighting and HVAC systems.
- Improving the insulation of buildings.
- Switching to electric-powered vehicles.
- Converting facilities to renewable energy sources like solar.

The Department of Energy announced selections for the first round of funding on June 29, 2023. The second round is expected to be released in Spring 2024.

2. Inflation Reduction Act

The Inflation Reduction Act is making waves in the K-12 education market. Due to new tax provisions, tax-exempt organizations like schools can receive direct cash payments for renewable energy-related projects. Developing a resilient energy infrastructure will allow schools to control their energy systems better and maintain power during catastrophic events.

A. Energy-efficient commercial building deduction

The U.S. federal tax code provision is also known as the 179D tax deduction. It allows eligible building owners or designers to claim a tax deduction for energy-efficient improvements made to commercial buildings, including schools. These improvements should meet specific energy-saving requirements to qualify for the deduction. To receive the deduction, schools should work with a designer (architect, engineer, contractor, etc.) who is eligible to have the deduction allocated to them on the district's behalf.

B. Solar investment tax credits

The Inflation Reduction Act also provides funding for solar energy projects. Previously, it was difficult for schools to support solar panel installations with federal tax credits. Today, upwards of 8,000 K-12 schools are utilizing solar energy. These tax credits are typically able to cover more than 30% of the project cost. These credits are eligible for elective pay (a direct pay incentive to a non-taxpaying entity) and can be filed after the customer's tax year or accounting period.

3. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund program The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding is a federal program that provides financial assistance to schools in response to emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. ESSER funds can be used for various purposes related to improving educational services. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provides detailed guidelines and application processes for schools interested in using the funds for energy-related projects. The current ESSER III grant performance period runs until Sept. 30, 2024.

4. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools program

While not a direct funding opportunity, this program recognizes schools for their exemplary efforts in reducing environmental impacts and costs, improving the health and wellness of students and staff, and providing effective environmental education. Additional financial incentives are available to schools participating in the program.

5. Federal Emergency Management Agency Grants

Federal Emergency Management Agency Grants occasionally offer funding opportunities for school facility upgrades, including energyrelated improvements focusing on enhancing resilience and sustainability.

6. Energy Innovation Grant Program Through its Energy Innovation Grant Program, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin's Office of Energy Innovation supports an array of projects dedicated to reducing energy consumption and supporting renewable energy systems. While not currently accepting applications, psc. wi.gov keeps interested individuals up to date on grant programs available to Wisconsin K-12 school districts.

Funding availability and program details can change over time, so it's essential to monitor official government websites for up-to-date information on available funding opportunities.

No matter the income level or location, any school can receive the tools needed to implement energy-saving upgrades. By committing to energy efficiency, schools will discover that making smart energy choices will benefit the students, the local community and the environment.

Schools interested in pursuing an energy-related project should contact their local energy advisor at focusonenergy.com/EA-map. They will discuss all the current federal and state grants and how to apply for them. By discovering the available financing opportunities, schools can help increase the return on investment with their next project.

Focus on Energy is Wisconsin's statewide energy efficiency and renewable resource program funded by the state's investor-owned energy utilities and participating municipal and electric cooperative utilities. For more information, visit focusonenergy.com.





A Q&A WITH **Tom Bertrand**

The executive director of the **Consortium of State School Boards Associations,** of which the WASB is a member, talks about his goals and the challenges faced by school boards.

Q: You're the first executive director of COSSBA. Since there's no playbook or predecessors to lean on, is that intimidating or liberating?

A: The word that came to my mind was daunting. You're essentially building an organization from the ground up, so there's a lot of things you just take for granted. But also, it's not very often you have this opportunity in your career to start a new national organization. It's a little intimidating, but it's also very exciting. I don't have a predecessor. What I have had is a lot of support and investment from my peers, from the different state associations, which has been really helpful. And a lot of in-kind donations of time and staff resources during this period of transition up until now. I'm grateful for that.

Q: What are your goals for the first 90 days on the job?

A: Certainly, building out the infrastructure of the association. We were fortunate that the North Carolina School Boards Association was willing to manage our finances for this first year. So now we're making that transition, with COSSBA assuming responsibility for its own financial management. We're migrating to a new association management system and we're employing more staff to support the work of the association. We're also onboarding new member states. We added Wisconsin on July 1, and we are adding the North Dakota School Boards Association. We have several new executive directors of our member state associations. We'll be reaching out and onboarding them. And then, of course, we've got major events that are happening here in the very near future.

- Q: A powerful conference in Tampa last April, an Urban Boards Alliance symposium, webinars, leadership events, advocacy initiatives ... COSSBA set the bar high during its first year. Why has it been so successful?
- A: I would attribute that to the collective effort of COSSBA's member state association leadership. We couldn't have done it without them. I didn't take over until July 1. I was doing what I could once I was named the executive director, but I also had my own association to run, so it really did take a collective effort. We had staff that, in addition to their work with their state associations, supported COSSBA in developing content and the logistics for all of these events. There's a real strong commitment by the states to the success of this organization. And that's what it's going to take to help us get where we need to be.

- Q: Prior to your leadership at the Illinois Association of School Boards, you served more than three decades as an educator and administrator — including 16 years as a superintendent. How did working under a school board prepare you for serving school boards across Illinois?
- A: I think part of that staying power and success is understanding the board's work and the challenges school board members face. I never forgot who I worked for, and I always tried to keep in mind it wasn't about me. I worked hard on building trust. If the people you work with and for don't trust you, you will fail. I think also, you're not always going to be the smartest person in the room. I had a school board once with a U.S. attorney and three CPAs, so I didn't pretend to know more about the law than my lawyer or about finances than my CPAs. You leverage that talent and wisdom. And I think how you treat people matters. You sometimes have strong disagreements with your school board members. How you treat people during the disagreement and afterwards often determines your success. You have to decide, is this a hill I want to die on or do I want to live to fight another day?
- Q: No two states are alike. What steps will you take to foster unity

and a common vision among the 25 different state school boards associations that are COSSBA members?

A: Illinois is really a microcosm of the country. We have a large metropolitan area, a large suburban area and then a large rural area, much like our country. You have to learn to navigate that type of diversity within your association, and at the national level you certainly do, too. (COSSBA) stayed very focused on these core values of being focused and responsive, transparent and efficient, reflective and relevant, and representative and accountable. When we had our transition steering committee, which was the temporary governing body of this association, from April of 2022 to January of 2023, we had a representative from every member state. That was a unifying element. When we developed the governance structure, there's a rotation so that every state will eventually get an opportunity to serve in a leadership role and on the board of directors. I think it unifies the membership and gives everybody a voice. We also were very intentional about our advocacy work. You have to be focused on your advocacy agenda, and not let people put things on your plate that fail to unify your members.

Q: What do you see as the most common and urgent challenges facing state associations and their respective memberships?

A: We're seeing the culture wars playing out at the local level, whether it's book bans or equity work, partisan involvement in school board elections, which in some of our states became very overt. There are interest groups that are trying to leverage frustration that people felt during the pandemic, and the academic fallout and school closures across the country. They're trying to leverage that into a push to privatize schools, and we have to be



Current COSSBA member states

very wary of that. I think a challenge for our schools is how do you connect with and engage the community in a productive way? Academic recovery is going to continue to be a big challenge. We've got mental health issues. School safety remains a real concern across the country. Those are areas where we hope we can provide additional support to our state school boards associations.

- Q: School boards are under a level of scrutiny that didn't exist just a few years ago. The tone at board meetings and in state legislatures is increasingly divisive. What are state associations doing to support their school boards?
- A: Working with boards about how to stay above the fray in terms of partisan politics. Providing more guidance to aspiring school board members. In Illinois, our association spent a lot of time and resources helping boards with managing conflict, managing hostility, community engagement, crisis communications and the importance of sharing your story. How do you build trust within your leadership team? How do you build trust with your community? Those are going to be big issues moving forward because, frankly, people have less trust in traditional organizations than they did years ago. We've got to work to build it.
- Q: COSSBA is working on the longterm priorities of the federation. Can you share COSSBA's focus for the coming years?

A: We're at this point where (COSSBA's board) identified potential strategic priorities. The next step is to shape that into an actual strategic plan. In August, we hope to present a draft to the board of directors for approval, and then we'll release that to the state association members. (Editor's note: This article was originally published in August 2023.) There's currently no one providing state associations with a national perspective and analysis of what's going on in the states. What are hot topics in states? What are hot pieces of legislation across the country? Those things have a tendency to move from state to state. That's something I think will be part of our strategic plan, to provide state policy analysis and information to our members. That's where we can be of support to our members.

Q: What is the most important thing that COSSBA provides state associations?

A: Our highest priority should be supporting the leadership of our state school boards associations - leadership teams and boards of directors — and really building a system that's responsive to our members, which are the state school boards associations. We'll be doing a needs assessment here very soon, to hear from the members. What are your highest priorities? What do you expect from your national organization? Because we need to be in alignment with that. Job one is supporting our state associations' leadership so that they can in turn support their local school board members. If we do our job as a national consortium, that will result in healthier, stronger state school boards associations who in turn now can serve more effectively. The better your leadership is in your school districts, the better outcomes there are for kids.

This interview originally appeared in the August 2023 issue of Kentucky School Advocate, the monthly magazine of the Kentucky School Boards Association, KSBA.

Evaluating the Use of **ESSER Investments**

How to transparently discuss federal stimulus funds with the community

by Laura Adams, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Recognizing that COVID-19 pandemic-related issues would not simply disappear with the emergence of a vaccine and the return to in-person instruction, the federal government granted federal stimulus funds to schools in 2021. Those funds are being used to provide academic, social and emotional supports for learners and staff until Sept. 30, 2024.

There continues to be great interest in and scrutiny of how those funds have been and continue to be used. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is committed to transparency in describing how districts have invested those funds, while also acknowledging the significant burden that data collection has placed on the department.

In the name of transparency and evidence-based practice, the DPI recommends that each school district set aside time to evaluate their ESSER investments and create a plan to communicate these investments with your local community. This is especially important for districts that may be considering a referendum and need to answer questions about why they are seeking additional local funds after receiving ESSER federal stimulus dollars. Transparency may give Wisconsin's citizens and taxpayers a better understanding of how the funds were used and why they aren't a solution to many of the longterm funding issues districts face.

To assist districts in evaluating and communicating their ESSER invest-



ments, the National Comprehensive Center formed a Community of Practice that developed a set of Education Stimulus Fund evaluation questions and a template for communications.

Below is a sample of these resources to support school districts in evaluating and communicating about their ESSER investments.

Questions to answer at the district and/or school level:

- How have ESSER funds been invested?
- What data do you have on learner outcomes? Consider academic and engagement data.
- What has worked? How do you know?
- What hasn't worked? How do you know?
- What will you continue doing to support learners?
- What will you stop doing?

Communications template for local customization:

• Our district received \$x per pupil in one-time federal relief funding.

- We spent \$x on y so that students could z.
- Starting in the 2024-25 school year, we will no longer have access to ESSER funds supporting the following programs: ...
- When those relief funds go away, our district will have to x. We will be looking at our programs to adjust in ways that still allow us to maximize student value.
- Given that most of our expenses are labor, that would mean a labor reduction of up to x jobs.
- Our latest data suggests that our students need x. In engaging with our teachers and families, we're finding/hearing y, which matters for students because z.

While many districts are already knee-deep in the next set of funding issues, it's absolutely in the best interest of students to evaluate how districts have used the ESSER federal funds. Answering the questions above helps district representatives prepare themselves to not only speak about what they did in the past, but also how they will prioritize student well-being going forward.

The pandemic has left so many indelible marks on the lives of students and communities. We owe it to ourselves and them to gather data and reflect on lessons learned.

Laura Adams is a policy initiatives advisor at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.



ATTENTION, New and Experienced Board Members!

his article is dedicated to all of us working to be the best board members we can be. (Please clip this article and put it on your fridge or other convenient place for happy reminders.)

Goals for board members

- 1: Educate and care for every child, every day. Our students are depending on us.
- 2: Attend board meetings with the expectation that all members can speak and be respected. If meetings are not productive, get outside assistance to help (the WASB can offer help).
- 3: Encourage students by attending their activities. Students love seeing us support their work. Meeting parents, families and community members is exciting.
- 4: Get to know your legislators. Call them with your questions, concerns and ideas. Attend their "meet and greet" meetings. Email or call them. The WASB has addresses and ways to connect with them.
- 5: Have your board invite students to board meetings. They enjoy sharing their honest thoughts about their school experiences. Teachers often help them prepare for the meeting.
- 6: Attend conferences, webinars and other offerings from the **WASB.** There are many very

helpful offerings throughout the year. These keep us up to date in all aspects of education. These can enhance board governance through innovative training and leadership activities.

7: Attend the State Education **Convention in Milwaukee**

(January 17-19). There are great speakers, valuable breakout sessions and numerous opportunities to network with so many colleagues interested in education. See educational offerings in the Exhibit Hall.

8: Know your board policies. Review the policies individually and as a board. It is recommended to look at a few policies each month.

- 9: Use the WASB if you have legal questions or questions concerning state mandates. Boards have the opportunity to learn so much from the employees of the WASB.
- 10: Lead by example. Strive to be a board member who is interested in education cooperation and discussions about your district. The community has elected us to do what is best for our students and community.

Congratulations!

Congratulations on being a board member who can work to affect the future of our country in a positive way. Care about and work to educate every child, every day!

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ASSOCIATION NEWS



WASB Connection Podcast

The story of John Quiñones, a 2024 State Education Convention keynote, is evidence of the power of perseverance, education and doing the right thing.

The latest episode of the WASB Connection Podcast features a conversation between Quiñones and Michael Lyons, an author and speaker based in the Philadelphia area.

Through their discussion, John reveals how he rose from a family of migrant laborers to host a TV show, "What Would You Do?" and travel the world telling stories for ABC News. Listen in to get to know John before meeting him at the convention.

"I'll never forget being on my knees on the cold, hard ground at six in the morning looking at a row of tomato plants that, for a young 13-year-old boy's eyes, seemed to go on for miles and miles. That's what I had to look forward to that day, picking tomatoes in that row of plants and my father Bruno looking down and saying, 'Juanito, do you want to do this for the rest of your life, or do you want to get a college education someday?"

John Quiñones, 2024 State Education Convention keynote

Find the episode at WASB.org, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

WASB Directors Elected to 3-Year Terms

Please join the WASB in welcoming Larry Cyrus of

Cochrane-Fountain City to the WASB Board of Directors and congratulating Andrew Maertz of Reedsville and Sue Todey of Sevastopol on their re-election. Bob Green of Middleton-Cross Plains, formerly an interim director, was also elected.

Thank you to the members in WASB regions 3, 6, 8, 12 and 14 who joined us to elect their directors, who will begin their three-year terms in January at the State Education Convention. (*Editor's note:* The election for Region 14 board member had not happened when this edition went to press.)

Thank you to departing Region 6 Director Mary Jo Rozmenoski of Black River Falls. She served for three terms of three years each, making her ineligible to run for re-election.

Our incoming new member, Cyrus, is vice president of the Cochrane-Fountain City School Board, where he has served for six years. He has reached Level 3 in the WASB Member Recognition Program and served for two years on the Policy and Resolutions Committee. □

UPCOMING ONLINE WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS

Register for the webinars below or visit the WASB website for the recordings. All members receive access to the recordings of complimentary webinars.

WASB Online Learning Platform subscribers receive access to the recordings of any webinars in which registration was required.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER PUBLIC RECORDS LAW ONLINE WORKSHOP

DEC. 6 | 12-1:30 p.m. WASB Staff Counsel

More than ever, individual board members find themselves being asked to respond to public records requests for records that are in their possession or where they are a record subject mentioned in the responsive record. This workshop will address individual board members' responsibilities under the public records law, answer frequently asked questions that board members have regarding their records and run through scenarios that board members may face regarding public records, including archiving records, responding to records requests and the unique records responsibilities that may come with social media use.

RECURRING WEBINAR: WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

DEC. 13 | 12 p.m.

Each month, WASB staff counsel and government relations staff address current topics of interest to WASB members. The topics are typically driven by recent developments affecting schools in the state Legislature, Congress, governmental agencies and the courts. No registration required. Visit WASB.org for the link.

SAVE THE DATE... SCHOOL LAW CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 29, 2024



Thank You, Fall Legislative Conference Attendees!

Thank you to the members who attended our Fall Legislative Conference, held Nov. 4 at the Heidel House in Green Lake. Find copies of the presentations and more photos at the Event Recap page at WASB.org.





WASB President Rosanne Hahn welcomes conference attendees.

Above: Marquette Law School Professor Charles Franklin presents a session about public opinion regarding public schools.

Right: Fall Legislative Conference attendees visit with each other during a break.





WASB Executive Director Dan Rossmiller speaks about changes to reading instruction.

12 Board Members Achieve Level 5 WASB Recognition

Congratulations to the following school board members who achieved Level 5 recognition – the highest tier possible – this year in the WASB Member Recognition Program. Members earn points for participating in WASB activities, including attending events, serving on committees and serving as a delegate to the WASB Delegate Assembly.

- *Mike Kwaterski,* Three Lakes
- Susan Kessler, Burlington (former)
- Patricia Qualman, Algoma
- Ann Clare Schmitz, Algoma
- Kelli Zebro, Mosinee
- Chris Bouressa, Kaukauna Area

- *Marge Jorgensen,* Beaver Dam
- Keith Medema, Randolph
- Gary Woolever, Reedsburg
- Tom Harter, Hartland-Lakeside J3
- Dawn Van Aacken, Hamilton
- Cherie Rhodes, Slinger



Patricia Qualman of the Algoma School Board is recognized by WASB Executive Director Dan Rossmiller at the Region 3 Fall Regional Meeting in Green Bay in October.

Find Your Photos on the Event Recap Page

Visit WASB.org, hover over the "Training & Events" menu at upper left and select "Event Recaps." Click "Fall Regional Meetings and Workshops" and scroll down the page to find links to photos from each region. Alternatively, you can find the Regional Meeting recap page at this link: bit.ly/40Ki6Kn.

Share your photo on social media to show your commitment to professional development.

Shaping the WASB's 2024 Legislative Agenda

Here's where your association will focus its advocacy efforts

he 2024 WASB Legislative Agenda has been approved by the Board of Directors and is now posted on our website. The agenda outlines the top priorities for the Government Relations Team to focus on in our advocacy efforts during the coming year.

The Legislative Agenda is approved annually in November by the WASB Board of Directors and is guided by the resolutions adopted by the Delegate Assembly.

This year's Legislative Agenda outlines our main areas of focus, with the supporting resolution in parenthesis:

- **1.** Local school board authority, including:
- Opposing the creation or expansion of unfunded state mandates. (Resolution 3.20)
- Local control of school district referenda including removing restrictions/penalties (Act 141/ low revenue ceiling). (1.25)
- School start date flexibility. (1.22)
- **2.** Address staffing shortages, including:
- Support legislation to remove any impediments to rehiring retired teachers and staff. (4.37)

- Support state and federal initiatives to assist rural school districts in their efforts to attract and retain high-quality staff, including student loan forgiveness programs and grants for teachers who commit to work in rural school districts for at least a minimum number of years. (4.72)
- Supports reasonable efforts to provide pathways to licensure for teaching candidates in subject or content areas where there is a shortage of licensed teachers if candidates have bachelor's degrees and are qualified to be in a classroom. (4.61 (b))
- Oppose and urge restraint on new mandates/requirements that will exacerbate staffing challenges. (3.20, 4.61)
- Support efforts to increase the supply of school social workers, school counselors and mental health providers throughout the state. (4.61 (c))
- Support legislation to provide all teaching license applicants with an alternative pathway to licensure that does not require passage of the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT). (4.61 (d))

- **3.** Career and technical education: Support the development of career and technical education programs in school districts by urging the state to support and strengthen existing CTE programs and stimulate the development of
- **4.** Declining enrollment: Continue to explore legislation to alleviate the funding effects on school districts with declining enrollment. (2.17)

new programs. (3.60)

- **5.** Shared school district services: Work to implement the legislation recommended by the study committee to remove obstacles and provide additional resources to empower districts to share services or explore consolidation while preserving local school board authority. (1.30, 2.16, 3.29, 5.00)
- **6.** Equal aid payments schedule: In the environment of state surplus, support the changing of payment of equalization aids to four equal installments (25% each) in September, December, March and June. (2.20 (d))

The Legislative Agenda is developed with input from the WASB staff considering factors such as feedback from school boards and administra-

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We encourage you to discuss the resolutions at your December board meetings and give your board's delegate directions on **how the board wants him or her to vote**.

tors about the most important issues you are facing in the field, the makeup of the Legislature and governor's office and their stated priorities, as well as the likelihood that the WASB can partner with other organizations to form a coalition to advocate for certain items.

The WASB's Legislative Agenda typically changes from legislative session to legislative session. What remains constant, however, is that the Legislative Agenda is guided and informed by the resolutions adopted by the WASB Delegate Assembly.

The resolutions set forth general guiding principles for the WASB to follow in its legislative advocacy. Ideally, resolutions do not define the WASB's position so rigidly that the WASB and its Government Relations Team cannot respond to lawmakers or state agency staff when they offer alternative solutions or compromises that may accomplish the same purpose. Having flexibility is always helpful.

Resolutions update

The WASB Policy and Resolutions Committee has determined, after multiple meetings, what resolutions will be presented at the 2024 Delegate Assembly in January.

This year, the resolutions moving forward address subjects such as teacher pipeline challenges, special education terminology, the use of seclusion and restraint in schools, funding for the ongoing operation of the Office of School Safety, and artificial intelligence, among others.

The full resolution language and rationale on each of these topics has been posted on the Delegate Assembly page on our website, WASB.org. Delegate packets containing copies of all submitted resolutions and the final resolutions forwarded to the Delegate Assembly have been mailed to all school board delegates and district administrators.

We encourage you to discuss the resolutions at your December board meetings and give your board's delegate directions on how the board wants him or her to vote.

We also urge you to review the suggestions made in our last column about things we can do to ensure the Delegate Assembly is as productive and efficient as possible while allowing members to be heard.

In our November Capitol Watch, we highly encouraged reaching out to us about any questions you have about the resolutions as well as giving us a "heads up" on any potential amendments in advance of the Delegate Assembly.

There are also opportunities at the convention (before the Delegate Assembly) to get answers to questions or assistance with an amendment.

A Pre-Delegate Assembly Discussion session will be held Tuesday, Jan. 16 at 7 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom of the Milwaukee Hilton City Center. This will be an informational session only.

If your board wishes to offer any amendments to resolutions, this is a good time to make that known to other delegates and to the WASB staff, as this session will also include a review of the parliamentary procedure to be used at the Delegate Assembly. You can also get advice from the WASB parliamentarian and staff on how to best accomplish the intent of an amendment.

This discussion session is also the deadline for member boards to submit any emergency resolutions to the Policy and Resolutions Committee. An "emergency resolution" is one that deals with a concern that arises between Nov. 1 and the time of the Delegate Assembly and could not have been presented earlier due to the emergency nature of the subject.

To help first-time delegates better understand the Delegate Assembly process, an orientation session will also be held at 8 a.m. on Wednesday Jan. 17 in Ballroom A/B of the Baird Center (formerly the Wisconsin Center).

In closing, we want to publicly thank all the school boards that submitted resolutions and the committee members for their work. If you are interested in serving on the Policy and Resolutions Committee in the future, please contact your WASB regional director.

Displaying Flags in School Buildings

chool districts across the country have navigated issues related to displaying flags that express a specific viewpoint in school buildings. One example of such flags are pride flags intended to demonstrate support for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Regardless of whether school board members support the display of any specific flag in school buildings, board members need to be aware of several important legal principles that apply to this decision. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution creates a nuanced legal framework regarding the display of flags in school buildings.

This Legal Comment will discuss the school board's broad authority to control school curriculum and engage in government speech through the display of flags. Then, it will discuss the school board's more limited ability to control employee personal expression in school buildings through the display of flags, and the importance of consistency in its policies and practices regarding employee personal expression.¹

1. The school board's right to control curriculum and speak as an entity

School boards have broad authority

to determine the curriculum in schools, typically in consultation with district administration, teachers, and parents. Within the scope of that authority, boards can adopt policies addressing teaching controversial issues in the classroom. Boards generally have the discretion to define what constitutes a controversial issue subject to such policies.

Such policies might include provisions that limit discussion of controversial topics only to specifically designated portions of the curriculum. Such policies might also include a requirement that parents are notified before the controversial issue is taught in class. Importantly, the school board can require teachers to follow the prescribed curriculum. Teachers can be prohibited from sharing their personal opinions on a controversial issue covered by the policy, or the policy could require teachers to be explicit when they are sharing personal opinions. The policy might also require teachers to refrain from attempting to persuade students to share their personal opinions on the issue, or to present certain other perspectives applicable to the controversial issue.

Board authority to control curriculum also extends to the regulation of classroom displays that are part of teaching the curriculum. Within the scope of the regulation of curriculum, boards could prohibit teachers from displaying flags that express a specific viewpoint even if displaying such a flag might be relevant to the curriculum. However, boards could also permit teachers to display flags in the classroom when doing so is relevant to the curriculum, such as displaying an expressive flag that is discussed in a literary work that the class is studying (for example, the flag in "Animal Farm" by George Orwell). Permitting the display of flags in the context of the curriculum does not "open the door" for the display of other types of flags. Boards can grant administrators and teachers the authority to make the decision whether to display a given flag as part of the curriculum.

Boards also have the authority to engage in their own expressive activity — a doctrine known as government speech. Using that authority, boards could expressly permit a certain flag to be displayed in school buildings, on school grounds, and on district-sponsored platforms such as newsletters, websites, and social media. However, boards are advised to be careful to make it clear that such expression is the board's expressive activity, as

Board authority to control curriculum also extends to the regulation of classroom displays that are part of teaching the curriculum. Boards who are potentially concerned with personal expression from teachers can close any such limited public forum for personal employee expression.

opposed to the board opening a limited public forum for others to engage in speech. To ensure this, the board should maintain sufficient direct control over the messages conveyed. For example, a board could pass a resolution to display a Black Lives Matter flag in the office of each school building for the month of February. This does not mean that the board would have to allow other types of expressive messages to be displayed in school offices; the board has specifically made the decision to speak as a board on this issue in this manner.

2. Has a district created a limited public forum for employee expression?

In order to determine if an individual teacher or other employee can display an expressive flag in school buildings without the explicit authorization of board policy, it is necessary to determine if a limited public forum has been created for that type of employee personal expression. Such a limited public forum can be created by policy, but can also be created through acquiescence or past practice.

Boards who are potentially concerned with personal expression from teachers can close any such limited public forum for personal employee expression. However, that likely requires districts to prohibit teachers from personal expression by completely shutting down the forum. In the alternative, districts could change the scope and nature of the forum, such as by permitting only certain categories of personal employee expression within the forum. For example, if a board had permitted teachers to use classroom bulletin boards for personal expression, the board could change the nature of the forum and require teachers to only use bulletin boards for curricular purposes.

At the same time, the board might want to permit teachers to have some space for personal expression by permitting teachers to use the top of their desks for personal expression. In that situation, the top of a teacher's desk becomes a limited public forum for personal teacher expression. For example, a teacher might display a small pride flag in support of an LGBTQ+ family member on their desk. Prohibiting just the pride flag in that situation would be an example of viewpoint discrimination, which is impermissible under the First Amendment. Once a limited public forum has been created, the district cannot discriminate based on the viewpoint expressed by the teacher within the forum. However, if a teacher hangs a large pride flag on the wall above their desk, doing so would exceed the scope of the forum, which is limited to the top of the teacher's desk. Administrators would not violate the First Amendment by asking that teacher to remove the pride flag, even though administrators were not permitted to remove the pride flag on another teacher's desk.

3. Framework for the legal analysis

Here are the essential elements of the legal analysis that board members and administrators should use in responding to the display of expressive flags in school buildings.

- Review potentially applicable board policies, such as those addressing teaching controversial issues or specific to displays in the classroom.
- Determine if the employee is displaying the flag as part of the curriculum, and if so, whether the display comports with applicable board policies.
- Determine if the space where the employee is displaying the flag has, through policy, past practice, or acquiescence, become a limited public forum for the personal expression of the employee.
- When appropriate, decide whether to take action, such as asking (or directing) the employee to take the flag down.

If boards and administrators are going to start tightening up forums for employee expression, they need to be aware of the incredible importance of consistency. If an administrator makes a teacher take a non-curricular flag off the wall, the administrator needs to be prepared to remove similar non-curricular personal expression such as personal photos, posters, and possibly even sports memorabilia that expresses support for an athletic team. If the walls are for curriculum-based expression only, then that has to be the consistent rule that is enforced. Otherwise, a teacher who was forced to remove their flag might be able to claim that the administration engaged in viewpoint discrimination by only targeting their flag due to the message it conveyed.

Conclusion

Legally, school districts must provide an environment that is free from harassment based on certain protected classes such as a student's race, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and districts cannot discriminate against students on those bases. However, that legal obligation does not require districts to permit the display of certain flags. Nevertheless, districts may be concerned that having only certain employees displaying flags in support of a legally protected class might send the message that only those teachers will protect students and employees in that legally protected class from discrimination and harassment. That

message would be fundamentally inconsistent with the law.

Finally, districts should consider the practical implications of removing flags. Some districts might want to remove them in an attempt to avoid controversy in the community. However, removal could cause just as much controversy, if not more. Similarly, limiting the nature and scope of forums for employee expression to prevent the display of certain flags will likely require administrators to tell employees not to display a variety of things, many of which are completely noncontroversial. School boards and administrators considering policies regarding the display of flags need to evaluate any potential benefits against their potential costs,

including the effort it would take to craft and enforce the policy in a legally compliant manner.

Endnotes

 Due to space constraints, this Legal Comment will not cover students' ability to display flags at school, such as on their clothing. Instead, see Wisconsin School News "Free Speech and Student Clothing" (April 2020) for a detailed discussion of the general legal framework that would apply to such student speech.

This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka and Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For related articles, see Wisconsin School News: "Free Speech and Student Clothing" (April 2020); "Teacher 'Free Speech' in the Classroom" (May 2007); and "Union Buttons and Signs in the Classroom" (Jan. 2007).

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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