

2024 CONVENTION REVIEW

WISCONSIN

SchoolNews

Official publication of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards

March 2024 | wasb.org



Keynote speaker

JOHN QUIÑONES

reminded us that the knowledge of values is just as important as the knowledge of facts.

The POWER to Change Lives

Thank you, sponsors!

PLATINUM



GOLD



Public Finance



SILVER



BRONZE



THE STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THESE SPONSORS and applauds the commitment to education exhibited by their generous support.

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
OF THE WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS, INC.

Dan Rossmiller
Executive Editor

Dan Linehan
Editor; Director of Communications

Sierra Linton
Contributing Writer
WASB Communications and
Marketing Specialist

▪ REGIONAL OFFICES ▪

122 W. Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608-257-2622
Fax: 608-257-8386

132 W. Main Street
Winneconne, WI 54986
Phone: 920-582-4443
Fax: 920-582-9951

▪ ADVERTISING ▪

Erica Nelson • 763-497-1778
erica.nelson@ewald.com

▪ WASB OFFICERS ▪

Dan Rossmiller
Executive Director

Mike Humke
Dodgeville, Region 9
President

Andrew Maertz
Reedsville, Region 8
1st Vice President

Sandie Anderson
Wild Rose, Region 10
2nd Vice President

Rosanne Hahn
Burlington, Region 13
Immediate Past President

▪ WASB BOARD OF DIRECTORS ▪

Linda Flottum
Turtle Lake, Region 1

Randy Erickson
Prentice, Region 2

Sue Today
Sevastopol, Region 3

Alan Tuchenhagen
River Falls, Region 4

Jim Bouché
Wausau, Region 5

Larry Cyrus
Cochrane-Fountain City,
Region 6

Barbara Herzog
Oshkosh, Region 7

Brett Hyde
Muskego-Norway,
Region 11

Bob Green
Middleton-Cross Plains,
Region 12

Xela Garcia
Milwaukee, Region 14

Cherie Rhodes
Slinger, Region 15

Wisconsin School News (USPS 688-560)
is published 10 issues per year by the
Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.,
122 W. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703.
Contents © 2024 Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.
Subscriptions are available to nonmembers for \$95 per year.
Periodicals postage is paid at Madison, Wis., and other
additional entry offices.

The views expressed in Wisconsin School News are
those of the authors and do not necessarily represent
WASB policies or positions.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Wisconsin School News, 122 W. Washington Ave.,
Madison, WI 53703.



SPECIAL 2024 CONVENTION REVIEW ISSUE

- 3** **Viewpoint** — *Reflecting on an Inspirational Convention*
- 5** **The 4 Essential Roles of Leadership** — *Keynote: Sean Covey*
- 6** **The Power to Change Lives** — *Keynote: John Quiñones*
- 7** **Laying the Foundation for Reading** — *Keynote: Maya Payne Smart*
- 8** **State Superintendent's Address** — *State Superintendent Jill Underly*
- 9** **Governor's Address** — *Gov. Tony Evers*
- 10** **Delegate Assembly**
- 12** **Finding, Retaining Staff Seen as Key for Districts** — *Session Theme*
- 16** **Learning to Live With Emerging Technologies** — *Session Theme*
- 19** **Confronting a Mental Health Crisis: Districts Collaborate on Solutions** — *Session Theme*
- 22** **Title IX: What's New and What's Next** — *Session Recap*
- 23** **Outlast the Storm: Keeping People Safe in Severe Weather** — *Session Recap*
- 24** **Hot Topics in Special Education** — *Session Recap*
- 25** **Be the Bridge: Why Communication Is Essential** — *Session Recap*
- 26** **Prayers by Coaches and Guns on T-Shirts** — *Session Recap*
- 27** **Accomplishments and Recognitions**
- 30** **New Horizons for Education** — *Photos from Convention 2024*
- 31** **From the President** — *Spreading the Good News in Public Education*
- 32** **Capitol Watch** — *Legislative Session Quickly Coming to a Close*
- 34** **Legal Comment** — *Avoiding Common Open Meetings Law Errors*

Freelance writers Anne Davis, Rich Rovito and Brock Fritz contributed to this issue of the Wisconsin School News.



BoardDocs[®]

A DILIGENT BRAND

EFFICIENT. TRANSPARENT. SECURE.

**Better board meetings require
the best-in-class solution.**

Learn how the premier governance portal for education helps thousands of districts and schools nationwide to streamline board meeting preparation and improve transparency with the community.

**Integrate the WASB Policy Resource Guide
with BoardDocs Policy features to power-up
your policy management!**

WASB PRG subscribers can seamlessly manage the entire policy lifecycle. Transfer PRG content to a local school district workspace; customize draft policies; post active policies online for public access; manage a local library of retired policies ... and more!



**BoardDocs is a proud partner
of the WASB.** Exclusive pricing
for WASB members.

**Visit [learn.Diligent.com/WASB](https://learn.diligent.com/WASB)
to request a demo.**



800-407-0141 | BoardDocs.com | info@boarddocs.com



Reflecting on an Inspirational Convention

This was my 17th in-person State Education Convention, and the energy and enthusiasm of attendees always inspires me.

Having experienced the convention for the first time as WASB executive director, I have a much deeper appreciation and gratitude for all the hard work that goes into making the convention a success.

Held through a partnership with the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials and the WASB, the Wisconsin State Education Convention has for over 100 years been the largest and premier gathering of educational leaders in the state. This is possible only through the efforts of many, many people, including the staff of these associations. Thank you all for a job well done.

Thank you especially to all the school board members, district administrators and school business officials who joined us in January. This year's event featured inspiring keynote speakers and dozens of top-quality breakout sessions presented by Wisconsin school districts — through a mix of school board members, administrators, educators, education researchers, business partners and other stakeholders.

One board member told me of multiple moments in Milwaukee when she felt inspired. Another board member said going to the convention reminds him that he's not alone on this journey. Others described the time spent learning,

laughing and networking with fellow board members and administrators from all over our state as energizing.

If you found the convention to be a great networking and learning opportunity, I hope you will make convention attendance a habit. Please share how much you gained from the convention with fellow board members who didn't make the trip to Milwaukee.

A common message of our keynote speakers was the importance of overcoming negative assumptions.

Sean Covey, introduced by two eighth-grade students from the Trevor-Wilmot School, encouraged school leaders to communicate to students and staff their worth and potential so clearly they see it in themselves. He described how this approach combined with focusing on one or two wildly important goals helped a struggling school turn around its problematic student performance and attendance to become a shining model.

John Quiñones rose from a migrant farm family to national prominence as a network news anchor and news magazine show host. Bolstered by his mother's firm belief in the power of education, Quiñones was able to cast aside negative assumptions and turn his dreams, ambition, and belief in himself into reality. Quiñones used video clips from his "What Would You Do?" program to demonstrate how people often fail to do the right thing because of negative assump-

tions about why the people who urgently needed help were in that situation.

Kelsey Tainsh described how, as a teenage champion athlete, she awoke one day to find herself paralyzed on one side of her body. Tainsh demonstrated how she had to think "outside the box" to relearn how to do nearly every single task in a different way and overcome limiting assumptions and expectations about her capabilities.

I hope the dialogue and idea-sharing from this year's State Education Convention re-energized and inspired you to be the best school leader you can be for our students. I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events, and as always, welcome your comments, questions and feedback.

In mid-April, the WASB will host New Board Member Gatherings in each of the WASB regions to help you welcome and onboard new board members.

These evening gatherings, hosted by your WASB regional director, aim to help first-time board members — whether newly elected or recently appointed — gain a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and provide a solid introduction to board service.

Now would be a good time to talk to your candidates for school board and let them know that if they are elected, the WASB is here to help them off to a great start in their new role. ■

This year's event featured inspiring keynote speakers and dozens of top-quality breakout sessions presented by Wisconsin school districts ...



WI Challenge Academy

The place for High School students to find their stride.

The Academy is the hidden tool in Wisconsin’s toolkit for students to succeed. Are you a professional that is interested in learning more on how the Challenge Academy is changing the lives of youth in the state of Wisconsin?



Presentation Opportunities

- ✓ Briefing and a tour
- ✓ Classroom presentations
- ✓ Organizational meetings



749 E 12th Ave
Fort McCoy, WI 54656

608-269-8042



Register

<https://www.challengeacademy.org/presentations/>

At the Academy or we will come to you.

THE 4 ESSENTIAL ROLES OF LEADERSHIP



Building a framework for how to lead

Keynote

SEAN COVEY



Sean Covey believes nothing is more important than educating young people.

Doing so at a high level requires strong leaders, says the FranklinCovey Education president, who gave the Jan. 17 keynote at the Wisconsin State Education Convention in Milwaukee.

Covey, the New York Times best-selling author of “The 4 Disciplines of Execution” and “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens,” acknowledges that school leaders must overcome the challenges of learning loss, students’ mental health and teacher turnover. He believes it takes strong leaders to address these challenges.

“The problem is we sometimes have low trust, no clear vision and little communication,” he says. “The solution is to be a good model, be a good person and be the best you can be. You don’t have to be perfect. People will like the fact you’re trying. Declare your intent, ‘I’m trying to be a better leader, can you help me?’”

Covey provides a simple framework for how to lead with his four essential roles of leadership:

1: Modeling – “This is where it starts. This is who you are as a person, your example. How can you be a leader others choose to follow? It’s important you have the vigor and

inspiration to inspire people around you.” While modeling, Covey suggests leaders employ FranklinCovey’s 13 behaviors of high trust leaders:

- Deliver results.
- Get better.
- Confront reality.
- Clarify expectations.
- Practice accountability.
- Listen first.
- Keep commitments.
- Extend trust.
- Talk truthfully.
- Demonstrate respect.
- Create transparency.
- Right wrongs.
- Show loyalty.

2: Pathfinding – “This is where we’re headed. It’s the vision. So often we think everyone understands the mission and the vision of what we’re trying to accomplish, and they don’t, because we under-communicate.”

3: Aligning – “What’s the most important goal we’re trying to achieve? Really narrow your focus.” FranklinCovey recommends schools narrow their improvement plans down to one or two wildly important goals. If an organization is clear on the one or two things that matter,

Covey says they are much more likely to accomplish those goals.

4: Empowering – How do you get the most out of your people? How do you make them feel they matter, provide them with the right environment to flourish and empower them to unleash their best? “Motivation is external, inspiration is internal,” Covey says, noting much of society’s leadership shifted from authoritarian command and control to enlightened command and control. “It’s still a paradigm of, ‘I’m in control and I’m managing you,’ but you do it in a nice way. It’s all about unleashing, extending trust, and empowering. ‘I’m not the boss of you, my job is to support you and inspire you.’”

Finally, schools are full of potential leaders. It’s not just superintendents and principals that make change. Everyone plays a role as kids develop through the school system.

“So many kids have the talent inside, they just need it to be nurtured. We need to be patient,” says Covey, who left the convention’s audience with a quote from his father, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” author Stephen R. Covey: “Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly they come to see it in themselves.” ■

Brock Fritz is a contributing writer.

THE POWER TO CHANGE LIVES



'Education is not just about the knowledge of facts, but also about the knowledge of values'

Keynote

JOHN QUIÑONES



John Quiñones has told a lot of stories about heroes. Many of those stories tend to be about educators.

"Your sole mission is to mold young minds," says Quiñones, the Emmy-winning reporter and host of "What Would You Do?," a hidden-camera show on ABC. "You have the power to literally change lives."

Education changed Quiñones' life, as he told attendees Jan. 18 at the State Education Convention.

Quiñones, born to a Spanish-speaking household in the barrios of a poor community in San Antonio, had parents who knew the value of an education. After picking 100 bushels of tomatoes per day as a migrant farmworker earning 35 cents per bushel, Quiñones took note when his father asked him, "Do you want to do this kind of work for the rest of your life? Or do you want to get an education?"

He wanted an education, but he needed some educators that believed in him to make it happen. However, when he went back to school asking about SATs, college, and his dream of becoming a television reporter, he was pointed toward woodshop, metal shop or auto mechanics.

"There's nothing wrong with those great trades, but I wanted to go to college," Quiñones says. "My

own teachers judged me by the color of my skin and the accent in my voice."

But his parents kept pushing him, and he started writing for the Brackenridge High School newspaper. Then he was one of 10 students from his high school selected to Upward Bound, a U.S. Department of Education program that prepares kids for college. He attended sessions on weekends, and he lived on a college campus for six weeks during every summer of his high school years.

He eventually attended St. Mary's University in San Antonio, where he interned at KKYX radio. His first phrase on the radio: "Now available at Walgreens."

After earning a bachelor's degree from St. Mary's and a graduate degree from Columbia University, Quiñones got his first TV job at CBS in Chicago. His breakthrough story came when he swam across the Rio Grande, entered the U.S., worked as a dishwasher, and interviewed his fellow migrant workers in the restaurant's basement, where they slept.

The next day, Quiñones put on a suit and went into the restaurant with a camera crew to interview the owner about why his workers said they were being held against their will. After his story aired, the government shut down the restaurant,

got the workers the money they were owed and provided them with temporary visas.

"I knew then that those were the kinds of stories I could tell," Quiñones says. "I call journalism the candle in the darkness. Shine it on the darkest corners of the room and illuminate them."

He was eventually hired by ABC, moving to Miami to cover Latin and Central America and "give a voice to people without a voice." He's continued to be a values-first reporter through 15 years of "What Would You Do?"

"We want to hold up a mirror to American society," Quiñones says of the show, which creates situations and watches if people act or mind their business. "When you witness injustice, and the little voice in the back of your head says, 'Do something,' do you step in or step away?"

"We face those questions and moral issues every day. Silence is complicity. We have to raise our voices. And it often starts at home. Many children learn to bully. You can also be taught to be more caring and passionate. How do you unlock the power and the light that exists in each of us?" ■

Brock Fritz is a contributing writer.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR READING

How parents and schools can work together to improve literacy



Keynote

MAYA PAYNE SMART

As a new mom, Maya Payne Smart took comfort in reading to her child.

She treasured the love, care and family ethos she felt during those moments. At the same time, she felt “anxious, nervous and intimidated” by what she was supposed to do.

“I got instruction on how to install a car seat and nurse her, but I got no information about how to nurture her brain development, language development or the connection between that language development and her future prospects as a reader.”

Now the mother of a sixth grader, Smart’s comfort and anxiety morphed into a passion as she became a literacy advocate intent on spreading her mission to understand what goes into raising a reader and how all kids can thrive with a foundational skillset.

“I threw myself into raising a reader,” says Smart, the author of “Reading for Our Lives: A Literacy Action Plan from Birth to Six” and the keynote speaker Jan. 19 at the State Education Convention. “We stand at a crossroads with respect to reading development, instruction and laying a strong foundation for

reading development and literacy in the years before school starts.”

Smart believes families and schools must work together to improve the literacy foundation. The more parents can do to prepare their children, the easier it will be for teachers to usher them to the next level.

“There’s so much going on in those early years, and parents aren’t taught how to take advantage of that,” Smart says, seeking “a more coordinated, organized system for supporting and educating parents so they can do all they can to bring their children to school ready to learn and take advantage of the high-quality instruction.”

Smart says parents insecure or uncomfortable about teaching their kids can benefit from:

- **Perspective** — Educating young children doesn’t take special tools. Parents can impact their child’s reading development with simple back-and-forth conversations that build the child’s brain connection, vocabulary, expressive skills and oral language skills. Smart suggests parents utilize the acronym TALK while using these conversations: taking

turns, asking questions, labeling what’s around them, and keeping the conversation going.

- **Confidence** — Parents know more about reading than their child. Therefore, they should feel empowered to teach what they know, and encouraged that it matters.
- **Problem solving** — Parents can connect with resources in the community to learn about their child’s ability, the school’s expectations and local specialists who can help along the literacy journey.

Moreover, Smart stresses that reading is a long-term journey that isn’t limited to reading class.

“Everyone can play a role in building vocabulary, knowledge, interest and motivation. We’re all on this journey together, we all have a role to play,” she says. “Try to bring optimism and excitement into the work. Keep dreaming big dreams for kids. They will get there if we’re conscious about making a pathway for them.” ■

Brock Fritz is a contributing writer.

STATE SUPERINTENDENT'S ADDRESS



STATE SUPERINTENDENT JILL UNDERLY

Editor's note: Below are State Superintendent Jill Underly's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 17, 2024. The following is edited for space constraints. To download the speech in its entirety, visit rb.gy/fof4y4.

This week, we remembered one of our state's strongest champions of public education — Senator Herb Kohl. In a video released at his memorial, Senator Kohl said, "Education is the very foundation of our society, of our civilization. We must have well-educated people if we're going to preserve our democracy." I couldn't agree with Senator Kohl more. And alongside his commitment of massive resources to support teachers and students, his words also remind us that our public education system should be about getting every kid what they need — in the way they need it — in order to achieve success. We can use test scores to measure success, but we can also measure success in so many other creative and meaningful ways. There are also broader measures of achievement and growth that make a school great, and make a student successful in life.

Successful schools are where every kid is welcomed and affirmed... and where every student is ready to learn and achieve their own success. A classroom of joy and support — and even laughter — is a classroom full of engaged learners.

Success, to me, means every kid gets the support they need to learn to read, so they can turn around and

read to learn.

Success also means breaking down barriers so that every kid can access meaningful learning that is relevant to their interests and goals in life. Then, we are building not only that child's future, but we are building our state's future — because our schools are the economic and democratic engines of innovation and citizen engagement.

I am proud to believe in our public schools, and to believe in the fact that they are for everyone. I believe that ensuring everyone — especially our most vulnerable kids — get what they need for success in our schools, is precisely how we make them great for all children.

I want to be very, very clear: inclusion is what is best for kids.

And, at this moment in time, when we have a massive budget surplus, we must come together and work for greater investment in our schools. I'm really proud of our governor, who is also one of my predecessors, for his leadership over the last three budgets — we've turned the corner on the cuts we had under his predecessor. We have a friend in Governor Evers, but the truth is, I don't think that the small increase the legislature allocated to us last year — a small increase that does not get us anywhere close to where we need to be — is what our schools and kids deserve.

Right now, Wisconsin currently has over seven billion dollars available, some of which is assigned to a so-called "rainy day" fund. And yet, if you ask any educator, in any

school classroom, and they will tell you that it is pouring rain.

One place we should start, and where we can start now, without waiting for the next budget, is a renewed commitment to special education funding. It is a fiscally responsible choice — and a morally responsive one, too.

And not just special education — Investing in mental health, making free, healthy meals accessible to all, increasing sparsity aid and bilingual/bicultural aid — these are all the right choices to make. I urge our legislature to step up and make the right choices, and to do it now. Again, it is what is best for kids, and it is what is best for Wisconsin.

Asking what is best for kids is not a new concept to you as education leaders, and yet I also know that you, as school board members, as district and school administrators, as school business professionals... you are asked to make so many decisions and respond to so many competing interests, that question — what is best for kids — can sometimes get lost in the shuffle.

This is our greatest responsibility — to always center the students. I'm not claiming it's easy. I am asserting it is essential. And I know that, while public education leaders have always faced challenges, in our current environment, you are facing intensified attacks on your work. I know you know it, but it bears stating the obvious: attacks on educators, and politicizing our daily work in schools and libraries, is not what is best for kids. ■

GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS



GOVERNOR TONY EVERS

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to be here once again for the 2024 Wisconsin State Education Convention — an event I have been proud to attend now for 40 consecutive years.

To begin, I'd like to recognize and thank the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, and the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators for their continued partnership in putting on this world-class convention.

I'd also like to thank all the teachers, school board members, district and school administrators, parents, and education professionals for being here as well.

As you know, I got into this gig because I believe that “what’s best for kids is what’s best for the state.”

I've been a teacher, principal, superintendent, and state superintendent.

And I have worked for more than 100 school board members in my career.

I've always felt that board members on the right, left, and the middle had one important thing in common — they want to do the right thing for our kids.

I've always trusted parents, educators, and school districts to work together to do what's best for our kids and what makes sense for their local community.

And it is thanks to this strong partnership and trust that we have been able to make the important progress we have as a state these last five years.

First and foremost, I am proud

our efforts to direct approximately \$2.5 billion in federal relief aid to support our school districts and K-12 schools over the pandemic.

I am thrilled that we have been able to make substantial investments in helping bridge the digital divide by connecting more homes and businesses to high-speed internet to ensure instruction can continue even at the kitchen table or that a snow day can be a remote day.

And I am certainly proud to celebrate that after previously dropping to 18th in the nation, our schools are now back into the top ten.

In addition, through actions in previous state budgets, together, we secured a long-overdue increase in special education aid — the largest increase in state history.

We've also worked to secure increases for general and categorical school aids, sparsity aid, school-based mental health, and transportation costs, and brought per pupil aid to its highest level ever, providing an additional more than \$300 in per pupil aid.

Building upon our work together, through 2023 Wisconsin Act 11 and our most recent budget, I'm proud we were able to secure an overall increase of nearly \$1.2 billion in spendable authority for public school districts, including state categorical aids.

This historic increase is generated by a \$325 per pupil increase in revenue limits in each fiscal year, as well as an increase in the low revenue ceiling from \$10,000 to \$11,000 per pupil in the first year of the biennium.

This is the largest increase in

statewide revenue limit authority since revenue limits were first imposed on K-12 schools in 1993-94.

And folks, it is permanent, base-building, and another step in the right direction of making the system fairer and more equitable.

In fact, estimates show more than half of the state's 421 school districts would be able to use the low revenue ceiling increase in fiscal year 2024-25.

Recent data also suggests that the vast majority of districts eligible to use the record-setting increase in the low revenue ceiling this year took advantage of using some or all of this additional revenue limit authority.

And in total, the low revenue ceiling increase in 2023-24 appears to have generated over \$200 million in permanent base building revenue limit authority to districts across the state.

Additionally, a result of my broad, constitutional veto authority, I was able to line-item veto the budget to ensure school districts will have continued additive per pupil revenue adjustments of \$325 every year.

This measure is providing predictable, long-term revenue limit spending authority increases for generations to come — or for the next 400 years or so.

We also secured another \$97 million to achieve a special education reimbursement rate of 33.3% each year, which is the highest reimbursement rate our state has seen in over 20 years; \$30 million to continue funding for school-based mental health services modeled on our “Get Kids Ahead”

continued on next page

GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS CONTINUED

initiative; nearly \$6 million to increase the reimbursement rate for high-cost transportation aid to provide better access to school transportation to students in rural and isolated areas; \$50 million for efforts to improve reading and literacy outcomes; and \$3 million for bilingual-bicultural aid, ensuring that English language learners are properly supported and receive an education that addresses their specific language needs.

I am proud of the investments we've been able to secure for our kids and schools.

And none of what we have been able to do these last five years would have been possible without committed partners like all of you.

Now, I say all of that knowing — just as you do — that our work is far from over.

There's more we can and must do to do what's best for our kids, our schools, and all of you.

This budget is still not enough and fell woefully short of the more than \$2.6 billion education budget I proposed.

From special education reimbursement to school nutrition to

addressing the challenges we are seeing in our educator workforce and pipeline — we've got a lot of work left to do.

The work you do matters, and I will always strive to do all that I can as your governor to make sure you have the tools, resources, support, and respect needed to that important work.

So, with that, thank you, take care, and I wish you all the best for the rest of the school year.

I hope to visit many of you in your classrooms in 2024. ■

2024 DELEGATE ASSEMBLY

School board members voted on resolutions to help guide the WASB's legislative agenda



The WASB Policy and Resolutions Committee presented 11 resolutions to members for consideration during the Delegate Assembly on Jan. 17.

Resolutions on stipends for cooperating teachers and changes to existing policies on special education and licensure drew the most discussion. The delegates approved each of the 11 resolutions placed before them.

A delegate concerned about how stipends for cooperating teachers would be funded introduced an amendment that would insert the words “funded by the state” to the resolution. The amendment also eliminated the words “Wisconsin DPI designated” from the resolution because of concerns that it would be too restrictive. The resolution passed as amended.

A resolution to update the special education policy by removing references to mainstreaming — the prac-



tice of placing students with special needs in a general education classroom — drew discussion. Additionally, an amendment to define in more detail the way special education services are to be delivered was introduced.

The delegate who offered the amendment wanted to clarify that supplemental services for special education should be brought into the regular education classroom and that all students had access to supplementary aids, services and specially designed instruction based upon the child's unique learning needs. The amendment also included language specifying that individualized instruction should be brought into the regular education classroom and delivered by the special education teacher and/or paraeducator.

Delegates opposed to the amendment said it unnecessarily complicated the resolution. The amendment was brought to a vote but failed and the resolution was adopted as presented.

Another resolution aimed to improve seclusion and restraint by supporting continued best practice resources, training, and funding to support school districts. Each resolution has a rationale, and in this case the basis for the proposed resolution was that seclusion and restraint were widespread practices in schools statewide. Some advocates cite statistics that they are disproportionately used on students with disabilities and students of color.

Some delegates were concerned that the proposed resolution did not reflect the harmful effect on students of seclusion and restraint and the intent to help districts reduce the

practices. An amendment to include language specifying WASB support for reducing the harmful practices was presented. Some delegates questioned the need to specify student groups, while others supported the amendment, pointing to statistics that indicated a proportionally high percentage of students with special needs to be students of color. The amendment was put to a vote and failed.

There were multiple amendments presented for a resolution repealing sections of the current WASB resolution on licensure and replacing them with updated language.

An amendment was presented to delete a section of the resolution on charter school teachers, which supports allowing them to teach additional subjects they are not licensed in under the supervision of another teacher certified in that area.

The rationale was that allowing charter school teachers to teach subjects they are not licensed in would dilute their ability to teach that subject. Other delegates defended the section, noting that charter schools were often small and did not have enough staff licensed in all subject areas. This section gave the schools flexibility to operate.

The amendment was put to a vote and failed.

A delegate proposed an amendment to restore the original language of a section on staff dismissal. Opponents of the amendment noted the language proposed to be removed by WASB staff is outdated and existed before Act 10 and that districts currently have the authority to dismiss staff.

The amendment was put to a vote and failed. The original resolu-

tion, without amendments, was approved as presented.

Delegates also discussed two resolutions proposed by school boards that had not been accepted for presentation by the Policy and Resolutions Committee.

A delegate from the New London School Board asked delegates to consider its resolution proposing that the WASB support a current legislative proposal that would prevent transgender (biologically male) pupils from participating in female sports.

Delegates supporting reconsideration of the resolution said that the issue was a timely one and should be considered. Those who opposed reconsideration said the issue was one that had not been discussed by their school boards, so they did not feel prepared to vote on it.

The motion to bring the resolution to the floor was put to a vote and failed.

A delegate from the Milwaukee Public School Board asked the assembly to reconsider their district's resolution submitted after the September 15 deadline that would require school districts to give English language learner students an early literacy test in their home language instead of English. The rationale was that ELL students given early literacy tests in English rather than their home language are at risk of being labeled "at risk" when they might not be.

Supporters of the proposal to reconsider said that the issue was statewide, and a discussion would be beneficial for other districts. Opponents said that their boards had not discussed the resolution, so they did not feel qualified to vote on it.

The proposal to reconsider was put to a vote but failed.

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

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

FINDING, RETAINING STAFF SEEN AS KEY FOR DISTRICTS

Presenters shared strategies for recruiting teachers from within the community and improving school culture during State Education Convention breakout sessions.

School districts are increasingly looking within to help recruit teachers, and that is particularly the case for rural schools. Meanwhile, measuring and improving school climate is seen as an essential tool to help districts reduce staff turnover.

Rural schools recruit from within

The “Grow Your Own: Strengthening the Teaching Pipeline in Wisconsin’s Schools” breakout session focused on rising interest in grow your own programs, including both national and local models.

“There’s lots of research that suggests candidates for teaching positions and other positions in rural schools are more likely to come from other rural communities and they’re more likely to stay once they take a job in a rural school,” said Bradley Carl, research scientist and co-director of the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative.

Carl’s analysis of grow your own programs in Wisconsin rural schools found that staffing solutions are not

new for rural districts.

“[Rural districts] have been dealing with this for a long time,” Carl said. “Rural districts are well equipped at not waiting around for solutions. They’ve been developing solutions on their own.”

A national model highlighted in

this session was Educators Rising, a community-based model in which chapters at high schools feed teacher preparation programs at institutes of higher education. The organization hopes to provide a clear pathway to address teacher shortages.

The program offers students a curriculum structured to prepare them for their future profession, including conferences and workshops, leadership opportunities, networking and more.

According to Carl, Educators Rising provides districts with a locally grown base of talent that is interested in a career in education.

Another model the session focused on was the GROW Consortium, a locally developed cooperative of four school districts investing in pre-service educators: Cambridge, Lodi, Sauk Prairie and Wisconsin Heights.

The GROW Consortium started as a grant-funded program after receiving a Wisconsin



Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative research scientist and co-director Bradley Carl

GROW YOUR OWN: STRENGTHENING THE TEACHING PIPELINE IN WISCONSIN'S RURAL SCHOOLS

WISCONSIN STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION 2024

- Bradley Carl, Wisconsin Center for Education Research (UW-Madison)
- Leah Luke, Wisconsin Educators Rising State Coordinator and Madison School District (retired)
- Liz Dostal, Wisconsin Heights School District
- Jeff Eide, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance

Innovation Grant through the Department of Workforce Development. To ensure the sustainability of the program, each of the four districts contributes approximately \$24,000 a year into a savings account to continue funding the program after the grant funds expire.

The consortium "... awards scholarships to pre-service teachers throughout their college degree journey," said Wisconsin Heights Middle and High School Principal Liz Dostal. "We have different levels of scholarships, depending on where students are in their undergraduate work. Then it culminates with a \$10,000 scholarship the year they student teach."

The \$10,000 scholarship is contingent on them applying and accepting an offer from one of the four GROW districts.

Modeled after the Wisconsin youth apprenticeship program, GROW allows high school students



Liz Dostal,
Wisconsin Heights School District

to earn college credits while experiencing the backside of education.

"One of the things that a lot of people don't realize is that there is a backside to education," Dostal said. "There are a lot of decisions made behind the scenes. All of us experience the front side, we experience direct instruction from teachers in the classroom, but not everyone sees what goes on in the classroom when kids aren't there."

This early exposure to the backside of education helps students decide if this is a career they want to pursue.

"Your school district is one of the biggest businesses in your area," Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance Executive Director Jeff Eide said. "What are we doing for ourselves? We have to look at that. When we talk about grow your own or Educators Rising, we're training our people to be in school districts."

Improving your school climate

Pay raises of the magnitude necessary to reduce turnover aren't financially feasible for most school districts. So, that leads to the question, "... what else can you do?"

That question, posed by School Perceptions Research Director Rob DeMeuse, was one of high interest at the convention. School Perceptions presented with the School District of Kettle Moraine on how to improve your school climate, focusing on staff check-in surveys.

School Perceptions is an independent, Wisconsin-based education

research firm that has conducted over 10,000 staff, student and parent surveys for school improvement. While School Perceptions offers new employee, employee exit and customized surveys, their fastest growing area is the staff check-in survey.

During their session, they stressed that turnover can be reduced if your staff's engagement improves.

"Engaged employees are far more committed, have better job satisfaction and are more willing to go the extra mile for their employer," said School Perceptions Project Manager Daren Sievers.

Having engaged employees creates positive cyclical events. Satisfied employees will recruit and act as ambassadors on behalf of the employer.

"As engagement improves, satisfaction also surges," DeMeuse said.

"Satisfied employees are more committed and less likely to leave."

By surveying your staff, you can identify potential engagement problems.

"You can't solve the problem unless you know what it is," DeMeuse said.

The areas highlighted that can improve engagement without necessarily increasing pay include:

1. Job characteristics

- a. Do staff have clear tasks that also allow them to be challenged?
- b. Do they have a variety of work?
- c. Do they have discretion and autonomy?
- d. Do they have opportunities for advancement and professional development?

e. Bear in mind that engagement is not uniformly positive and being too engaged leads to burnout.

2. Rewards and recognition

- a. Is feedback contingent on goals that have already been set? Are the metrics of evaluation clear to all parties?
- b. Is feedback personal and immediate?

3. Organizational and supervisor leadership and support

- a. Can employees fail and not be punished for that failure?
- b. Are interpersonal relationships predictable and consistent?
- c. Communication doesn't need to focus solely on feedback. Communicating about how



**HOW
EDUCATION EXCELLENCE
LOOKS**

At CG Schmidt, we don't just build buildings. Our projects create spaces where tomorrow's leaders are educated, laying the foundation for the next generation. We foster partnerships between schools and their local communities to improve learning facilities, support future leaders and build a better tomorrow, together.



CGSCHMIDT.COM

you're doing as an organization creates a sense of community, but the burden is on leadership's shoulders to do that.

4. Justice

- a.** Distributive justice: Is the distribution of rewards predictable and consistent?
- b.** Interactional justice: Are interpersonal interactions regular, positive and consistent?
- c.** Informational justice: Why are procedures the way that they are?

While sharing his own experience with staff surveys, Kettle Moraine School District Superintendent Stephen Plum said, "The key factor of improvement is just self-awareness. I'm pretty sure that is the

largest block that we humans have moving forward."

Plum emphasized it's not just self-awareness of facts that can be a block, but also self-awareness of feelings that people are generating. He stressed the importance of surveying your staff to help get to the bottom of some of these feelings.

"If we have a staff that says we're not paid comparatively to another district, that may or may not be true, it's really a self-awareness of the feelings."

Plum stressed not being afraid to present the data. "Data is just data. And if we can get into a mindset of more of a judgment-free zone, I think we're going to be better off."

The surveys are real information that school districts can communicate and use as a source of discus-

sion to move forward.

"What I would emphasize is don't be scared," Sievers said. "The goodwill that comes from just asking the question and having the courage to put the survey in front of your employees... is so critical."

It's recommended districts survey staff about once a year, at the same time of year. It will take time to make progress.

"Just show your staff you care how they feel, you're willing to listen and you're going to report back what you found, whether it's good, bad or otherwise," Sievers said. "That sends a nice message, and it lifts their spirit because they finally have a voice back to administration and school boards." ■

Sierra Linton is the WASB's communications and marketing specialist.

**INSURANCE
MADE SIMPLE**



DELTA DENTAL® DeltaVision®

Delta Dental of Wisconsin | deltadentalwi.com

How do we make managing your employee benefits easy? By providing a dedicated account manager, offering combined administration, and helping keep rates stable. Plus, we're known for our responsive service and large provider networks. Who partners with you to make your employees happy? **#DefinitelyDeltaDental**



LEARNING TO LIVE WITH EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Two State Education Convention breakout sessions explored “hot” topics in technology – ransomware and artificial intelligence.

Understanding emerging technology is crucial for school leaders, whether that technology is dangerous or beneficial. Cyber attacks, including holding district data for ransom, area clearly in the former category. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence is changing how we work.

Exploring artificial intelligence's role in education

“It’s so critical that we teach our students about what it is and how to use it appropriately and ethically,” said Danielle Bosanec, chief academic officer for teaching and

learning at the Pewaukee School District. She co-presented at the session, “Empowering with AI: Enhancing Teaching and Learning.”

Bosanec was joined by Kellie Sanders, chief academic officer at the New Berlin School District, and Kelli Kwiatkowski, New Berlin’s director of secondary teaching and learning. The two districts are working together to become a regional hub for AI at the state and national levels. The presenters discussed AI in general and recommended specific AI tools of interest to educators.

The emergence of AI was abrupt

and unexpected, Bosanec said. She remembers being at a conference in June of 2022 where experts confidently predicted that AI would not be a useful tool for several more years. Everything changed months later when OpenAI released ChatGPT. In just five days after its release, the chatbot had 1 million users.

“It came at us in a quick flurry, and we have to respond to it,” Bosanec said, noting that there was a spectrum of comfort level among educators about AI. Some were wary of the technology and concerned about its risks while others were

“You can ban it but [students] are still going to use it. The alternative to trying to fight that battle would be how can you lean into AI tools and help students learn to use them ethically.”

— Danielle Bosanec, Pewaukee School District



more accepting and willing to explore its possibilities as a classroom tool.

She distinguished between two types of AI — human-trained and deep learning. In the first, the technology uses strictly data input by humans while in deep learning, the technology takes all of the data and develops its own networks.

As they prepare to use AI, districts need to look at integrating it into ethics guidelines for students and staff. They also need to be conscious of data privacy and terms of use — some platforms require users to be at least 13 years old. Another consideration is cost — districts need to determine how much they want to spend on AI and identify the most appropriate platform for their use.

In Pewaukee, AI was approved for use this school year by staff but not by students because there were still so many unknowns.

Because AI will continue to evolve, districts need to equip students with the technical skills to be able to adapt to future technologies. If they don't already, districts should consider offering classes on data science and computer science, Bosanec said.

Another consideration is plagiarism. Because AI tools can be used to generate text, it is important to update definitions of plagiarism to include the use of AI, set up very specific rubrics for generating text, and emphasize to students the importance of citations.

The presenters briefly discussed six AI tools of potential use to educators.

- **NaturalReader:** The tool translates any piece of uploaded text into a variety of languages and

can read back the results. It can be used with English language learner students or non-readers.

- **ChatGPT:** The best-known AI tool. It can generate text and respond to questions, compose music, write poetry and song lyrics and translate and summarize text.
- **Gamma:** The tool generates presentations on a given topic.
- **Diffit:** The tool takes uploaded text and summarizes it at a specified grade level. It can also generate reading passages, diagrams, key vocabulary words and multiple choice questions on a specific topic. It can be used for advanced students as well as students with IEPs.
- **Canva Magic Studio:** The tool is a design generator that produces templates, logos and presentations based on a brief description. It can be used to produce flyers or posters for events.
- **Brisk Teaching:** This Google extension can take an uploaded document from an outside source and change the reading level, translate it into a different language and can create lesson plans, IEP goals, rubrics, quizzes and other resources. It can also give feedback on a document based on a specific rubric.

Despite the risks of AI, Bosanec strongly urged districts not to ban its use.

“You can ban it but (students) are still going to use it,” she said. “The alternative to trying to fight that battle would be how can you lean into AI tools and help students learn to use them ethically.”

■ Surviving a cyberattack

Ransomware, or the practice of shutting down an entire computer system and demanding users to pay money to regain access, represents the dark side of emerging technology and is a growing risk for school districts everywhere, according to Edward Snow, director of network services for the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board. Snow was one of several panelists at a session on “Everything You Never Wanted to Know About Ransomware.”

According to Snow, FBI statistics show that there is one incident of ransomware in a K-12 school district every day. Microsoft reports that K-12 school districts were the number one target for ransomware perpetrators in 2023. In addition, 10% of all Wisconsin districts have reported an incident in the past three years.

“Once every 10 years, it's your turn,” Snow said. “It's coming.”

Snow is a member of the Wisconsin Cyber Response Team, a service free to all school districts that offers training and resources to help prevent attacks as well as assistance when one occurs.

Schools are a target of attacks because they are perceived as extremely vulnerable — they are underfunded and usually have limited technology staff. They are valuable to attackers because of the data they hold, especially student and staff demographic data that can be used for identity theft.

Information on students can be used to open credit cards when they turn 18. The cards can be used fraudulently, and students are not likely to check their credit history until it's too late and undoing the

damage of identity theft can take years.

Robert Smiley, chief information officer for the Janesville School District, vividly described a ransomware attack on the district in 2021. The attackers were unskilled and instead of shutting down the district network, they destroyed it. Smiley learned of the attack on a Sunday morning when a vendor trying to do a weekly system update could not get into the system.

The district did not lose all of its data — payroll information had been backed up — but the outage took weeks to fix and affected everything from busing to food service to opening school doors. Smiley called the Cyber Response Team and members started working on the attack the day it was discovered.

Tim Greve, chief information security officer for the DPI, explained that the team was made up almost entirely of volunteers and was funded by grants from the Department of Homeland Security. There is no cost to districts for its services.

With the risks to students and staff so high, districts should begin preparing for a ransomware attack by reviewing possible scenarios and how to respond and by collaborating with outside vendors. The Cyber Response Team and other agencies can also audit a district's security systems.

Mike Bianco, vice president of information security for Skyward, a student information system used by many Wisconsin school districts, said vendors can suggest additional security features that districts can use to further protect information.



*Mike Bianco,
vice president of
information security
for Skyward*

Districts should consider using multi-factor authentication on their systems, just as individuals do with their bank accounts.

Skyward also includes cloud storage as part of its system. Districts should consider using multi-factor authentication on their systems, just as individuals do with their bank accounts.

If an incident occurs, Greve said districts should call the team first, then the holders of their cyber insurance policy. He noted that cyber insurance is not “cyber security.” Insurance companies will not care if a system is secure as long as it is functional.

Another technological risk to districts are “phishing” schemes when attackers get access to internal information and accounts and are able to withdraw money for their own uses. Bianco noted that Skyward responds to many of these incidents and they often occur when an employee — perhaps in the business office of a district — receives an email and clicks on a link that gives the attacker access to his or her account.

From there, attackers can gain access to systems and accounts and are eventually able to manipulate financial records. Bianco again recommended districts talk to their vendors to see if there are other security features they can install to protect their accounts. Training staff is also key.

Another possible attack is what's called a “distributed denial-of-service” attack, when multiple computers try to access a system at the same time, eventually shutting the system down. In some cases, students have purchased such an attack on the “dark web” for a small amount and shut down their district's system as standardized tests were being administered.

Because some sort of attack is inevitable, the best thing districts can do is to seek out resources and be prepared, Snow said.

“This is not an IT issue, it's a community issue,” he said. “It's an epidemic in our state. It's an epidemic in our country and it can happen to anybody, any district in the state of Wisconsin.” ■

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

CONFRONTING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS: DISTRICTS COLLABORATE ON SOLUTIONS

The vitally important issue of mental health in schools was covered in several State Education Convention breakout sessions, including trauma, the role of student voice and programming.

Student mental health challenges reached crisis levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to a myriad of factors, including social isolation.

Although schools have long since returned to operating in a pre-pandemic manner, districts continue to search for ways to address issues centered on mental health.

“This new normal wasn’t normal,” St. Francis School District Superintendent Deborah Kerr said. “Students were suffering, teachers were suffering, all because of inadequate support during the pandemic.”

Overcoming trauma

The session “Don’t Let Students Face Trauma Alone” delved into the key strategies educators can implement to create settings that help students experience a sense of belonging, self-awareness and resilience.

“We’ve all faced trauma in our lives at some point, whether (through) death, changing family situations, poverty, racism, food insecurity, marginalization,” Kerr said.

Trauma can cause students to disengage and turn silent and often leads to depression.

As part of its strategy to address the effects of trauma on student mental health, the St. Francis School District turned to an outside entity, Stryv365, a Milwaukee-based non-profit organization that creates

customized non-clinical trauma-informed programming.

“What we are doing is to help young people be more resilient and doing it in a way that is more sustainable and practical and not overly scientific,” Stryv365 Vice President and General Counsel Cody Hallowell said. “Stryv365 was created to amplify what schools and community-based organizations do by layering in this support.”

Stryv365’s programs work to build resiliency skills through teaching responsible decision-making, self-management, self-awareness and relationship skills that are critical for children and adults.

“Whether you’re the son or daughter of a billionaire or whether you are finding yourself homeless and moving from place to place every month, you are going to face adversity,” Hallowell said. “We’re trying to get young people to be proactive in being in touch with their emotions and to understand what a healthy relationship is. But it has to be fun and engaging. It can’t be PowerPoints and lectures.”

Kerr noted that about half of the student population in the St. Francis School District are young people of color and half are economically disadvantaged.

She described the decision to engage with Stryv365 as “intentional,” in part because of the makeup of its staff.



St. Francis School District Superintendent Deborah Kerr

“The Stryv365 staff looks like my diverse kids, and that was really important because my staff doesn’t necessarily represent that 50% diversity,” Kerr said.

Among the strategies that have been implanted in the district is a “gentle” start to each school year.

“Teachers spend the first three days getting to know the kids better, creating these deeper relationships with them before they start all the academic stuff,” Kerr said.

The Brown Deer School District also partnered with Stryv365, in addition to employing three social and emotional learning coaches.

“We have seen a true success with our students, especially coming back from the pandemic,” said Brown Deer Superintendent Monica Kelsey-Brown, who will become superintendent for the Waunakee Community School District in July.

The staff at Stryv365 has shown an innate ability to connect with students, she said.

“When you talk to our students



*Brown Deer Superintendent
Monica Kelsey-Brown*

about their experiences with Stryv365, we hear them talk about self-control and discipline,” Kelsey-Brown said. “What we are instilling in our children is transferable. When they leave or graduate from our school district, we know that they will be able to take those strategies with them so they can be successful.”

The focus on student mental health is multifaceted and extends beyond formalized strategies, she stressed.

Many of the 145 teachers in the Brown Deer School District communicate with students after regular school hours during the week and on weekends, Kelsey-Brown noted.

“It’s not anything contractual or that we ask them to do. We just have teachers like that, who go above and beyond for our children,” she said.

Mental health initiatives also need to focus on teachers, Kelsey-Brown added.

“It’s also important for us to think about their mental health as well,” Kelsey-Brown said. “Some in the public will say that’s what (the teachers) signed up for. I will push back and say that’s not what they signed up for. We also have to make sure that our teachers are in a great space from a SEL (social and emotional learning) perspective.”

Strong connections with adults are of the utmost importance to the well-being of students, Kelsey-Brown said.

“One of the dreams I’ve had here in Brown Deer is making sure that every one of our students is connected to at least one adult in our school

system,” she said. “Stryv365 is part of that, and so are our SEL coaches, teachers and athletic coaches.”

■ Data-driven mental health

The Gibraltar School District in Door County has 540 students. The session “How Can We Help With Student and Staff Mental Health” explored how the district and CESA 7 worked together to implement data-driven programming to support mental health programs and services, including the creation of a mental health team.

The top issues identified by the team are social, emotional and mental health services for students and preparing students for life after high school.

“Part of that preparation was not just for the jobs that students will have or the universities or tech schools that they’ll go to, but also the mental health portion, their own self-care when they leave our schools,” Gibraltar School District Superintendent Brett Stousland said.

Deciding which stakeholders to include on the mental health team is critical, said special education teacher and health team member Anna Knapp.

“One of the things you need to consider is who you bring around the table to talk about these issues,” Knapp said. “Our mental health team has its own vision statement. It’s the idea that everyone is seen, heard and connected, as well as supported.”

The Gibraltar School District began to focus on mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued the push ever since.

“For a year, I came in during quarterly staff meetings and talked about strategic things you could do in the classroom and on the bus or in the lunchroom,” said Marci Waldron-Kuhn, pupil services specialist at CESA 7, which supports school districts in preparing students for college, career and life through an array of services.

Then came the formation of the mental health team, whose members take an active role in the well-being of students in the district.

“Each one of us from the mental health team goes into the classroom to participate with the students just to see how it feels and how the teacher is feeling,” Knapp said. “It’s not a judgement about the teacher, but we’re collecting information about how we can better support this staff member to make sure that they are comfortable.”

Student voices are leveraged through focus groups and surveys during advisory periods.

As the mental health team examined baseline data and priority areas, it took steps such as establishing areas in school buildings where students could regulate their behavior.

“Every elementary school classroom has a chill zone, where kids are taught how to use the tools that are available,” Knapp said. “We also have a room that our secondary kids can use, and we put together a great teacher work room.”

■ The role of student voice

In the Stevens Point Area Public School District, students have taken an active role in the effort to create a learning environment where all individuals feel valued, honored and included.

In the session “Amplifying Student Voice: Creating Belonging in the Classroom,” students shared their experiences and strategies.

“We got our students involved so that they could have a panel experience where they could talk about the connections and celebrations they were having related to inclusion,” said Gigi Stahl, equity, diversity and inclusion program specialist for the district.

In an innovative initiative, Stahl worked alongside Sam Dinga, the district’s director of equity, diversity and inclusion, and invited all of the district’s teachers in seventh through 12th grades to an auditorium.

Students facilitated the panel

discussion and selected which teachers they wanted in the front row during the presentation so that they could be recognized for the positive influence they have had on students in developing and fostering a learning environment that is free of discrimination, biases and other roadblocks that hinder learning.

“Imagine being one of the teachers who is being talked about that has made a huge impact on a student’s experience,” Stahl said. “It’s really powerful.”

A panel of students took part in the session at the convention, where they shared a variety of positive experiences with teachers and staff in the district, including how they provided support in a time of need.

Kimora Zaragoza-Reyes told session attendees that during her freshman year at Stevens Point Area

Senior High she dealt with considerable racism.

“I had to meet with our principal quite a bit and he made me feel really safe,” she said. “I’ve always dealt with racism, but I never felt like I had a person that I could always go to. He introduced me to Gigi and Dr. Dinga. Getting to work with them brought me so much more confidence in myself.”

Vanessa Guizar Meneces, currently a freshman at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, attended Stevens Point Area Senior High after moving to the area from Arizona before her sophomore year.

“It was a very big change. It was definitely a huge cultural difference, which was hard to adjust to and I struggled academically,” she said.

When a teacher recognized that Guizar Meneces was struggling, he

connected her with an honor student.

“I got tutoring and started doing better and he saw the progress and effort I made,” she said. “That definitely has helped motivate me. I know that even when things get hard, all I have to do is keep trying because I know I’m going to get there.”

Jose Saldana, a freshman at Ben Franklin Junior High School in Stevens Point, said he finds it empowering when teachers and students forge a relationship based on mutual respect.

“When teachers have the attitude with students that if they get respect from you, they will reciprocate, I feel this gives a sense of unity and understanding between the teacher and student,” he said. ■

Rich Rovito is a contributing writer.

PROTECTING SCHOOLS SINCE 1974

Your Wisconsin classrooms deserve the security of solid coverage and local expertise. You can *Count on EMC®* to provide the resources you need to keep your schools safe.

Make the smart choice—choose EMC.



Milwaukee Branch
855-495-1800
milwaukee@emcins.com
www.emcins.com



©Copyright Employers Mutual Casualty Company 2023. All rights reserved.



TITLE IX: WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT'S NEXT

In August 2020, significant changes went into effect regarding Title IX, a federal civil rights law first enacted in 1972. The new rules govern a school district's response to reports or complaints of sexual harassment occurring in its education programs and activities.

A few years later, most schools have at least a few Title IX investigations under their belts. Several Wisconsin school districts have also been the subject of a Title IX investigation by the Office for Civil Rights, a sub-agency of the U.S. Department of Education that enforces Title IX and other federal non-discrimination laws.

In this Q&A, we'll discuss lessons learned from these investigations and proactive steps your school district can take to comply with Title IX.

1. What steps must a school district take if it receives a report of alleged sexual harassment, but a formal complaint has not been filed?

A school district receives a report of sexual harassment when any school employee, Title IX coordinator or school official with the authority to institute corrective measures is made aware of allegations of sexual harassment.

For example: Student A tells a teacher that Student B photoshopped her head on a picture of a topless woman and texted it to other students. As a result, other students have been making lewd comments to her at school, making her uncomfortable. If a school district receives a

report of sexual harassment, the Title IX coordinator must promptly contact the alleged victim to explain the process for filing a formal complaint and discuss the availability of supportive measures, regardless of whether they decide to file a complaint.

A report of sexual harassment alone does not trigger the Title IX grievance process. A formal complaint triggers the grievance process. When a school district asks for advice regarding a Title IX complaint, our first question is usually whether a formal complaint has been filed.

2. What can school officials expect in an Office for Civil Rights investigatory interview?

Suppose the civil rights office is interviewing a building administrator who received and investigated a report of student-on-student sexual harassment. In addition to factual questions about the incident(s) and the school's response, the investigator will likely ask the administrator to describe what type of conduct is prohibited by Title IX. The investigator will also likely ask whether the administrator contacted the Title IX coordinator in this instance, and if not, why not? The investigator may also ask whether the administrator has ever referred something to the Title IX coordinator, and if yes, to describe the circumstances.

Failure to involve the Title IX coordinator has been the number

one issue flagged by the civil rights office in investigatory interviews we've participated in this year. Remember, the Title IX regulations require the Title IX coordinator to take certain steps in response to a report or complaint of sexual harassment. The Title IX coordinator can't take those steps if they aren't made aware of the allegations.

3. What Title IX training should all school employees receive?

Title IX requires specific training for Title IX coordinators, investigators, decision-makers, and facilitators of informal resolution. Additionally, we recommend that all school employees receive training on the definition of sexual harassment under Title IX and the obligation to report allegations of sexual harassment to the Title IX coordinator.

4. Will the Biden administration change the current Title IX regulations?

The Biden administration has issued notices of proposed changes to the current Title IX regulations. The proposed changes broaden the regulations to also address sex discrimination based on gender identity. The U.S. Department of Education initially reported that the final rules would be issued in May 2023, which has been postponed until March 2024. Stay tuned! ■

Alana Leffler and Emily Turzinski are attorneys at Buelow Vetter Buikema Olson & Vliet.

OUTLAST THE STORM: KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE IN SEVERE WEATHER

Is your school or district ready for a tornado?

It's unlikely but potentially devastating to have a tornado hit your school district. However, with disasters you get one chance to be as prepared as possible. In Wisconsin, the school year and day crosses paths with portions of our most active tornado periods.

Wisconsin has a history of tornadoes hitting schools, but recent ones have hit on the weekends or a few days after the last day of school. Unfortunately, some schools in northern Illinois haven't fared as well, with two significant tornadoes taking lives.

On Aug. 28, 1990, Plainfield, Ill., was hit by an unexpected F5 (the most powerful type) tornado on the day before school was set to start. Tornado wind speed is measured by the Enhanced Fujita Scale, ranking from F0 to F5.

The tornado hit multiple schools and the district office in the city, resulting in the loss of life of a science teacher, two maintenance staff, a custodian's wife, a music teacher and a principal.

On April 21, 1967, just south of the border in Belvidere, Ill., an F4 tornado struck just as the high school was dismissing and while school buses were loading up. Thirteen of the 24 fatalities that occurred that day occurred at the high school.

More recently, the last violent tornado vs. school situation was with the powerful Moore, Okla., tornado that hit the Plaza Towers Elementary School, causing seven fatalities. All

were third graders.

Much like with canceling school for an impending winter storm to keep students and staff safe, action should be taken ahead of time to ensure that students and staff are sheltering in safe places that are easily accessible. This is the time of year that hazardous weather plans should be scrutinized and updated to handle all the situations that a tornado can bring.

When identifying sheltering locations at schools, every available space in the school needs to be assessed independently. Layouts and structural integrity will vary from one school to another, so it's important to create your own plan and not just copy from another school. The Texas State School Safety Center put together some general guidelines to use when considering tornado shelter locations:

- Generally, the most dangerous locations are large rooms with expansive roofs such as cafeterias, gymnasiums, libraries and auditoriums.

This school bus was destroyed by an F4 tornado in Belvidere, Ill. The tornado killed 13 people at the high school out of 24 total deaths.



- Avoid rooms with large exterior windows as they may shatter and/or turn almost any object into a dangerous projectile.
- Avoid the highest level of a building.
- When using hallways, the sheltering locations must be at least 30 feet from exterior doors and windows.
- Suggested school tornado sheltering areas include small interior rooms (with short roof spans), bathrooms, interior hallways away from exterior doors and that have interior load-bearing walls.

Some other tornado sheltering considerations include:

- How long does it take everyone to get to the shelter?
- How many can fit in the room, and do you have enough capacity (count ceiling tiles as an estimate)?
- Who oversees monitoring the weather for after-school activities?
- When are you all clear during a tornado warning?

The average lead time from a tornado warning to a tornado hitting a location is about five to 10 minutes. Please, set aside some time this spring to scrutinize your plans before we get into peak severe weather season. ■

Tim Halbach is the warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service Milwaukee/Sullivan office.

HOT TOPICS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education is complex, but navigating the educational and legal expectations for students with disabilities doesn't have to be overwhelming. School board members are regularly asked to make decisions about funding programs, hiring staff and student discipline.

Understanding a handful of hot topics in special education will help education leaders support their students and staff.

During the 2022-23 school year Wisconsin school districts served 822,804 students, of whom 14.9% were students with a disability and who needed specially designed instruction provided through an Individualized Education Plan. All children, including those with disabilities, are entitled to a free and appropriate public education.

Special education law has additional requirements. Ideally, education for students with individualized education plans happens within the context of a multi-tiered system of support that includes general instruction and intra/interpersonal learning for all students and intervention and intensification needed for some students.

Since the pandemic, special education due process complaints have increased across the country.

■ The role of student services directors

The role and responsibilities of student services directors varies greatly across the state depending on the size of the district, available resources and skill sets of colleagues. All student services directors need expertise in special education laws, regulations and effective use of funds and educational programming.

They work in partnership with

superintendents, curriculum leaders, business officers, principals and families to ensure that student needs are met and that district resources are used in an effective and legally compliant manner.

■ Staffing challenges

In addition to planning how to fund student services, related services and special educator positions, directors are directly engaged in making staffing decisions. They routinely review staff workloads using tools such as those available through the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services.

While there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach because the needs of students and the resources of districts vary, directors across the state use processes to evaluate workloads, make staffing recommendations and engage in creative approaches to retaining and recruiting staff.

Some proactive strategies include:

- Matching staff talent and abilities with student needs.
- Supporting new special educators through the DPI Special Educator Induction Program available through CESAs.
- Paying current staff members to add needed certifications and licensure in exchange for a commitment to serve the district for a period of time.
- Building relationships with teacher preparation programs to connect early with students interested in internships.
- Leveraging bridge pathways and CESA licensure programs to "grow your own" staff to fill needed positions.

Special education has a high

turnover rate because it is a hard job. Supportive boards and administrators can reduce turnover by ensuring staff have the coaching support to grow and the time to plan and do the necessary paperwork.

■ Behavior and discipline

Directors are often asked about addressing student behavior that is impacting other students, the staff or the school.

Students with IEPs have rights that other students don't have. Directors must think about district processes and what students need.

They think about behavior as communication and help staff teach skills to prevent problematic behaviors. Even when a school or district is doing well with these proactive strategies, some students will still "tear up the room" and board members may be asked "why are you letting them do that?" The primary consideration is keeping students safe.

When board members get calls, it's important to protect the privacy and integrity of the student, reinforce that there are systems in place and that public schools support a wide variety of students with a wide variety of needs.

Student services directors have deep knowledge and skills that help districts navigate a myriad of needs. They support compliance with state and federal special education laws, contribute to staffing and funding decisions, build partnerships with community organizations and collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of students, families and staff. ■

Gail Anderson is executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services. For more information or a copy of her presentation, contact her at executive.director@wcass.org.

BE THE BRIDGE: WHY COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL



“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

— George Bernard Shaw

As school leaders, how many times have you felt you’ve delivered a great message properly, only to find out after that people didn’t receive it, didn’t understand it, or ignored it?

We have a responsibility as school leaders to meet people where they are and use diverse communication channels to try and make our messages reach, and be understood by, as many people as possible. As the demographics of our schools are constantly evolving, so are the styles, languages and norms by which our stakeholders want to receive information.

Without realizing it, we all have our own communication tendencies and biases. In the rush of our busy lives, we often resort back to our comfort zones, but in doing so we’re missing out on reaching people who don’t communicate the same way we do.

Communication is never done. Schools are recognizing that a one-size-fits-all communication approach doesn’t work effectively and are continuing to devote more resources to engaging their communities. Membership in the Wisconsin

School Public Relations Association has risen above 300, up 20% in the last school year.

The good news is you don’t have to do this alone — harness the power of others to help tell your story. If you’re not a social media guru, find someone who is. Struggle with breaking down large, complicated concepts via the written word? Find a graphics guru who can help construct visuals to make things more comprehensible.

Many districts of all sizes are making the leap to have a designated school communicator on staff. I’m proof of this, now in my 10th year in Mineral Point, a K-12 district of 755 students. However, if that isn’t a realistic approach for your school at this time, get creative — use the talents of people you might already have on staff and don’t be afraid to reach out to others for advice.

Doing a baseline communication survey to see how your education partners wish to receive information is also a good idea. The results may surprise you. School resources are limited, so the last thing you want to do is put your time and effort into a communication mode that your stakeholders aren’t even interested in.

In these divided times, it can seem extra daunting to try to unite people around potentially polarizing topics. But that also means it’s that much more important. We can’t ignore this work just because it’s difficult. When you break it down, our educational

partners are our friends, neighbors, and relatives. It can be hard but vital to assume best intent, even when people come to us angry.

When our stakeholders understand the “why,” and feel as if their voices are heard, they tend to become believers in the mission, and even brand ambassadors, for our districts. This doesn’t mean that everyone “gets their way,” but rather they are able to understand the bigger picture and the reasons behind the decision.

Effective communication is not just a skill; it truly is a bridge that works to connect all aspects of our school systems. It requires constant attention and care, as there is always something new to learn.

I truly believe effective communication is the core of successful leadership — the truly great leaders, and school districts, are great in large part because they are outstanding communicators. I’m sure you have a few people, and schools, that come to mind that do this work really well.

Challenge yourself to improve at least one measure of your personal communication that, ultimately, will also improve your school district, too. I’m willing to go out on a limb and say you’ll never regret the time you spend connecting with others. ■

Joëlle Doye is communications director at the Mineral Point Unified School District and president of the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association.

PRAYERS BY COACHES AND GUNS ON T-SHIRTS

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution establishes a general right to free speech.

However, years of judicial decisions have limited the scope of this right for school district employees and students. The result is a complicated tapestry of legal tests depending on the situation.

At the same time, the “establishment clause” of the First Amendment prohibits school districts from establishing or advocating for a certain religion, and another clause establishes a general right for individuals to freely exercise their religion. These three

clauses of the First Amendment collided in a U.S. Supreme Court case when a high school football coach knelt in prayer at the 50-yard line following a game. The U.S. Supreme Court looked narrowly at the facts of the case, eliminated a decades-old legal test for assessing a potential violation of the establishment clause (the Lemon test), and ultimately ruled in favor of the football coach exercising his religion.

Where does that leave school districts today? Well, they are caught in somewhat uncharted legal territory. Courts have begun to more broadly recognize individual teachers’ right to exercise their religion, even in the presence of students. At the same time, courts continue to protect students from being coerced into

participating in a teacher’s personal religious expression.

Districts faced with teachers engaging in religious practices during the workday should focus on whether a teacher is actively performing work duties at the time they are engaged in the religious practice. At the same time, districts should be vigilant of potential student coercion. However, the mere presence of students is unlikely to constitute coercion. Furthermore, schools must not favor certain religious practices

Student free speech remains a complex area.

over those of another faith.

Student free speech remains a complex area. Recent case law states that districts cannot categorically ban the depiction of guns on student clothing at school. Instead, school officials must comply with the legal test established in the Tinker case by being able to reasonably forecast that a substantial disruption or a material interference in a school activity will occur if they don’t prohibit the clothing. School officials need to focus on the current environment in the district, including past incidents, in order to establish a sufficient basis to regulate the depiction of guns on clothing.

This may require restraint by school officials to fully assess the situation before disciplining a student for wearing clothing depicting a gun.

Additionally, in lieu of discipline, school officials can talk to the student about how wearing the clothing might affect other students, educating the student to consider making a different choice in the future. These “teachable moments” typically do not violate the First Amendment.

Social media use by students is another situation where school officials must exercise caution. A recent U.S. Supreme Court case held that school officials do not have an unlimited right to discipline students for off-campus social media activity. However, the U.S. Supreme Court specifically stated that

schools are able to regulate off-campus social media activity that constitutes threats, severe bullying, or harassment targeting particular teachers or students.

When investigating claims of threats, bullying or harassment, school officials might discover that the conduct took place both on and off campus. Officials are able to investigate the entirety of such conduct, even the portions that take place off-campus.

The First Amendment is a constantly evolving area of the law. School officials should continue to monitor future developments and contact legal counsel with specific questions. ■

Brian Goodman is an attorney at the law firm of Boardman & Clark, LLP and past president of the Wisconsin School Attorneys Association.

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

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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & RECOGNITION



School Board Honorees

Elizabeth Manion of the Waupaca School Board is congratulated by WASB 2024 President Mike Humke, right, and Executive Director Dan Rossmiller for serving for 20 years on her school board.

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

- Cheryl Baysinger, Westosha Central High
- Mark Cassellius, Onalaska
- Brian Derber, North Lakeland
- Dan DeYoung, Cambria-Friesland
- Daniel Dutschek, Necedah Area
- Kay Eggert, Appleton Area
- Darrell Fenske, Markesan
- Jason Figi, Black Hawk
- Bob Green, Middleton-Cross Plains Area
- Kenneth Harter, Oconto Falls
- Mary Heyer, Walworth J1
- Michael Horak, Necedah Area
- Brian Horn, Brillion
- James Knutson, Tri-County Area
- William Kuehn, Markesan
- Mike Kwaterski, Three Lakes
- Debbie Larson, Franklin
- Andy Lyke, Ripon Area
- Elizabeth Manion, Waupaca
- David Miller, Menominee Indian
- Dennis Pfingsten, Juda
- Patricia Qualman, Algoma
- William Tesmer, Colby
- Doug Waterman, Royall

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

David Amundson, Cashton | Christine Erickson, Grantsburg | Randy Erickson, Prentice
 Stephen Hock, North Fond du Lac | Daniel Kundert, Linn J4 | Herman Maier, Fennimore Community
 Darrell Pierson, Prentice | Roy Ruegsegger, Pecos Area | Sue Schultz, North Lake | Tim Sivertson, Elk Mound Area

The following board members were also recognized for serving at least **40 YEARS** on their local school boards:

Cliff Gerbers, Gillett | Keith Jacobson, North Cape

The following board member was also recognized for serving an incredible **50 YEARS** on his local school board:

Robert Langham, Birchwood



Humke Assumes WASB Presidency for 2024

Mike Humke of the Dodgeville School Board has been selected by the WASB Board of Directors as the president of the association for 2024.

The board also selected Andrew Maertz of the Reedsville School Board to be the 1st vice president and Sandie Anderson of the Wild Rose School Board to be the 2nd vice president.

All three will serve a one-year term.

2024 WASB Board of Directors

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

Front row, left to right — Linda Flottum, Turtle Lake (Region 1); Cherie Rhodes, Slinger (Region 15); Bob Green, Middleton-Cross Plains (Region 12); Rosanne Hahn, Burlington (Region 13); Barb Herzog, Oshkosh (Region 7); Sue Today, Sevastopol (Region 3)

Not pictured: Larry Cyrus, Cochrane-Fountain City (Region 6); Sandie Anderson, Wild Rose (Region 10); Xela Garcia, Milwaukee (Region 14)



Teachers of the Year

State Superintendent Jill Underly (right) honors teachers of the year (left to right) **Saghar Homayounpour**, New Berlin West High School, School District of New Berlin; **Claudia Heller de Messer**, Milwaukee Parkside School for the Arts, Milwaukee Public Schools; **Rachel Kumferman**, McKinley Elementary School, Wauwatosa School District; **Katelyn Simmerman**, Cedar Grove-Belgium Middle School, Cedar Grove-Belgium School District; and **Brian Collins**, Unity High School, Unity School District.



Principals of the Year

State Superintendent Jill Underly honors **Andrew Farley** (left) of Brookfield East High School in Elmbrook Schools, the 2023 Wisconsin Secondary Principal of the Year.

Underly joins attendees in recognizing **Jeffrey Taege** (right) of Butler Middle School in the School District of Waukesha, the 2023 Wisconsin Associate Principal of the Year.

Not pictured: Nikki Harcus, Westside Elementary School, Sun Prairie Area School District

Superintendent of the Year

Mark Hansen (center) of Elmbrook Schools is recognized as Superintendent of the Year by Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators Executive Director Jon Bales (right) and WASDA President John Thomsen.



School Business Managers of the Year

Three outstanding Wisconsin business officials were recognized for their contributions to their communities and districts by State Superintendent Jill Underly, Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials Executive Director Mike Barry and WASBO President Holly Burr.

Recognized were (second from right in each photo): **John Stellmacher** (above left) of the Kettle Moraine School District; **Tim Prunty** (above center), retired from the Antigo School District; and **Jeff Genovese** (above right) of the Yorkville JT #2 School District.



NEW HORIZONS for Education

SCENES FROM THE 2024 STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION

Thank you to photographer John O'Hara for all the photos featured in this issue (unless otherwise noted).

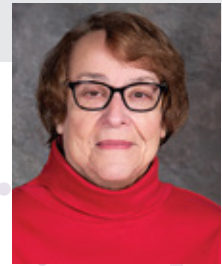


Photo Courtesy
Security Health Plan



Above: Visitors perused student art on the second floor of the Baird Center. Thanks to sponsor Performance Services and the Wisconsin Art Education Association for making the student art contest possible.

Left: The University of Wisconsin–Madison's plucky mascot, Buckingham Ulysses "Bucky" Badger, gets up to some shenanigans in the Exhibit Hall. Thanks to Security Health Plan for sponsoring the visit from Bucky and the other UW mascots who joined us at the convention.



Spreading the Good News in Public Education

2023 WASB President Rosanne Hahn reflects on what's working in Burlington

Editor's note: Below are Rosanne Hahn's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 18, 2024. The following is edited for space constraints.

I'd like to teach you, and we can learn together, an old, ancient word, and that word is "selah."

The word selah means pause and reflect. And, you know, sometimes we don't do enough of that. So as I speak with you today, we will use this word to pause and reflect.

Our job as board members is to work hard to see that all of our students are educated every day in a caring way. Because we really have a global economy, we encourage exchange programs with other countries. In our district, we have a group that goes to Denmark and stays with families there. And then the Danish students come to our city of Burlington, and they stay with families. It's wonderful.

It is the goal of our district to have our students college and career ready when they graduate. Challenging classes are offered, for instance, in our ACE Academy, where the kids who graduate can step right into a construction role. Construction companies in the Burlington area have paid for that to get us started.

And we also have something neat, called the PAC House. We know we must educate kids who are 18 to 21, so we work with the Waterford district to create a program where the kids go to learn how to take care of a house.

They learn how to cook, how to

answer the phone, how to do all sorts of things. And then they are found jobs in the community. One girl came up and said, "Guess what?" I said, "What?"

She said, "I get to clean the cages, because I'm good with animals."

She got a job part time doing that. So it's really a successful program.

You know, the WASB offers so many things for us, and we expect our teachers to take other courses to keep up with things. But do we? We are school board members, and we need to keep up with things, too. And we can do that by going to webinars, seminars, meetings, anything that the WASB can offer that we feel would help us. So I hope you will all do more of that. We must be lifelong learners, as I said.

I'd also like to share another neat idea: Our district invites a different school to dinner with the board before a monthly meeting. The administrator, some teachers, and sometimes some kids might be presenting there, and they might all

come. It's been very successful.

It's very casual. It's not a sit-down big meal. The guests are so happy and talkative. And then the school guests give a short presentation about their school. But each one of our seven school board members is in a different area with a different bunch of teachers. And you'd be surprised how they open up and tell it like it is.

And most of them say, you know, our school is just like a family. And they mean it. I hope some of you will try that.

And be creative about how you include parents and citizens. We are planning to have like about a quarterly meeting where citizens are going to be invited to come and just talk about things and hear things that are going on in the district. And then discussions will be welcome.

We have the gift of helping our students become great citizens, not just of our country and city but of our world. Enjoy your opportunities to keep educating and caring for every child every day. Thank you. ■

Save the Date



2025 Wisconsin State Education Convention

January 22-24, 2025
Baird Center, Milwaukee
#EdCon2025

Legislative Session Quickly Coming to a Close

4K mandate, reading screener delay and school safety funding among bills monitored by WASB



As of this writing, both houses of the state Legislature were expected to wrap up their work in February. As such, legislative activity hit a fever pitch as the session grew short.

PreK-12 legislation has been as hot a topic as any, generating a large number of legislative proposals. Committee hearings are also in high gear with numerous committees holding hearings on bills, often simultaneously.

The end of session is a hectic time, and veteran Capitol observers know that some of the bills that come at the end of session are not necessarily meant to become law, but rather stake out positions for lawmakers to use in their reelection platforms. Since time is short and things are rushed, the ability to review and provide feedback on proposals is often limited.

We have selected a few proposals to mention here but, as always, please refer to the WASB Legislative Update & State Bill Tracking Chart on our website (WASB.org) for a more comprehensive list, as well as the most up-to-date information on the status of these bills.

Community 4K mandate

These bills (Assembly Bill 1035/ Senate Bill 973) would require the community approach to four-year-old kindergarten (4K).

Under this bill, if a school provides 4K, the school board must offer 4K using a community approach to early education, as defined by DPI rule. The school board must contract with each family child care center, group child care center and head start agency (community-based provider) that holds a license issued by the Department of Children and Families; is in good standing with DCF; and notifies the school board of its intent to offer a four-year-old kindergarten program by no later than Feb. 1 of the preceding school year.

The bill also requires that the contract between a school board and a community-based provider include a minimum net per pupil amount that is not less than 95 percent of the per pupil revenue limit that applies to four-year-old kindergarten pupils in the school district in which the community-based provider is located. Under the bill, the contract must also include a quarterly payment schedule, allocate the responsibility to provide

transportation to the community-based provider, and allow the community-based provider to use any curriculum that meets the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards.

The bill further specifies that the contract between a school board and a community-based provider may not require a staff-to-child ratio that is less than what is required by DCF under the community-based provider's DCF license and may not require the administration of assessments that are not required under state or federal law.

Finally, the bill exempts teachers who teach four-year-old kindergarten at a community-based provider from the requirement to hold a license issued by DPI. Instead, under the bill, a teacher who teaches four-year-old kindergarten at a community-based provider must have 1) a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited institution of higher education or 2) an associate degree in early childhood education and be enrolled at, or intend to enroll at, an accredited institution of higher education for the purpose of obtaining a bachelor's degree and intend to obtain a bachelor's degree within four years.

The end of session is a hectic time, and veteran Capitol observers know that some of the bills that come at the end of session are not necessarily meant to become law, but rather stake out positions for lawmakers to use in their reelection platforms.

The WASB supports state funding and staff to maintain the functions of the Office of School Safety, including but not limited to grants for schools, trainings for school staff and law enforcement ...

The WASB has significant concerns about the impact of this legislation on existing school-based 4k programs and the quality of all 4k programs.

■ New reading screener delay amendment

2023 Wisconsin Act 20, signed into law in 2023, makes major changes and includes new requirements related to reading instruction in all Wisconsin school districts. It has recently come to our attention from multiple school administrators that there is strong concern and uncertainty in the timeline for acquisition of the statewide screener and whether there will be sufficient time for schools to implement it in time for the 2024-25 school year.

A coalition of education stakeholder organizations, including the WASB, sent a letter to Dr. Jill Underly and other key legislators detailing concerns and urging them to consider providing an extended implementation timeline. State Superintendent Underly and the DPI joined in the request for an extension.

To be clear, this is solely an effort to make the timeline more manageable and increase the likelihood of successful implementation of the new statewide reading screener. Sen. Duey Stroebel (R-Saukville) and Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) have drafted amendments to delay the first screening of students under Act 20 to allow schools more time to acquire the new screener, train staff, etc. The amendment has been introduced to AB 1069/SB 990 which allows for CESAs to provide early literacy training/professional development under Act 20.

■ Office of School Safety funding

AB 1050/SB 955, authored by Sen. Romaine Quinn (R-Cameron) and Rep. Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville), would allow the Department of Justice and the OSS to use revenue generated from concealed carry permits to fund the office. This came after efforts by Sen. Quinn and Rep. Novak to have the office funded in the 2023-25 state budget were unsuccessful.

While this legislation is important to keep the OSS running, these funds are only a stop gap measure. Earlier this session, the attorney general announced that one-time federal stimulus dollars would be used to fund the office through December 2024. Even if this bill were to pass, it is important legislators include per-

manent funding in the 2025-27 state budget to keep the office functioning.

The WASB supports state funding and staff to maintain the functions of the Office of School Safety, including but not limited to grants for schools, trainings for school staff and law enforcement on preventing and mitigating school violence, and maintenance of the 24-hour hotline to confidentially report potential threats.

■ Delegate Assembly update

The report to the membership on the newly adopted 2024 WASB Resolutions has been posted on the Delegate Assembly website at WASB.org. The WASB staff is working on adding the new language to the Resolution Book and the new 2024 book will be available soon. ■

YOUR GOALS. OUR MISSION.

Wisconsin public school districts face unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The attorneys at Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c., are dedicated to helping you meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities.



RENNING
LEWIS & LACY

Your goals • Our mission

Green Bay • Toll Free: (844) 833-0830
Madison • Toll Free: (844) 626-0901
Oshkosh • Toll Free: (833) 654-1180

law-RLL.com



Avoiding Common Open Meetings Law Errors

Compliance with the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law is important for school board members and other district officials. Failure to comply with the law can result in board actions being void. Additionally, individuals violating the law could face monetary penalties for which the district cannot reimburse them. This Legal Comment will identify several common errors school districts might make regarding the open meetings law and provide tips to avoid these errors in the future.

Remember to notice meetings

School districts usually remember to notice school board meetings and school board committee meetings. However, the open meetings law applies more broadly than that. Any meeting of a “governmental body” must be noticed under the open meetings law.

When determining if a body is a governmental body subject to the law, it is necessary to look at the form the body takes, which generally requires having a defined membership and collective responsibilities. A defined membership does not require that specific individuals or positions be identified. Simply stating that a body will be comprised of one administrator, two teachers, and two community members is likely a sufficiently defined membership. When the school board adopts a rule

authorizing the formation of a body and gives that body the power to take action, that body is generally a governmental body subject to the open meetings law.

Additionally, the source of the body’s existence must be made by a constitution, statute, ordinance, rule, or order. Board policies or board-approved handbooks are a common manner by which a school board acts to create a governmental body subject to the open meetings law. A committee comprised of certain individuals created by a board-approved policy or handbook to review curricular materials and make recommendations to the school board or take other formal actions is subject to the open meetings law. Similarly, a strategic planning team with a defined membership that is established by the board to take specific actions would also be subject to the open meetings law.

Avoid impermissible meetings

A meeting occurs any time there is a purpose to engage in governmental business and the number of members present is sufficient to determine the governmental body’s course of action. If there is a meeting, it must be noticed as required by the open meetings law.

Members should be particularly careful not to create an impermissible “walking quorum” by holding

a series of meetings (in person or through other means of communication) of less than a majority of members in order to determine the course of action for the body outside of properly noticed meetings.

Similarly, members should be careful not to convene an impermissible “negative quorum” by gathering with enough members to stop a course of action from taking place, even if the gathering doesn’t have a majority of members in attendance. Negative quorums most commonly appear when more than a majority of the membership of the body is necessary to approve a given action. For example, if a board policy states that two-thirds of a nine-member library review committee must vote to remove a book from the library, any gathering of four members of that committee to discuss the removal of a book from the library would constitute an impermissible negative quorum.

Be sufficiently detailed with agenda items

Agenda items must be detailed enough to reasonably apprise the public of the subject matter to be discussed and/or acted on. Governmental bodies are often careful to be sufficiently detailed regarding closed session agenda language. However, the law requires that open session agenda language also be sufficiently detailed.

The amount of notice must be

If there is a meeting, it must be noticed as required by the open meetings law.

The default is that all meetings should be “open,” and governmental bodies need to have a specific statutory reason to go into closed session.

reasonably sufficient under the circumstances considering three specific factors:

- The burden of providing more detailed notice,
- Whether the subject is of particular public interest, and
- Whether it involves nonroutine action that the public would be unlikely to anticipate.

In addition, if the agenda item is for closed session, it must cite to a particular statutory exemption from the open meetings law permitting the body to meet in closed session. A mere recitation of the statute is insufficient; the agenda item must still provide sufficient detail to reasonably apprise the public of the subject matter to be discussed in closed session. Remember, the default is that all meetings should be “open,” and governmental bodies need to have a specific statutory reason to go into closed session. And when the governmental body goes into closed session, it needs to have a roll call vote so that each board member’s vote is recorded.

One way in which boards can err is by using broad categories on the agenda, especially for standing items. “Personnel update” is considered insufficiently detailed. Instead, the agenda should give further detail about what the personnel update will include. For example, “Approval of the 2024-2026 District

Administrator Contract” is an example of more specific notice that likely complies with the law. There is little burden in providing these additional details; the position of District Administrator makes the agenda item of particular public interest; and, the public is unlikely to anticipate that “personnel update” would cover the approval of a two-year contract for the highest-level administrator in the district, so more detail is recommended.

■ Be cautious when voting in closed session

In general, board members should strive to vote in open session whenever possible. However, the board can vote in closed session when the vote is clearly an integral part of the deliberations authorized to be conducted in closed session under the open meetings law. If voting in open session would compromise the purpose for the closed sessions, then the vote can generally be done in closed session.

For example, to maintain the confidentiality of student records, boards typically vote in closed session following an expulsion hearing. Similarly, when a board is negotiating a vendor contract, the board might vote to authorize the district administrator to offer up to a certain amount of money to the vendor. Such a vote would likely be held in closed session. Otherwise,

the vendor would know the maximum amount the board was willing to pay the vendor, and that is the amount the vendor would demand. By contrast, once the board and the vendor reach an agreement on financial terms, the vote to approve a final contract with the vendor should be done in open session because at that point, there are no longer bargaining reasons to justify holding the vote in closed session.

■ Conclusion

Many school districts consider preparing agendas and complying with the open meetings law to be routine. However, board members and other school officials should maintain diligence with respect to compliance with the open meetings law because the law contains plenty of traps for the unwary. This extra caution is much less time-consuming than defending a potential legal claim. School boards should work with legal counsel on open meetings law compliance including to comply with other obligations that were outside the scope of this Legal Comment. ■

■ Endnotes

**This Legal Comment was written by Brian P. Goodman and Douglas E. Witte of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For related articles, see Wisconsin School News: “Legal Issues Involved in Reviewing School Library Materials” (Sept. 2023), and “Board Agendas, Voting and Minutes” (Apr. 2017).*

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.

nexus

SOLUTIONS®



**shaping
the buildings
that shape
their future**

Nexus specializes in planning and implementing realistic facility improvements tailored to K-12 public school needs. Our expert team will help your district:

ASSESS and **COMMUNICATE** your facility needs

DESIGN and **BUILD** safe, healthy, modern spaces for your students

REDUCE project costs to make your budget go further

Let's shape your school buildings together!

info@NexusSolutions.com | 414.290.6650



Educational Services and Products

2024 WASB SERVICE ASSOCIATES

HIGHLIGHTED BUSINESSES are members of the WASB Endorsed Insurance Agency Program.
Learn more at wasb.org/wasb-insurance-plan.

Architecture, Engineering and Construction

► Bray Architects

414-226-0200
mwolfert@brayarch.com
brayarch.com

Architecture, interior design, planning, referendum support.

► C.D. Smith, Construction, Inc.

920-216-9081
tmuellenbach@cdsmith.com
cdsmith.com

Serving districts of any size, C.D. Smith has over 80 years of diverse experience building state-of-the-art educational facilities.

► CG Schmidt

608-255-1177
sarah.dunn@cgschmidt.com
cgschmidt.com

Construction management, general contracting, design-build.

► Eppstein Uhen Architects

414-271-5350
ericd@eua.com, eua.com

Architectural design and service leader known for inspired design.

► Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, Inc.

800-236-2370
jandres@hoffman.net

Integrated planning, design, and construction firm that partners with Wisconsin school districts to provide everything from facility assessments, referendum services, renovations, and additions, to new design and construction, to solar and energy upgrades, enhancements, and more.

► J.H. Findorff & Son Inc.

608-257-5321
cmlsna@findorff.com, findorff.com

With offices in Madison and Milwaukee, Findorff is one of Wisconsin's leading builders.

► JP Cullen

608-754-6601, jpcullen.com
Marissa Young,
marissa.young@jpcullen.com

A family-owned, full-service construction management firm that specializes in budgeting, planning and constructing the tough jobs.

► Miron Construction Co., Inc.

920-969-7334
megan.prestebak@miron-construction.com
miron-construction.com

A leader in the educational market, having completed over \$1 billion in K-12 construction. Services include: construction management, design/build, facilities master planning, pre-construction services & referendum planning services.

► Performance Services

630-461-0780
jwede@performanceservices.com
performanceservices.com

Providing complete referendum services to Wisconsin K-12 schools including pre-planning, design and construction with a guaranteed learning environment.

► Plunkett Raysich Architects LLP

414-359-3060
skramer@prarch.com, prarch.com
Architectural and interior design services.

► Scherrer Construction Company, Inc.

262-539-3100
customsolutions@scherrerconstruction.com
scherrerconstruction.com

General contractor/construction manager for over 90 years. Specializing in K-12 school construction, our services include master planning, referendum support, pre-construction services and construction management.

► The Boldt Company

920-225-6216
theboldtcompany.com

A leading sustainable construction firm in the nation providing professional construction services in a variety of markets.

► VJS Construction Services

262-542-9000
ccogins@vjscs.com, vjscs.com

A top-10 construction management, general contracting and design-build firm, with over \$1B in K12 education project experience.

Computer Hardware, Software, Consulting

► Skyward, Inc.

715-341-9406
holly@skyward.com, skyward.com

Skyward is an administrative software company serving over 2,000 K-12 school districts around the world. Our goal? To foster a more productive, collaborative, and successful environment.

Financing, Banking, Consulting

► Baird Public Finance

414-765-3827
bairdpublicfinance@rwbaird.com
rwbaird.com/publicfinance

Baird's Public Finance team provides school financing solutions including: long range capital planning, services related to debt issuance, investment advisory services and referendum assistance.

Insurance and Employee Benefits

► Community Insurance Corporation

800-236-6885, josh@aegis-wi.com
communityinsurancecorporation.com

Dedicated to providing school districts with the tools they need to economically and efficiently address today's changing insurance and risk management environment.

► EMC Insurance Companies

262-717-3900, emcins.com
Phil.R.Lucca@EMCIns.com

Property and casualty insurance.

► Gallagher

262-792-2240
nancy_moon@ajg.com, ajg.com

Specializing in serving the risk management and insurance needs of public schools.

► Foster & Foster Consulting Actuaries, Inc.

262-522-6415, foster-foster.com
Sarah.plohocky@foster-foster.com
Actuarial and employee benefit consulting services.

► M3 Insurance Solutions, Inc.

920-455-7263
bec.kurzynske@m3ins.com
m3ins.com

The dedicated education specialists at M3 Insurance provide over 50% of Wisconsin school districts with the very best in risk management, employee benefits, and insurance services.

► National Insurance Services of Wisconsin, Inc.

800-627-3660
slaudon@nisbenefits.com
NISBenefits.com

Over 82% of Wisconsin school districts are already working with NIS! Since 1969, we've helped school districts find creative solutions to their employee benefit plans. We offer health, dental, disability, life, insurance, worksite benefits, retirement income solutions, full benefit consulting, exclusive proprietary arrangements, and our own online enrollment and benefit administration system, NIS Enroll.

► R&R Insurance

262-953-7177
Alyssa.Bauer@rrins.com
myknowledgebroker.com

Our School Practice Group has more than 25 years of educational institution experience and a dedicated resource center designed with school districts' risk and claims management needs in mind.

► TRICOR, Inc.

855-904-1618
jgibson@tricorinsurance.com
tricorinsurance.com

We now insure over 150 public schools. Our School Practice Team is made up of a diverse group of experienced individuals who are extensively trained and specialized in school insurance products, risk management, support services, loss control, human resources and claims advocacy.

► UnitedHealthcare

414-443-4735
jessica_a_daun@uhc.com
uhc.com

UnitedHealthcare is dedicated to helping people live healthier lives and making the health system work better for everyone. We are committed to improving the healthcare experience of K-12 teachers, staff, retirees and their families in the state of Wisconsin.

► USI Insurance Services

262-302-2343
raeanne.beaudry@usi.com, usi.com

Our focus is financial security options that protect and assist growth. We go beyond simply protecting against the loss of assets and property.

Leadership Consulting

► Studer Education

850-898-3949
info@studereducation.com
studereducation.com

We support the critical work of school district leaders through coaching around an Evidence-Based Leadership framework to increase student achievement, employee engagement, parent satisfaction, district support services, and financial efficiency.

Legal Services

► Buelow Vetter Bulkema Olson & Vliet LLC

262-364-0300
jaziere@buelowvetter.com
buelowvetter.com

We have decades of experience in representing school boards across Wisconsin. We advise school boards and administrators on a variety of issues from labor and employment to student discipline and expulsion.

► Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c.

844-626-0901
info@law-rl.com
law-rl.com

Renning, Lewis & Lacy, S.C. provides legal counsel on a full range of issues that school and higher education institution clients confront on a regular basis.

► von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

414-276-1122
james.macy@vonbriesen.com
vonbriesen.com

For more than fifty years, von Briesen has delivered client-driven results to school districts throughout Wisconsin. Our team's depth and breadth of experience allows us to understand the unique challenges facing school districts today and help our clients become true leaders and innovators.

► Weld Riley, s.c.

715-839-7786, weldriley.com
sweld@weldriley.com

We provide a wide variety of legal advice and counseling to help Wisconsin school districts, colleges and CESAs address corporate-related, body politic and unique legal issues.

School/Community Research

► School Perceptions, LLC

262-299-0329
info@schoolperceptions.com
schoolperceptions.com

An independent research firm specializing in conducting surveys for public and private schools, educational service agencies, communities and other state-level organizations.

Transportation

► Dairyland Buses, Inc.

262-544-8181, ridesta.com
mjordan@ridesta.com

School bus contracting provider, managed contracts, training, maintenance.



SUPPORTING, PROMOTING AND ADVANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION



UPCOMING PROGRAMS



APRIL 2024
Various Locations

MAY 2024
Various Locations

NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER GATHERINGS

Will a new member be joining your school board in April? If so, plan to attend a WASB New School Board Member Gathering with them during the third full week of April. There will also be an online option for members unable to attend in person.

The gatherings provide an informal orientation for newly elected members to begin learning about their role and the WASB services available to them.

SPRING WORKSHOPS

The 2024 Spring Workshops will provide training for new and experienced board members.

The workshops will be held in May.

Watch the WASB website and your email inbox for details about these and other upcoming events.

Visit [WASB.org](https://www.wasb.org) for complete information. | 608-257-2622 | info@wasb.org