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ENERGIZING 1401CATION

Keynote speaker Kevin Honeycutt (right) demonstrated how technology can elevate learning and connect students to the world

2015 CONVENTION REVIEW













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ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE were written by: Shelby Anderson, Sally Sweitzer, and Joe Quick. Freelance writer Anne Davis also contributed articles.

Thank you.



























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We Need You to Advocate for **Public Schools**

ith the 2015-16 Wisconsin Legislature in full swing, it is incredibly important for school leaders, especially locally elected school board members, to make their voices heard.

Many of the biggest debates facing the Legislature this session will revolve around school funding, school accountability, academic standards, student testing, vouchers and charter schools. Facing significant fiscal challenges, the governor has proposed an austerity budget that includes a significant cut to schools next year coupled with no increase in revenue limits for the next two years. As a result, on a per-pupil basis, state aid in 2015-16 will decline to a level approaching what districts received in 2009.

At the same time, the governor proposed to expand the statewide, taxpayer-subsidized voucher program by completely removing limits on enrollment into the program and, for the first time, pay for vouchers directly out of state general aid. If approved, money to fund the vouchers would come directly from individual school districts rather than a separate, general appropriation. And because school districts can't raise property taxes to make up for the lost aid, this will be another cut

for public school students.

On top of the funding and voucher changes, the governor's budget would also end the state's use of the Smarter Balanced testing, calling into serious question the future of school accountability will curriculum standards need to be changed again? Will new state standardized tests be developed? How will the state compare public schools and private, taxpayersubsidized voucher schools if they are using different tests?

We urge you to make your voice heard locally and in Madison.

The WASB government relations staff has prepared talking points, background papers, sample letters, and other resources intended to help you be as effective as possible in advocating during the 2015-17 state budget process.

On March 18, we encourage you to take part in the WASB Day at the Capitol. A broad-based coalition of school leaders will gather in Madison to share common concerns and meet with their state legislators.

WASB staff will provide briefings on the proposed state budget and training on how to have effective meetings with lawmakers. Your district, and the children you educate, can benefit from your participation.

In the state's current fiscal situation, public K-12 education is in competition with many other programs for scarce dollars. Regardless of whether you attend the Day at the Capitol, it is important that you communicate with your legislators about the impact of the state budget on your schools. This should include attending one of the Legislature's budget listening sessions, writing letters to the editor, and finding other ways to tell your district's story. Parents and community members need to understand how the proposed budget will affect your students.

Our success in securing additional funding will depend in large part on how well we communicate these stories and how persuasive we can be.

Many sessions at the State Education Convention in January addressed strategies for engaging with community members and many other advocacy-related topics. This edition of the Wisconsin School News focuses on a recap of the convention. We hope you found the event to be informative and that it re-energized your commitment to public education and the battle ahead for the future of public education.

The WASB government relations staff has prepared [resources] intended to help you be as effective as possible in advocating during the 2015-17 state budget process.

Every Child, Every Day

This special, expanded issue of Wisconsin School News highlights the many sessions, keynote speakers, special events and people from the 94th State Education Convention in Milwaukee. View photos, recaps of break-out sessions, and a look back at other special events from this year's Convention.



One of the most important aspects of the State Education Convention is connecting with other school leaders from across the state. Here school board members interact during a special Pre-Convention Workshop lead by the National Association of School Boards' Technology Leadership Network.



Students from Mineral Point Elementary School demonstrate remote-controlled cars that they designed and built as part of the Project Lead the Way curriculum in their school.



The Exhibit Hall featured hundreds of organizations from across the country that provide services and products for school districts. The support of exhibitors helps make the Wisconsin State Education Convention one of the best education conventions in the nation.



The Cedarburg High School Jazz **Ensemble** featured several very talented soloists. In this photo, Chris Naas takes a solo during the group's performance. Student music groups that performed at the convention were supported by the WASBO Foundation.



Students from the vocal group Out to Lunch dazzled the audience during the final general session of the 2015 State Education Convention. The group is from the Prairie du Chien School District.



The Westby Area High School Concert Band opened the State Education Convention with a very impressive performance.





Wisconsin Health and Physical Education held an active break-out session that got attendees up and moving. Students lead active games, showcasing the kinds of healthy activities promoted by the organization.



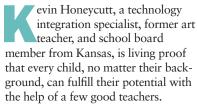




Meet Our Learners Where They Are

Technology integration specialist Kevin Honeycutt encourages school leaders to dive into technology





Growing up the son of a repeat criminal, education and teachers were all Honeycutt had to help him reach his potential. Honeycutt remembered as a young child hiding his dad's guns when his dad came home drunk. Honeycutt remembers going to school as a poor kid with no prospects or hope for a better future. And, vet, Honevcutt remembers a few teachers who took him into their arms and welcomed him in school.

"Years later, I found those teachers and I thanked them because they saved my life," Honeycutt said. "I'm the first Honecyutt in memory to graduate high school. And I went to college and that's because of the work you guys do, one day at a time, one classroom at a time.

In his work as a teacher and school board member, Honeycutt sees the important role education and good teachers can have in a student's life.

"I believe it's possible to flip a kid any single day," Honeycutt said. "We can will kids to be amazing."

As a technology integration specialist, Honeycutt believes technology can, and should, play a role in developing and nurturing students. However, Honeycutt has some caveats.

He said schools need to teach students how to use the tools of technology effectively but also justly. He emphasized that students need to be taught that everything they do online is a reflection of who they are and what kind of people they are. For instance, posting mean things about a student online or even "liking" posts aimed at hurting other students can have lasting and harmful effects.

"We've got to be better at raising kids who are kind," he said. "How are you treating people with nothing? That says something to me about you."

He also encouraged school leaders to model good use of technology for students. "We need to be where they are," Honeycutt says.

Teachers, school leaders, and parents need to be using Twitter, Facebook and any other social media sites or online tools that their students are using. Second, Honeycutt says students shouldn't be allowed free range on the Internet. Rather, students need to be challenged to use technology to create content and use



it productively. And parents and teachers need to know what their kids are doing on the Internet.

Honeycutt has many examples of how teachers can work with students to help them use technology in productive ways. For instance, in English class, have students write a book and then publish it via one of a number of book creator tools and websites. Or use a website like Café Press to help students create their own online stores where they can sell their artwork or designs on a mugs, t-shirts, etc.

"You want students to learn about business, what better way than for them to start their own?" Honeycutt said.

With all of these tools at the tips of our students' fingertips, Honeycutt encourages school leaders to develop policy that make these available to students and encourage teachers to use them in the classroom. This kind of forward-thinking policy enables teachers to cultivate innovative learning and opportunities.

"A quarterback doesn't throw the football where the receiver is, but where he is going," Honeycutt said. "We've got to meet our students where they are going. We've got to predict the future."

"We've got to meet our students where they are going."







Coloring Outside the Lines

Author Richard Gerver challenges school leaders to put passion and creativity back into education

Keynote sponsored by



hen Richard Gerver imagines education, his vision looks very different than your typical public school.

Instead of assessments and mandates, there is creativity and problem solving and no need to color within the lines.

"Who first taught you where you have to color in through the lines because that's where it all goes wrong, I think," Gerver said. "That's the moment we stop believing we know the answer and start thinking we have to take someone else's answer instead."

Gerver, an author and renowned inspirational leader, spent 20 years as a teacher and principal in England where he received a British National Teaching Award for his work. In 2011, he was named Business Speaker of the Year and he has published two best-selling books about innovation in education and business. During his keynote address, Gerver shared his insights into the challenges facing public education and changes he believes would make them stronger.

He sharply criticized the tendency of politicians to continually impose mandates and policies on public schools.

"The problem is that this stuff is

nonsense," he said, adding that keeping up with the policies has driven passion and creativity out of education. "Passion has been driven down by layers and layers of concrete. We need to think differently."

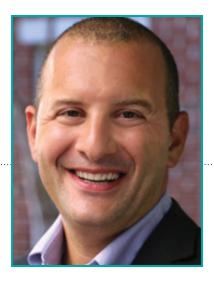
Such pressures contribute to an epidemic of stress, which Gerver calls "the biggest disease of the 21st century." He identified the five early warning signs of stress and warned that unless there are systemic changes in education, it will continue to be a problem.

He urged his audience to take up the challenge of being agents of change.

"You are the people who can drive and assure a climate in our schools in the 21st century that is worthy of our young people," he said.

Gerver used stories of his encounters with some "famous friends" to illustrate the types of transformations he believes are necessary if schools are to succeed in the future. He talked about one friend, an actor and stunt man, who divided people into two types. One type are like rocks in water who just sit and let the water flow around them. The other are like the water itself, which "will always find a way."

Traditional education tends to make children into rocks, Gerver



said. "Shouldn't we actually be creating a world where children are encouraged to think like water?"

And educators, too, need to think like water and find a way around the obstacles that face them, he added.

Another serious problem in public education is the tendency to compare school performance and achievement internationally and obsess over putting new systems and structures in place in order to compete with others.

"Testing systems are a shocking waste of our children's time," he said.

Instead, educators should be asking themselves two questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to go? Learning to juggle both questions is the "greatest strategic challenge," he said.

Gerver also reminded his audience that true education is not about mechanically reproducing a set of correct answers but about learning to solve problems by making mistakes.

"You only ever learn anything from the point of a mistake," he said. "The truth is that the magic happens in the point. We should be thinking constantly, organically about the future and ask, 'How do we create the culture of continuous development?" ■

"You are the people who can [assure] a climate... Worthy of our young people."

'It's Always the Right Time to do the Right Thing'

Neil Willenson, founder of One Heartland, emphasizes the importance of helping others and teaching good character

hen Neil Willenson was 22, he befriended a little boy who changed his life. Home from college, Willenson learned about a boy named Nile who was facing adversity at a local school because he had HIV.

Some parents, afraid for their own children's safety, demanded that Nile be removed from the classroom and use a separate bathroom. Many parents didn't understand HIV/AIDS and were afraid of people with the virus.

Willenson visited Nile and quickly saw he was like any other child — he liked the Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles and he just wanted to be able to go to school like any normal kid. Over the course of two years, Willenson became friends with Nile and saw some of the prejudice and ignorance that Nile faced. At some point, Willenson got the idea to create a camp where children with HIV/AIDs or affected by the virus could have fun and just be normal kids.

"I thought maybe by creating a camp, like Camp Heartland, maybe we could bring them some joy,"



anything if you don't have a moral compass."

Willenson said.

Camp Heartland was born and today, now known as One Heartland, it has locations across the country and has helped thousands of young people and their families challenged by HIV/AIDS.

Willenson said he has learned that nothing is more important than helping and serving others.

"You can ace the ACT but it doesn't mean anything if you don't have a moral compass," he said. "If you don't have compassion for your fellow man, it leads to an empty life."

He encouraged school board members and school administrators to evaluate their communities and see where they can help. He challenged them to hold a day of caring or service in their schools or, even better, make character education a fixture of the school culture.

"Find your cause for both you and your students," Willenson said. "Once you find your cause, take action. It's always the right time to do the right thing."



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Fighting for Dignity

Rosalind Wiseman talks about addressing complex bullying situations and developing a school culture aimed at treating everyone with dignity

Keynote sponsored by

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These are the types of complex bullying scenarios that school districts are facing today. Rosalind Wiseman, a best-selling author and expert on school bullying and ethical leadership, said these situations demand that school leaders address these issues justly.

"The school has to have the ability, the knowledge, and the trust of the parents and of the community to say, 'We have to figure out who this kid is. Just because it's from this child's phone doesn't necessarily mean that it is him," Wiseman said. "And the school has to know that. That is the

world that we are living in today."

Addressing school bullying is messy and complex. Unlike most movies, in real life, it can be hard to see who is the perpetrator and who is the victim. It can also be challenging to distinguish between what is bullying and everyday drama. The work of school leaders, Wiseman says, is to create environments where students can reach their potential and give students the ability to empower themselves.

"We want you to have mastery over your own life to the best extent you can," Wiseman said, talking as a school leader to a student. "It's about you having control over your life with the understanding that messed up things are going to happen. People are going to abuse their power, they're going to try and silence you so you need to be prepared so that you can have the best chance of your truth being heard."

Wiseman said this begins with the adults and leaders in the school district modeling appropriate behavior. How students treat each other is a reflection of how they see their teachers, principals, school board members and administrators interact with each other. For instance,



Wiseman said that even well-intentioned adults will sometimes look the other way when they see other adults abusing power. Young people see that and lose trust in the adults around them and are going to be much more reluctant to go to an adult when they have a problem.

"When young people have confidence in the capacity and the confidence of the adults in the school, they are much more likely to come forward," Wiseman said.

Adults can build confidence among their students, parents, peers and community members by acknowledging when they failed or could have done better and when they treated someone poorly. As part of this process, Wiseman said, it's absolutely crucial that the school board treats all of its members and community members who come before the board with dignity.

"This is hard but we're only asking ourselves what we regularly ask our students to do and that is to take responsibility to hold ourselves accountable and to do the right thing when it's hard," Wiseman said. "We're fighting for what matters most — our collective right to be treated with dignity."

"We're fighting for what matters most —

our collective right to be treated with dignity."

Cannot Afford to Fail

State Superintendent Tony Evers calls upon school leaders to be advocates

**** tate Superintendent Tony Evers acknowledged school leaders for their work in improving and progressing public education and emphasized the importance of advocating on behalf of students.

Noting that the amount of change in public education in the state has been unparalleled, Evers recognized school leaders for their work in helping to adopt and support many of these changes, including: new standards and assessments, a new educator evaluator system, and new accountability frameworks.

"The amount of change has been unparalleled," he said.

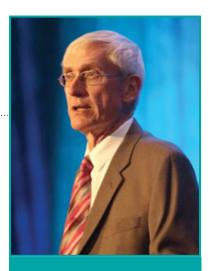
Evers argued that the changes are

being made to improve the lives of kids. He added that he needs the support of teachers and principals, in addition to school leaders, for these changes to be successful and improve student achievement.

Evers recognized the School Administrators Alliance's (SAA) report, "Pathway to World-Class Student Success," noting its efforts to create a state-wide initiative to draw skilled people into education.

"I look forward to working with the SAA to find innovative ways to identify and recruit talented candidates into teaching and school administration," he said.

Despite new statewide school



"We must do our part, share our viewpoints, and contribute to the important dialogue."

improvement measures, Evers said the state still has a good balance of local and state control. However, Evers also called upon state leaders in Madison to stop handing down school reform measures.

"Let's preserve our good working balance, which includes local control, by hitting the pause button on new mandates and conflicting priorities coming out of Madison," Evers said. "Our collective message must be: Our plates are full."

To make this message clear to lawmakers, school board members, school administrators, and other public education advocates need to make their voices heard. Evers said he believes "more divisive mandates along with constrained revenue are on the way."

"We cannot afford to fail," Evers said. "We must do our part, share our viewpoints, and contribute to the important dialogue about the future of one of Wisconsin's greatest resources — our public schools." ■



Help Plant the Seeds

Governor Scott Walker nixes accountability board, promotes technical schools, and addresses alternative licensure options for educators

ammering home themes already laid out prior to introduction of the 2015-17 biennial budget, Governor Scott Walker told convention attendees he opposed an "accountability board" suggested by legislators. Walker also asked for help from school board members to plant the seed in young minds that Wisconsin's technical schools are an underutilized gem offering promising careers.

On accountability, which is one of the first major educational measures discussed in the new Legislature, Walker said, "I don't want an extra set of bureaucrats or politicians of either party ... making decisions about sanctions. I trust parents. The best way to be accountable is to provide objective information for communities."

He added, "My belief is that every school that receives public funds should be accountable. We're going to work with you, but, ultimately, we need to trust parents."

Using the example of a NASA scientist who wants to teach physics in a secondary school, Walker proposes an alternative certification process determined by content mastery. While details at this writing are sketchy, the ability to actually teach does not appear to be part of the recommendation.

"The decision (about approving alternative certification) is still ultimately up to (school board members). We have an incredible opportunity. Career and technical education is one of the most important things we can do." Walker noted the shortage of technical employees faced by Wisconsin manufacturers. "We have a

need today. We need to do more to attract students into these areas.

"It's not just about a job — these are careers," Walker added. "We need to treat our welders with the same respect as doctors and lawyers. We need more than just resources - we need more of a focus and acceptance of the tremendous career opportunities."

Walker said that all school employees need to send the message to students about impressive careers available through the technical colleges. He offered that message needs to impress upon students that a twoyear degree is "just as noble and needed and accepted" as a student



"My belief is that every school that receives public funds should be accountable."

attending a university. "We need to start that discussion early on," suggesting sixth-grade career exploration as a good starting place.

Concluding, Walker asked school board members to, "Help us send a clear message that there's value in a two-year degree." ■

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Before the Convention.

Before the State Education Convention officially began, a series of in-depth Pre-Convention Workshops addressed a variety of important issues, including school finance, school law, technology, and board governance.



School Finance Puzzle

"The school aid formula is controversial but I believe it is better than people give it credit for. Groups are continually trying to change it and they have failed." Emily Koczela, Brown Deer

School District



The Secret to School **Board Member Success**

"If you have a good superintendent, you can bet they're going to hire good principals and those principals are going

to hire good teachers that's how it works."

Dr. David Lee, University of Southern Mississippi



Leading for Learning in the Digital Age

"Regardless of the technology, we need to teach students to be learners. Kids that know how to learn for the rest of their lives are going to succeed." Kurt Kiefer, Department of **Public Instruction**



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Barry Forbes, Wisconsin Association of School Boards

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2015 WASB

Delegate Assembly

Delegates address teacher licensure, rural teacher shortages, open enrollment window, school board members serving as volunteers

The 2014 WASB Delegate Assembly approved 17 resolutions that addressed a variety of issues related to public education. Several resolutions focused on addressing teacher shortages and problems faced by rural schools, while others focused on funding and concerns raised by the state's new Course Options program. Other topics included support for legislation to revise public school open enrollment, address concerns with the out-of-state tuition payment statute, and to establish parameters for school board members who wish to serve as volunteer coaches or student advisors. The positions adopted by the annual WASB Delegate Assemblies are added to the association's resolutions book, which are then used to set the WASB legislative priorities.

For the complete report on the 2015 WASB Delegate Assembly, visit wasb.org. Select "Advocacy and Government Relations" and then "Delegate Assembly."



by the numbers

- 17 resolutions proposed and passed
- 4 resolutions addressed teacher-related issues: licensure, alternative pathways, teacher shortage, recruitment and retention in rural districts
 - 2 resolutions addressed funding and flexibility for the Course Options Program
 - 2 resolutions on Open Enrollment



Not Just an Urban Problem

As the school voucher program expands, its impact on public schools across the state is felt more prominently

SESSION: Impact of Vouchers/Charters on Wisconsin Public Schools | **Presenters:** Jerry Fiene, executive director, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance; Marc Duff, deputy chief financial officer, Racine Unified School District

s a member of the state
Assembly, Marc Duff, now
deputy chief financial officer
of the Racine Unified School District,
voted in favor of a measure to
expand the school voucher program.
Today, in his position with the school
district, that is a decision he regrets.

Jerry Fiene, executive director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, laid it out very clearly.

"The expansion of school vouchers is directly harming the financial support of our local public schools," he said.

The original intent behind expanding the school voucher program was to give low-income students in public schools an option to attend private school. It was supposed to empower parents and provide a better opportunity for students. However, several years into the school voucher program, neither is the case.

Most students enrolled in the school voucher program already come from private schools. And, most notably, Duff said, there is no indication that the program has helped students.

"Vouchers were supposed to improve student achievement," Duff said. "There really isn't any evidence of that. There is no research to back that up."

Before the school voucher program came along, a lot of private schools in the state were actually losing students and struggling to keep their doors open.

"This has allowed many of them to stay open or, in some cases, expand," Duff said.

At first, the school voucher program started small. However, at last count, \$212 million in state aid went to school vouchers. In Milwaukee alone, there are 109 schools participating in the voucher program. In Racine, voucher schools have contributed to higher transportation and special education costs.

"We've already closed a school, we will probably have to close more," Duff said. "We've also had to reduce staff."

Duff warns school leaders not to think of this as only an urban school district problem. Schools accepting students via the voucher program are now all over the state.

"I think there was a feeling that, 'That's a Milwaukee problem, I don't have to worry about vouchers,'" Duff said. "Well, we're all in it now."

Duff explained that there really are two different kinds of schools participating in the voucher program. There are the traditional parochial schools and then there are private schools run by "entrepreneurial groups."

"These private, entrepreneurial groups can swoop into a community," Duff said. "These are a little harder to deal with."

For instance, a group can come into a community, open a voucher school and, suddenly, Duff says, the local public school loses 100 students. "In a smaller school district,



that's a big hit," he said.

To retain students, Duff said school districts need to be innovative. For instance, the Milwaukee Public Schools have long offered magnet and immersion schools.

"We need to adopt these kinds of innovations in our public school districts across the state," Duff says. "There is a lot you can do to treat parents like a customer."

In addition, public schools can highlight what they can do better than private schools. Duff says, the Racine Unified School District has the ability to put technology in students' hands and to implement it effectively into its schools – something that a smaller private school might not have the resources to do.

Additionally, Fiene and Duff encouraged school leaders to tell their lawmakers how the voucher program is directly taking funding from the public schools and, ultimately, putting more pressure on local taxpayers.

"What's basically being developed is a dual school system where we're all going to be competing for resources," Fiene said."

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Barneveld's PIE for Everyone

Student intervention strategy helps support all students

SESSION: RTI? Easy as Pie | Presenters: Ben Jones, assistant district administrator, Barneveld School District; Heather Schmitz, teacher, Barneveld School District

hen the Barneveld School District decided to incorporate RtI, a program to identify and assist struggling students, into its curriculum, the first question officials faced was when.

"How do we create time, space and utility and what do we do with all of the kids?" asked Ben Jones, Barneveld's assistant district administrator.

Barneveld officials liked RtI because it offered them a chance to better identify students who were having problems academically and give them help before they fell behind their peers. But finding time to provide that intervention was difficult given the tightly scheduled school day. Teachers were already providing help before and after school, and pulling students out of a class meant they would have to make up even more work catching up on what they had missed.

So with a few adjustments to the schedule, district officials decided the best option was to give all students and staff in sixth through 12th grades a common 35-minute period at the end of the school day, four times a week. Called PIE (Prevention, Intervention and Exploration), the period offers students and staff a variety of options.

The Prevention component means that teachers are available if students need extra assistance on something they learned in class. There is also time for Intervention, which is part of the formal RtI program. Students who have been identified as needing help in a particular area work one on one with a specialist to strengthen their skills and to prevent them from falling farther behind.

For all the students who don't need assistance, the common period is one of Exploration. Teachers tap into their personal interests or hobbies and offer a host of small group activities from gardening to yoga to music lessons. Students are surveyed frequently to find out what kinds of activities they might be interested in. They can also suggest ideas through a link on the district's website.

Heather Schmitz, a middle school science teacher and PIE coordinator, keeps a list of possible activities that is frequently updated.

"There are hundreds of ideas," Schmitz said.

According to Jones, teachers were a little nervous at first about what they might offer.

"We said, 'You don't have to teach anything. Find your passion and share it," he said.

For high school students, PIE



offers a chance for them to take electives like art or music they might not otherwise have time for. They can also use the period to prep for AP classes or ACT tests or listen to speakers talk about colleges or careers.

On Mondays, the PIE period is used as a home room where all staff meet with a small group of students and work on community-building activities.

At the elementary school, the focus is on Prevention and Intervention during a common 30-minute period at the end of the day, four days a week.

Barneveld has completed one full semester of PIE and Jones said officials are pleased with what they have seen. Overall, the number of students with Ds and Fs has decreased and attendance has improved, especially on Mondays when students get to select their PIE sessions for the week.

The fact that Barneveld is such a small district — there are 465 students in one site - helped with the schedule changes needed to add the PIE period. Officials added 15 minutes to the length of the school day and reduced the high school lunch period by 15 minutes.

Preparing for Crisis

Coping with accidents, natural disasters, student or staff death

SESSION: PREPaRE Your School for Crisis with Trauma in Mind | **Presenter:** Kathryn Bush, school psychology consultant, Department of Public Instruction

athryn Bush, school psychology consultant for the Department of Public Instruction, had some advice for school leaders: now is the time to "PREPaRE" for a school crisis.

Thanks to a new grant from the U.S. Department of Education, workshops on a special curriculum for school crisis prevention and intervention are now being offered to Wisconsin school districts to help them improve their emergency plans. Bush described the training called PREPaRE (Prevent, Reaffirm, Evaluate, Provide and Respond and Examine) and offered tips about dealing with school crises in general.

Although all schools are required to have emergency plans for dealing with crises, they are too often developed then ignored and forgotten until an emergency situation occurs, Bush said.

"You've got to deal with your crisis plan being a living, breathing document," she added.

She defined a crisis as an event that is perceived as extremely negative. Although people frequently think of school shootings when a school crisis is mentioned, the truth is that shootings are very rare. More often, a school crisis is an accident, a student or staff death, or even a natural disaster such as a flash flood

or tornado.

School crises are different than crises in other settings.

"One thing we have determined is that children are more vulnerable than adults in a critical incident," Bush said. "We also know that trauma can have a lasting impact."

The first PREPaRE workshop focuses on comprehensive school planning for a crisis. It offers school officials a chance to review and update their emergency plans and consider special elements they may not have prepared for such as how to evacuate a child in a wheelchair from a second story classroom.

Because of its emphasis on preparing for school crises, a district that wants to take the first workshop should send a team of people that could also include community members such as first responders, Bush said.

The focus of the second workshop is on recovering from a crisis and is designed for school mental health professionals such as nurses, counselors and special education teachers.

Most students involved in a crisis will recover without special assistance. For others, however, there will be a lasting trauma that will require more intervention. It is critical for school staff to learn how to identify those students who will need extra



"You've got to deal with your crisis plan being a living, breathing document."

help and what resources to use to assist their recovery.

The workshops also examine how to respond during a crisis including how to deal with communication in the age of social media and how to develop a strict protocol and chain of command for crisis response.

"There is a chain of command when there is a critical incident," Bush said. "We follow the rules in order to get the best results we can."

The federal grant has reduced the cost of both workshops, which can be offered on site or through a local CESA. Schools can sign up for the training by going to the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Center website, www.wishschools.org.

The Janesville Success Story

How one district faced with challenging demographics rose from mediocrity

SESSION: Creating a Culture of Achievement – Improving Student Learning Results in a Large District | **Presenters:** Kim Ehrhardt, director of instructional services, Janesville School District; Karen Schulte, district administrator; Robert Smiley, chief information officer, Janesville School District

or many years, the Janesville
School District sat comfortably
in the middle of the pack when
it came to student achievement. Then,
prompted by some external changes
as well as new leadership, the district
decided to try for the top.

"We became very focused on what our culture would look like. Instead of being in the middle of the pack, we wanted to be number one," recalled Kim Ehrhardt, Janesville's director of instructional services. "Culture is the vehicle that really brings substantial change."

The results have been stunning. Within the past three years, two of Janesville's elementary schools have been nationally recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools. The district's student test scores are now at the top when compared to other districts around them. And on the last state-issued district report card, Janesville's score was second highest among the 10 largest districts in Wisconsin.

The achievements are even more remarkable when you consider Janesville's demographics. The ninth largest school district in Wisconsin, it has 10,400 students, 1,400 employees and 21 schools. The closing of local businesses led to hard times for Janesville and its students. The district has a high number of homeless students

and more than half the district's students come from families with incomes below the poverty level. Yet the district has been recognized at the state level for its success at educating students from low-income families.

"We have the same standards for those students as we do for every other student," Janesville's Superintendent Karen Schulte said, adding that the difference was a higher level of support for those lower income students.

The first step on the journey to excellence was setting clear, measurable goals for the district and its leadership team, who are rated each year on how well they have achieved those goals. Goals for each school are then set to align with the district goals so all students, teachers and administrators are working toward the same objectives each year.

Janesville changed the way it communicated with parents and students and among the staff. There are frequent surveys of parents and staff on a variety of topics and changes are made in response to the survey results. Principals are also asked to rate the performance of central office staff.

"We are service oriented," Schulte said. "We serve the principals who serve the teachers who serve the students."



Janesville changed its curriculum to a guaranteed and viable curriculum that includes the same mastery goals for each student. The district developed a set of curriculum-based common assessments that are given each quarter or trimester. The results are then reviewed and analyzed at monthly data retreats held at each school.

A final component is technology that is carefully chosen to complement the curriculum and tied to a specific way of improving student achievement. Janesville has two of the first immersive telepresences in Wisconsin, enabling students to talk live with experts all over the world. Elementary schools are able to use technology to virtually combine classrooms. District staff can receive needed training on site using a remote link with an external trainer.

The district is still looking for new ways to achieve. Janesville has established an international education program that sends staff overseas to learn how schools in other countries are producing students who are even higher achieving.

"We're continuing to learn and find out how we can be more competitive," Schulte said.

Community Education Connects Schools and Taxpayers

River Falls School District's successful community education program has more than 3,000 participants

SESSION: Community Education: The Path to Community Support and Engagement **Presenters:** Jamie Benson, district administrator; Monique Squire, community education coordinator; Alan Tuchtenhagen, school board member, River Falls School District

hile schools are perceived by many as the focal point in the community, it is sometimes difficult to connect with citizens who do not have children enrolled in the school district. To meet that challenge, five years ago, the River Falls School District explored the possibilities of a community education program. The program's evolution has paid huge dividends — including the passage of a \$19 million referendum.

"Community education allows the district to engage a population that is much broader than those families with children enrolled in K-12," River Falls School Board member Alan Tuchtenhagen said. "All residents of the district are invited to participate. This is one of the things we should be doing to serve the people of this school district."

Course offerings run the gamut from welding and quilting to foreign language and computers. The program has blossomed from 582 registrations to nearly 3,300 — a 550 percent increase — and is now an integral part of the River Falls community. Over 500 senior citizens availed themselves to course offerings in the current session, a key group the

district wanted to connect with. The district offers three sessions annually.

"The environment is ripe for community education," said program coordinator Monique Squire.
"People are really looking for lifelong learning opportunities." While Squire directs the program, she takes her marching orders from the community — more pointedly a 10-member advisory council. "They are my 'eyes and ears' of the community," she said. "The key is to ask the community what they want."

The advisory council meets monthly and decides which classes are added or dropped (potential instructors make their "pitch" to the council). The program is designed to break even. A general rule is the instructor receives 70 percent of the registration with 30 percent returning to the program. Several instructors volunteer and ask for no payment.

Squire said it is important to have a consistent brand for the community, noting the course catalogue has a similar look each publication.

"A big part of our success is using pictures of local people — people comment about that."

She termed the catalogue "the



"[Community education]
offers a structured,
effective way to
expand the school's
traditional role."

bread and butter of community education."

"Make it professional; it's how people judge your program," Squire said. The district uses a local professional photographer.

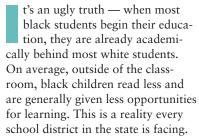
A critical component to pay for the program is Fund 80 (\$150,000), which allows a school board to approve tax expenditures over the revenue limit. Superintendent Jamie Benson said, "There are some real opportunities to use Fund 80 for Community," but cautioned, "understanding Fund 80 is critical."

Benson noted the community education program "offers a structured, effective way to expand the school's traditional role and create a mutually interdependent relationship among home, school and community."

Opportunity and Time

Tackling the achievement gap through early childhood education, teacher training and collaboration, character education

SESSION: Closing the Achievement Gap: "The Brown Deer Way" | **Presenters:** Deb Kerr, district administrator; Dennis Griffin, school board member; Kortney Smith, K4-6th grade principal; Tosha Womack, 7-12th grade principal; Ted Knoll, director of pupil services; Greg Schaffer, director of teaching & learning; Brown Deer School District



"Every one of us has an achievement gap in our district," Deb Kerr, superintendent of the Brown Deer School District, said to school leaders. "We can't be afraid to talk about this."

As is the case with many school districts in the state, the Brown Deer School District saw its percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch increase. The number of special education students went up as well. Like many school districts, the achievement gap was a major issue. The district has undertaken several specific efforts to try and lower its achievement gap.

One of the most successful efforts has been bringing early childhood back into the school district and working collaboratively with day care providers in the community.

"We went to early childhood providers in the community and asked them, 'What are you doing to prepare kids for school," said Kortney Smith, K4-6th grade principal. "It's been very enlightening learning where we have holes."

The district works with participating day care providers in the community to better prepare young children for school. This collaboration has been going on for several years and the district knows students are benefiting from the work. "Students who participated are soaring [academically]," Smith said.

After-school support has also helped students. The support is available two hours after school, two to five days a week depending on the individual student. "For some kids, it is their homework time," Smith said. "In many cases, we have students place their homework in their teacher's box before they leave."

The efforts seem to be making a difference. Data from the 2010-11 school year showed an improvement in reading scores, especially in lower grades. Specifically, among fourthgraders, 85 percent of black students and 89.3 percent of white students were at least proficient in reading (a gap of only 4.3 percent). Students in the upper grades are achieving as well. In 2012, 84.2 percent of Brown



Deer's black sophomores rated proficient or advanced in reading, compared to the state average of 47.7 percent for black Wisconsin students in 10th grade.

Character education has also helped play a role in addressing the achievement gap by creating a school culture where students feel more connected to teachers. The school district initially had such a high number of discipline referrals, that it was asked by the DPI to improve. The district put together a team to address student behavior and that team found that 40 percent of Brown Deer students said they didn't feel connected to the school.

In an effort to create a school community, the team suggested the school district make character education a priority. The district educated its community, trained its teachers, and began dedicating one lesson a week in homeroom to character education. The district has had the most success with character education by empowering the students and letting them take the lead. Students now create the character education lessons and the community outreach efforts continue.

The effort is known as the "Brown Deer Way."

"If we do this collectively as a community, we're much more likely to help turn things around for our students," said Tasha Womack, 7-12th grade principal. The school district used to get as many as 10,000 discipline referrals a school year, now they district only deals with about 2,000.

Teacher training and staff development have also been key to addressing the achievement gap. The district's staff development committee, made up of teachers, helps identify what teachers need to know and learn to be effective. The teachers that make up this committee then go into their respective schools and lead staff development, covering student/teacher interactions, classroom management, and strate-



gies shown effective in helping low-achieving students.

Finally, the school board has been behind the efforts to lower the district's achievement gap. The

school board helped get professional development time onto the school calendar, and it specifically focused on narrowing the achievement gap as one of the district goals.

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Developing Young Engineers

Kenosha Unified School District's PLTW pilot program engages young students in STEM

SESSION: Launching K-5 Learners into STEM | **Presenters:** Angela Andersson, principal; Tim Carlson, teacher; Arielle Hodges, teacher; Jenny McCall; technology education support; Kenosha Unified School District

tudents decide early whether they like, or think they are good at, math and science. Therefore, it is critical to reach students at a young age to enable them to have positive experiences and success in the STEM subject areas.

The Kenosha School of Technology Enhanced Curriculum (KTEC) was developed to foster an interest of these subjects in young students. KTEC is a charter PreK-8 school with a mission "to prepare students for success in a global society through academic excellence by the use of 21st Century skills and technology integration."

KTEC opened its doors in 2007 as a STEM school and selects students from a random lottery. Due to long waiting lists, the school recently opened a second campus and expects to soon educate 1,200 students between the two schools.

In June 2013, KTEC was selected as one of 44 schools nationwide to pilot the Project Lead The Way (PLTW) Launch program for K-5 students.

PLTW Launch includes 24 topicbased, 10-hour modules created to engage students in design problems, collaboration, analysis, problem solving, and computational thinking. Airielle Hodges, Kenosha Unified teacher and a PLTW master teacher, explained that the Launch projects "take the students through the engineering design process." All modules are set up with an activity-, project-, and problem-based approach. While working in the third-grade Science of Flight module, students design a glider with the best wing design to travel the farthest and carry cargo (binder clips!). Students must ask: (1) How does the structure affect the function? and (2) Who has the best structure?

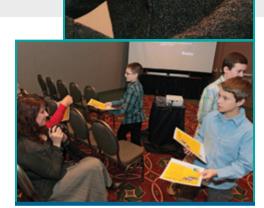
"PLTW is doing a wonderful job of teaching children to answer the questions that all of us have," said Jenny McCall, technology education support for PLTW.

The KTEC staff explained that students learn that they do not fail.

"We learn more from what doesn't work, than from what does," McCall said.

The KTEC staff relayed a story from a parent about her five-year-old who announced, "We've had an engineering failure." The mother asked, "What are we going to do?" The PLTW Launch student responded, "We'll redesign." Failure is not an option!

The PLTW program is part of the school's science curriculum and is aligned to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and the Common Core State Standards. The Kenosha science curriculum used to be content heavy but recently the district



adopted the NGSS, which emphasize that science is interconnected with content, practices, and crosscutting.

The KTEC staff said that using the PLTW program is not expensive. One staff member attends PLTW training to become a lead teacher and then goes back to school to lead implementation for that school. KTEC assigns four students per kit and uses an iPad Cart to minimize costs. Furthermore, the cost of the module kits is reasonable and the ongoing cost of resupplying consumables is very low.

The staff at KTEC have seen first-hand the positive results from using the PLTW STEM program with K-5 students.

"The biggest piece is student engagement," Hodges said. "They are so engaged in this curriculum."

As Angela Andersson, principal of KTEC, says, "attendance is never a problem for us."

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School Safety is Everyone's Job

State renews focus on school safety

SESSION: Keeping Wisconsin Schools Safe: A Safe Schools Initiative | **Presenters:** Kit Dailey, public information specialist, Eppstein Uhen Architcts, Inc.; Steve Fernan, student services/prevention and wellness, Department of Public Instruction; Peter Pochowski, executive director, Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association

eeping Wisconsin schools safe is a group effort.

"In Wisconsin, we have an excellent record of keeping schools and students safe," said Steve Fernan, assistant director of the Department of Public Instruction's Student Services/Prevention and Wellness team. Fernan added that an ongoing collaborative initiative by the state's major education groups is designed to keep that record intact.

Shortly after the violence at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, Wisconsin education leaders began to discuss what they could do to improve school safety. The discussions culminated in a three-day safety summit in Racine attended by representatives from WEAC, WASB, WASDA, DPI, parent groups and law enforcement in 2013. Students added their voices in the form of a video presented at the summit. In the video, they talked about being afraid, not of a gunman like at Sandy Hook or Columbine, but of everyday pressures like bullies and depression.

Using a set of core beliefs as a basis for discussions, the group came up with a series of recommendations. In the area of mental health, members suggested coordinating state and national mental health initiatives and identifying best practices at the local level for meeting the mental health

needs of students. This was key since the group found that in Wisconsin there are a great number of students with unmet mental health needs.

Since the summit, Governor Scott Walker has established and funded an office of Children's Mental Health. There have been meetings between DPI and the new state office to coordinate efforts to serve students. Federal grants are being used to pilot programs in several cities in the state that would serve as models for delivering mental health services throughout the state.

There is also ongoing training of school staff to identify and refer students with mental health services and to respond and prepare for school crisis situations.

The group also made a number of recommendations for changing school climate and culture including developing new ways to respond to disciplinary issues and adding peer to peer support and character education efforts.

In the area of policy and procedures, the group recommended adopting a statewide standard for crisis preparation and response and creating uniform templates for policies, procedures and crisis communication. Creation of regional crisis teams and a statewide school safety center were also suggested. All the



recommendations are available on the DPI website, Fernan said.

Peter Pochowski, executive director of the Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association and another summit member, discussed his group's on-site safety assessments for schools that use a 25-point school security checklist. The checklist includes questions about staff training, and the school's emergency operation plan, among other items.

Kit Dailey, a public information specialist with Eppstein Uhen Architects and past president of the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association (WSPRA), discussed the crisis communication tool kit developed by WSPRA. The kit has recently been updated to include a significant section on social media, Dailey said.

The kit is particularly important because the vast majority of Wisconsin school districts do not have a trained public information specialist on staff to help in times of a crisis, Dailey said. The toolkit is available free on the WSPRA website. The group's members have also formed a network of specialists who are available to help districts with crisis communication when needed.

Collaborative Improvement

Three school districts work together to build processes and strategies to build strong school leaders

SESSION: Developing Leaders in a Collaborative Model: Evidence-Based | **Presenters:** Patricia Deklotz, superintendent, Kettle Moraine School District; Larry Dux, board clerk, Pewaukee School District; JoAnn Sternke, superintendent, Pewaukee School District; Kelly Thompson, superintendent, Muskego-Norway; Robin Largue, lead coach, Studer Group

n 2014, the Pewaukee, Kettle Moraine, Oconomowoc and Muskego-Norway School Districts entered into a collaborative partnership with Studer Education to develop their school leaders. The Studer Group has long had success improving health care organizations. In 2010, the Studer Group took its approach and applied it to education.

The process centers on the "Execution Flywheel" and tools with which to guide a district's improvement. The Execution Flywheel has three elements at its core: passion and principles, which lead to results.

"The Studer Group provides us principles to get results," said JoAnn Sternke, superintendent of the Pewaukee School District. "It gives us those principles but also tools and strategies."

The first tool is employee and parent surveys. Kelly Thompson, superintendent of the Muskego-Norway School District said the Studer Group helped the district re-think the way it uses surveys.

"Our district had been doing surveys but we hadn't really utilized that data in a way that helps make us better," Thompson said.

For example, under the Studer Group framework, the district held three surveys: an employee and parent engagement survey in the spring, an employee survey in the summer-fall, and a district services survey in the fall-winter. The district met with some of the people that filled out the survey and heard directly what their concerns were. Doing surveys several times also allowed the district to set benchmarks and track its progress. Working as a collaborative effort, the four districts shared their survey results to get a perspective of how they did in comparison with the partner districts.

Another tool used by the districts is scorecards, which are a simple, one-page statement of what the district is going to do. It helps narrow a district's focus and communicates priorities for action in specific areas.

"It allows you to monitor your district's process on a regular basis," said Pat Deklotz, superintendent of the Kettle Moraine School District.

The districts also incorporated "Rounding" into their principal's schedules. Rounding is an intentional conversation with a school employee. The goal is to improve processes and recognize people for good work. Deklotz said it helped her principals build and strengthen their school team.

"Every one of my principals feels like it's the most important thing they do all week," Deklotz said.

The final strategy or tool the



"...we hadn't really utilized [survey] data in a way that helps make us better."

districts use is new employee interviews. The interviews are conducted by a new teacher's supervisors, an assistant principal or principal, and take place 30, 60, and 90 days into a new teacher's employment. The interviews are set up to help create a connection with new staff members and learn more about what they can offer or may need support with.

The districts had positive feedback on the collaborative improvement process and work with the Studer Group. The districts are currently looking at their next steps, which include getting more data from their surveys, holding additional training sessions, monitoring and learning new tools.

"We've greatly grown as three districts," Sternke said. "This is important, collaborative work that we should all be doing."

Staff Buy-in is Critical

Teacher mentor program, communication efforts crucial to adoption of educator effectiveness program

SESSION: Effective Educator Initiative – Transitions Supporting Staff | **Presenters:** Susan Borden, district administrator; Ann Higgins, director of administrative services, Machell Schwarz, principal; Colleen Kollasch, teacher; DeForest Area School District

n 2011, work began behind the scenes in the DeForest Area School District to begin the transition to support staff in the new effective educator requirements. Administrators understood there would be process changes, new software, different expectations and demands and implementation challenges. In the end, it would be affected staff who were the critical ambassadors for success.

"There is a ton of trust with these folks (from other teachers)," said high school principal Machell Schwarz, acknowledging the two teachers who were part of the session presentation and who served on the one-year pilot program before implementation district-wide. Veteran social studies teacher, Colleen Kollasch, half-joking offered, "We were the guinea pigs. Getting buy-in from staff was a really important part of the pilot year (2013-14)."

Kollasch acknowledged trepidations when she was evaluated by three different people, but in the end, "As a pilot teacher I was able to see no matter who did the evaluation, the result was the same and that was reassuring." It also enabled her to convey that to other staff members who had different misgivings about the impending changes.

Superintendent Susan Borden said the district created a 25-member pilot team, "to give us regular and effective feedback from teachers in the classroom." Three district-wide committees were also created (elementary, middle, high school). Over the course of three years, staff worked together on collaboration, support, team building and other activities to create conditions for successful staff implementation.

"At the center of everything we do is how to improve student achievement," said Ann Higgins, director of administrative services. Kollasch added, "Working with my colleagues to help improve student learning is one of the best things that has happened."

To assist staff, pilot teachers developed a website with contacts, resources, an evaluation timeline checklist and more — such as, what will evaluators be looking for in classroom lesson delivery? Early release time allows effective educator mentors to work closely with staff who have questions or need help. At the mid-point of this year's district-wide implementation, 93 percent of staff responding to a survey indicated they want the mentors continued next school year. Mentors receive compensation.



"At the center of everything we do is how to improve student achievement."

While the mentors were key, Principal Schwarz also stressed the importance of communication.

"Communicate, communicate, communicate — in 100,000 different ways," he said. "It's important to let teachers know this is a work in progress."

DeForest used a variety of communication tools from a weekly "Employee Evaluation Tip of the Week" to in-service meetings for updates, discussion and concerns. Principals expressed a natural concern of getting new tasks performed given current duties and responsibilities. Administration responded by providing more time and curtailing other duties, such as special education evaluations.

In the final analysis, Borden said, "In God I trust, all others bring data!" ■

A Business and Education Partnership

School districts and local businesses come together to prepare students for future careers

SESSION: Building Business Engagement with Your Schools | **Presenters:** Richard Breen, Jay Capelle, Rick Merdan, business/education partnership committee, Incourage Community Foundation; Kyle Cronan, principal, Port Edwards School District; Brian Giese, school board treasurer, Nekoosa School District; Eric Siler, teacher, Wisconsin Rapids School District

aced with a set of tough, new economic challenges, a trio of central Wisconsin school districts and local businesses decided their best bet was to start working together. But first they had to get past the blame game – businesses blaming schools for not preparing students to work and schools blaming businesses for not having enough jobs.

"Because we had this environment of trust and respect, we were able to meet these challenges and do amazing things," said Richard Breen, an adjunct instructor at Mid-State Technical College and a member of the business education partnership committee formed by the Incourage Community Foundation of Wisconsin Rapids.

The collaboration involves the Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Nekoosa School Districts, all located within miles of each other, as well as the major industries in the area. In the beginning, both educators and business leaders had to learn more about each other. One of the first steps in building the partnership were tours: business leaders visited local schools and learned about their realities of limited resources and financial restraints; educators toured the local businesses and were amazed at the high-tech facilities.

"That was very eye opening," recalled Kyle Cronan, principal at Port Edwards Middle and High Schools.

Once they learned more about each other, the new partners began to work on solutions to their shared problem. Businesses had jobs but not enough potential employees with the right kind of skills while schools needed to provide their students with the right kind of training and education to take the jobs that were available locally.

"What we're really talking about is collaboration," said Rick Merdan of the Incourage Foundation.

So far, the partnership has yielded a week-long summer class for educators who spend time at local businesses and learn more about what they do and what types of jobs are available. Local businesses have also sent employees in to help teach classes. And local high schools have won grants from Constellation Energy that have resulted in construction of solar installations at each school. Students learn how to maintain and use the installations, giving them valuable training in a fast-growing industry.

The partnership has also resulted in new manufacturing apprenticeship programs and additions of Project Lead the Way programs and a middle



"What we're really talking about is collaboration."

school STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) charter school that will help expose more students to science and technology education.

An ongoing part of the partnership is education for parents and students so that they understand that going to college and earning a fouryear degree is not necessary in order to obtain a good, high-paying career.

"One of the myths in central Wisconsin is that there aren't any jobs," said Cronan, noting that local businesses expect to have 1,500 job openings in the next five years as current employees retire. "There is work out there. We want to keep our students in central Wisconsin and help grow our communities."

Care and Rigor

Superintendent of the Year Jamie Nutter thanks colleagues and stresses important role of schools in children's lives

believe every school needs two things — a balance of care and rigor," said Jamie Nutter, superintendent of the Fennimore Community School District and the 2015 WASDA Superintendent of the Year. "Some days students need more care than rigor."

Nutter knows this to be true, not only from his role as a superintendent, but also as a wayward student whose teachers refused to give up on him.

At one point during his childhood, Nutter was raised by his grandparents. When his grandmother was in the hospital recovering from a stroke, he was free to do as he pleased. He let his homework slide. His teachers, however, didn't let this continue for long.

"One day they pulled me into the hallway and said, 'We know you are going through a tough time, but Jamie, we are not going to let you quit learning,'" Nutter recalled.

This moment had a tremendous impact on him, not only helping him get back on track academically but also cementing in himself a respect for what his teachers did for him and his classmates. Speaking to his fellow superintendents at the annual WASDA Luncheon at the State Education Convention, Nutter said people may not realize the important role schools





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play in the lives of young people.

are smarter than

anyone of us."

"Sometimes, as leaders, other people view us as being advantaged or having led an advantaged life, but if we got to know everyone here, I bet you all overcame some sort of adversity in your life," Nutter said. "And I bet it is because of the people at your school that you overcame it."

Similarly, Nutter said that his success as superintendent is due to the work and support of his family, staff, school board, and mentors.

"Success requires contributions from many. All of us are smarter than anyone of us." ■

People Make a District

Business Official of the Year **Betty Zimdars** shares advice on how to help add value to public education

rograms and initiatives are great but they aren't enough to make a school district top notch: it's the people who do that.

That was the message Betty Zimdars, assistant superintendent of business services for the Howard-Suamico School District, shared with her colleagues and others who gathered at the State Education Convention to honor her as WASBO's Wisconsin School Business Official of the Year.

"It's the people who make a school district great," Zimdars said. "We can put all sorts of systems and policies in place but it's the people who at the end of the day add the value."

And because adding value is so important to doing a good job, Zimdars went on to share several ways her colleagues could add value to their jobs "each and every day and each and every year."

First, she said business professionals need to know the mission and value of their individual school districts and incorporate them into their own business practices so everything reflects the overall district mission. Zimdars also recommended "learning the instructional side" of district operations even though it may seem foreign to financial experts. Other tips included taking action by implementing best practices and continuous improvement

processes and becoming a lifelong learner.

Finally, she suggested giving back: to the profession by volunteering with WASBO and to the greater school district community. Volunteering locally builds personal connections between the school district and the community, which will then be more likely to support district initiatives like referendums, she added.

"Find something that you're giving back to your community," Zimdars said. "Give from your head, give from your heart and give from your pocketbook."



"We can put all sorts of systems and policies in place but it's the people who add the value."



Accomplishments | RECOGNITION

The annual State Education Convention provides an opportunity to recognize some of the educators, administrators, and school board members that make public education great in Wisconsin.

Join us in honoring this year's award winners.

20-Year Service Award

Alan Zirzow and Carol Lambert, school board members for the Mishcot School District were congratulated by WASB Executive Director John Ashley for serving 20 years on their school board.

Other 20-year service award winners are: Marlane Anderson, Melrose-Mindoro; Leon Biesterveld, Little Chute Area; Eric Bloohm, Lomira; Deborah Briggs, Hamilton; Lyle Briggs, Cornell; James Crandall, Drummond; H Clay Dean, Riverdale; Christine Erickson, Grantsburg; Linda Flottum, Turtle Lake; Dennis Havlik, Westby Area; Stephen Hock, North Fond du Lac; Lynn Jaeger, Trevor-Wilmot; Charles Krueger, Cochrane-Fountain City; Susan Leibsle, Elkhorn Area; Wilson Leong, Milton; Janet Matthes, Kickapoo Area; Mark Mayer, Menasha; Charles Rasmussen, Glenwood City; Deborah Roberts, Kimberly Area; Wayne Roemer, Wild Rose; Joseph Simonich, Hurley; and Cathy Walsh, Greenfield.





30-Year Service Award

Thomas Stellmacher, a school board member for the Ripon Area School District, was honored for serving 30 years on

Other 30-year service award recipients are: Bernard Host, Bruce; Timm Johnson, Osceola; and Harold Olson, Galesville-Ettrick-Trempealeau.



■ Principals of the Year

From left: Jessica J. Johnson, Dodgeland Elementary School, Juneau, Dodgeland School District, Elementary School Principal of the Year; Richard L. Appel, Chilton Middle School, Chilton School District, Middle Level School Principal of the Year; Asta Sepetys, Wisconsin Heights Middle/High School, Mazomanie, Wisconsin Heights School District, High School Principal of the Year; and Lisa L. Rettler, Asa Clark Middle School, Pewaukee School District, Associate Principal of the Year.



Teachers of the Year

From left: Andrea Pasqualucci, Valley View Elementary School, Ashwaubenon School District, Special Services Teacher of the Year; Carla Kuffel, Cameron High School, Cameron School District, High School Teacher of the Year; Sarah Franson, Irving Elementary School, West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, Elementary School Teacher of the Year; and Diana Callope, Whitewater Middle School, Whitewater Unified School District, Middle School Teacher of the Year.



Special Services Director of the Year

Tammy Nyen, Wausau School District, was recognized by Gary Myrah, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Administrator of Special Services, as Special Services Director of the Year.

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Student Art Awards

Congratulations to our award-winning student artists, and a special thanks to our student video team

ach year, student artists from across Wisconsin are invited to participate in an annual art contest held in partnership between the WASB and the Wisconsin Art Education Association. Award-winning pieces from the following students were proudly displayed at the 2015 State Education Convention. Thanks to Liberty Mutual Insurance for their continued support of the annual art contest.

1st — **Brooklyn Elliot**, Lancaster High School, Lancaster Community Schools

2nd — **Madison Merrill**, Stratford High School, Stratford School District

3rd — **Tristen Prebeg**, Merrill High School, Merrill Community Schools

4th — Alyssa Shiffler, Union Grove High School

5th — **Erynn McNeill**, Central High School, School District of La Crosse

6th — **Emily Wegner**, Merrill High School, Merrill Community Schools

7th — **Mirada Roberts**, Beecher-Dunbar-Pembine High School, Madey Heimerl, Beecher-Dunbar-Pembine School District

8th — Aaron Pospyhalla, Stratford High School, Stratford School District

9th — Jane Pinkowski, Lincoln/SOTA2/ Coulee Montessori, School District of La Crosse

10th — Maddie Mattson, Madey Heimerl, Beecher-Dunbar-Pembine High School, Beecher-Dunbar-Pembine School District

Student Video Team

The WASB invited school districts to submit an application to have students attend the State Education Convention, tape highlights, and then produce a video. A group of students from Tomah High School were selected to take on this task and helped us capture the events, speakers, and other highlights at the 94th State Education Convention.

Special thanks to Tomah students Caleb Walz, Caleb Scott, Tanner Sutton, Tia Mayberry, Brittney Lasko, and teacher Brian Kibby. **Brooklyn Elliot** of Lancaster High School receives her 1st place student art award (right);

The student video team from **Tomah High School** interviews WASB Executive Director John Ashley (below)







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Employee Alcoholism under State and Federal Disability Law (Part 1)

chool districts are regularly faced with issues under both the Wisconsin Fair Employment Act ("WFEA") and the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"). One of the most challenging situations that districts face in regard to these laws is dealing with employees who suffer from, claim to suffer from, or appear to suffer from, alcoholism. Both the WFEA and the ADA recognize alcoholism as a disability that may be subject to legal protection. But the two laws differ in terms of both the analysis required to determine whether an employee's alcoholism qualifies as a disability and a district's legal obligations if it does.

This is the first part of a two-part Legal Comment that will explore some of the key considerations for a district dealing with these complex legal issues. The focus of this installment will be on identifying when an employee with alcohol issues is considered to have a disability under the ADA or WFEA, and, if so, the obligations imposed by these laws on a district. The second installment will review a district's legal obligation to accommodate such an employee with a disability.1

When is Alcoholism a Disability?

The first issue that a district will confront when dealing with an employee who may suffer from alcoholism is determining whether the employee's condition constitutes a

protected disability. This is a critical issue because it will define the scope of the district's legal obligations.

Under the ADA, an employee's alcoholism will be considered a disability if it substantially limits one or more of the employee's major life activities.2 The ADA's definition of "disability" is intended to be read broadly. "Major life activities" include such activities as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, or working. In addition, when determining whether an employee's alcoholism constitutes a disability under the ADA, a district may not consider the fact that the employee is receiving (or could receive) treatment that would reduce the impact of the alcoholism on the employee's major life activities.³ Instead, the employer must disregard any actual or potential treatments or other interventions that might reduce the impact of the condition on the employee's ability to engage in major life activities.

The WFEA, on the other hand. defines "disability" as a physical or mental impairment that makes achievement unusually difficult or limits the capacity to work.4 In the case of alcoholism, Wisconsin courts and the Labor and Industry Review Commission (LIRC) (the administrative body responsible for reviewing cases under the WFEA) appear to

have narrowed the definition of "disability." Specifically, the courts and LIRC have stated in multiple rulings that, for alcoholism to be considered a disability under the WFEA, the condition must be medically diagnosed and "non-volitional" (without free will). Moreover, in applying this rule, the courts and LIRC have made it clear that evidence of what might be commonly referred to as a "drinking problem" will generally not be sufficient to establish a legally protected disability of alcoholism, even if the "drinking problem" interferes with an employee's performance at work. An employee likely needs to provide an opinion from a psychiatrist or other medical professional documenting his or her alcoholism. Thus, employees generally face a higher burden under the WFEA (as compared to the ADA) in establishing that they suffer from alcoholism that constitutes a legally protected disability.

Applying the Legal Definition of Alcoholism in the Workplace

In addition to having to comply with different definitions of "disability" under the WFEA and the ADA, districts also face the challenge of applying these definitions to particular fact situations in the workplace. In ideal circumstances, an employee suffering from alcoholism would simply come forward with medical documentation substantiating the condition and supporting a request for a reasonable accommodation.

A district risks violating the WFEA if it takes adverse employment action against the employee on the basis of behavior that the employee can demonstrate was caused by his or her alcoholism.











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This rarely happens. Rather, in many cases, a district will notice problematic behavior or performance issues coupled with certain facts that suggest a link to the employee's use of alcohol. For example, an employee's rate of absenteeism or tardiness might increase at the same time the district begins hearing reports that the employee is regularly frequenting bars and drinking until late into the evening on school nights. Or an employee may openly discuss drinking habits at the same time that his or her job performance noticeably declines.

In both of these examples, a district might have grounds to take disciplinary action against the employee based on the change in the employee's on-the-job conduct or performance. At the same time, however, the district may also have reason to believe that the conduct or performance issues are related to a legally protected disability. These scenarios raise a difficult question: At what point does the district have a legal obligation to address the potential disability issue with the employee?

Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this question. In every case, the district will need to carefully consider all of the facts and circumstances at issue before proceeding with any disciplinary action and is advised to consult with legal counsel.

Districts must proceed with caution regarding these issues. Under the ADA and WFEA, an employer generally may not require an employee to submit to a medical examination or make a disability-related inquiry except when such are job-related and consistent with business necessity.5 Without some factual basis to connect an employee's performance or conduct to a potential disability, a district risks violating the ADA and WFEA by making a disability-related inquiry or asking the employee to submit to a medical examination. In most situations, the better practice is to proceed with addressing the conduct issue without raising the potential of a disability and to put the burden on

the employee to disclose the medical condition and request a reasonable accommodation. For example, it is not uncommon for an employee who is in the middle of a disciplinary investigation or due process meeting to bring up the issue of alcohol use in a manner that ties the employee's use of alcohol to the conduct at issue. Once the employee raises the issue, the district must address whether the employee has a disability which entitles the employee to a reasonable accommodation.

Perceived as Disabled

Both the ADA and the WFEA provide protections for employees who do not qualify as disabled under the law, but who are nevertheless "perceived as" disabled.6 A district, therefore, needs to consider the possibility of an employee making a "perceived as" disability claim if the employee is disciplined for alcoholrelated conduct. In particular, if a district is aware that an employee has issues with alcohol (e.g., the employee is commonly known to have a "drinking problem" or has previously brought up drinking in the context of a disciplinary meeting), but the employee's alcohol issues do not rise to the level of a disability under the ADA or the WFEA, the employee may nevertheless be able to claim that the district's disciplinary action was based on its perception that he or she was an alcoholic. This type of claim may also be made as a "back-up" claim by an employee who has claimed to suffer from the disability of alcoholism, but who cannot substantiate that claim with sufficient documentation.

Therefore, when a district makes a decision to discipline an employee for conduct that may be alcohol related, it must proceed with caution, even if the employee has not established that he or she suffers from legally protected alcoholism. There may not be a way to completely protect against the possibility of a "perceived as" disability claim, but a district can nevertheless reduce the risks associated with such a claim by making sure that it

has a solid and well-documented justification for any disciplinary action taken in regard to alcohol-related conduct. A district should make certain that the disciplinary action is based on the employee's conduct (even if that conduct was alcohol related) and not the fact that the employee has issues with alcohol.

Interactive Process

In any circumstance in which a district has determined that an employee suffers from alcoholism that qualifies as a legally protected disability, the district must then consider whether the employee is entitled to a reasonable accommodation for that disability. If the disability is interfering with the employee's ability to perform his or her job, the district generally will have a legal obligation to engage the employee in an interactive process to attempt to identify a reasonable accommodation that will permit the employee to adequately perform his or her job.

In the interactive process, the district and the employee must work together collaboratively to try to identify a reasonable accommodation. The interactive process is intended to be ongoing, and it may involve the consideration and implementation of any number of potential reasonable accommodations. As long as the district and the employee are able to identify additional potential reasonable accommodations, a district will generally have an obligation to continue to engage in the process. If a district causes a breakdown in the process by, for example, refusing to offer any reasonable accommodations or disciplining an employee when there are still potential reasonable accommodations that could be considered, it may be found liable for discrimination. On the other hand, if the employee causes a breakdown in the process by failing to provide necessary medical information or refusing to accept any of the reasonable accommodations proposed by the district, the district may be entitled to end the interactive process and discipline the employee.

Clemency and Forbearance and Behavior Caused by a Disability

While engaging an employee in the interactive process, the WFEA may require a district to afford the employee "clemency and forbearance" by temporarily suspending application of certain work rules if the employee's disability prevents him or her from complying with those rules.⁷ For example, if an employee's alcoholism prevents him or her from complying with the district's attendance policies, the district may have to suspend those policies for a period of time while the employee seeks treatment.

In addition, under the WFEA, a district may be prohibited from taking adverse employment action against an employee on the basis of any conduct that is caused by the disability. LIRC has concluded that taking adverse employment action on the basis of such behavior is equivalent to taking adverse action based on the disability, and therefore it is prohibited by the WFEA.8 Applying these principles to an employee who suffers from legally protected alcoholism, a district risks violating the WFEA if it takes adverse employment action against the employee on the basis of behavior that the employee can demonstrate was caused by his or her alcoholism.

These rules under the WFEA stand in stark contrast to guidance regarding an employer's legal obligations under the ADA. Both the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) and the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals (the federal appeals court with jurisdiction over Wisconsin) have advised that, under the ADA, an employer is entitled to hold an employee who suffers from the disability of alcoholism to the same standards of conduct as other employees. This means that for purpose of the ADA, an alcoholic

employee cannot use his or her alcoholism as a defense to disciplinary action. As a practical matter for Wisconsin districts, the more stringent protections of the WFEA will likely apply.

This puts districts in a tough position in certain situations. For example, one critical issue that has not been addressed by either the courts or LIRC is whether an employee who is intoxicated on the job would be protected from adverse employment action by the WFEA if the employee claims that the intoxication was due to his or her disability. Applying LIRC's rule that action taken by an employer in response to behavior caused by a disability is equivalent to taking action on the basis of that disability, it would be possible to conclude that on-the-job intoxication that is caused by an employee's disability would be protected conduct. From a district's perspective, however, it might seem unreasonable that an employee's on-the-job intoxication would need to be accommodated (particularly because it is clear that under the ADA a district would not be required to accommodate such misconduct). Nevertheless, until there is further guidance on this issue from LIRC or the courts, districts will need to consider the possibility that on-the-job intoxication might be legally protected under the WFEA if it is caused by an employee's alcoholism which meets the definition of a disability under the WFEA.

Conclusion

As this discussion illustrates, districts face a challenging task in determining whether and to what extent an employee who suffers from alcoholism is entitled to legal protections under the WFEA or the ADA. As such, districts should act with caution (and consider involving legal counsel) in situations where they suspect that an employee is having

performance or conduct issues that might be related to the use of alcohol, or where an employee brings up the issue of alcohol use in the context of a performance evaluation or disciplinary proceeding. The next installment of this Legal Comment will consider the equally (if not more) challenging issues that districts face when determining their legal obligations under the WFEA and the ADA in accommodating employees who suffer from alcoholism that qualifies as a legally protected disability.

End Notes

- 1. For additional information related to this topic, see Wisconsin School News, "Reasonable Accommodations for Employees with Mental Disabilities" (December 2009), "Employee Disability Discrimination" (February 2002), "Determining Essential Functions under the ADA (June 2000); see also WASB Legal Notes ""Implementing the American with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (Summer 2011), "Employees with Mental Disabilities and the ADA (Spring 2004), "Disability-Related Inquiries and Medical Examinations under the ADA (Fall 2000), "EEOC Issues Guidance on Reasonable Accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Part I and Part II, (Spring 1999 and Summer 1999), "Mental Impairments and the ADA" (Winter 1997), and "An Overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act: Employment Provisions" (November 1992).
- 2. 42 U.S.C s.12102(1).
- 3. 42 U.S.C s. 12102(4)(E).
- 4. Wis. Stat. s.111.32(8).
- 5. 29 C.F.R. s. 1630.14(c); Wis. Stat. s. 111.34(2)(a).
- 6. 42 U.S.C s.12102(1); Wis. Stat. s. 111.32(8).
- 7. Stoughton Trailers v. LIRC, 2007 WI 105.
- Maeder v. University of Wisconsin-Madison, (LIRC June 28, 2013).
- Ames v. Home Depot U.S.A., 629 F.3d 665 (7th Cir. 2011).

This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka, Steven C. Zach and Andrew N. DeClercq of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel.

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.

School Funding Takes Center Stage

Education issues will be at the heart of many debates of the 2015-16 Wisconsin Legislature



he 2015-16 Wisconsin Legislature is now in full swing. Education issues will be at the heart of many of the key debates. With issues affecting K-12 education playing such a prominent role and with so much at stake, it is incredibly important for school leaders, especially locally elected school board members, to make their voices heard.

Here is a summary of where a number of key education-related issues currently stand:

School Funding - A cut, a freeze, then a bit of a thaw

In early February, Gov. Scott Walker proposed a two-year (2015-17) state budget that eliminates a \$150 per-pupil aid payment due school districts in 2015-16. The loss of this aid will result in an immediate \$127 million cut to all school districts next year. Districts will be unable to make up for this cut in 2015-16 because per-pupil revenue limits are frozen at the 2014-15 level. (See below.) Per-pupil aid would be restored and slightly increased the following year (2016-17), when districts would receive approximately \$165 per pupil or \$141 million through this aid.

Although key majority Republican lawmakers say they support additional state K-12 education funding to restore this cut, your advocacy is needed. Many of these supportive legislators say the state's ability to

provide additional aid to schools will depend upon whether re-estimates of state revenues due in late April or early May show significant growth over earlier estimates. While that is encouraging, it suggests that if state revenue estimates don't increase, the cut could remain in place.

A key focus of the governor has been holding the line on property taxes. The proposed budget provides modest property tax relief (a \$5 cut for the typical homeowner in each year). This tax relief, however, is largely accomplished by clamping down on school spending — the proposed budget provides no increase in school district revenue limits in either year — and by channeling \$211.2 million over the biennium to the school levy tax credit, which lowers property tax bills.

The proposed budget provides a modest \$108.1 million increase in state general school aid in the second year. Because revenue limits are frozen, this increase will also result in no additional resources for school programs. Any additional aid districts receive must be used to reduce property taxes.

The bottom line is that while about \$320 million in additional state funding in the proposed budget is said to be "school-related," none of that money will provide additional resources to schools. It all goes toward reducing property taxes.

It is important that you communicate about your district's story about how the funding cut in the proposed budget and the freeze in revenue limits will affect the students you serve. You should be communicating with your parents, communities, local media and, especially, with your legislators about particular aspects of the budget bill that are of concern to you.

Public K-12 education is in competition with many other programs for scarce dollars in this state budget (as we describe below). Our success in securing additional funding will depend in large part on how well we communicate these stories and how persuasive we can be.

Voucher Expansion and **Changes in Voucher Funding**

The 2015-17 budget proposes expanding the state-wide voucher program for students from lowincome families by eliminating the 1,000-student cap on enrollment in the voucher program. But more than that, the budget bill also proposes paying for vouchers directly out of the state general aid — money public schools receive from the state a dramatic change.

In the past, vouchers have been funded from a separate appropriation. Now, under the budget as proposed, for every dollar that a new voucher student in the statewide program receives, public schools will receive less state aid. Beginning in

A key focus of the governor has been holding the line on property taxes ... largely accomplished by clamping down on school spending.

2015-16, resident districts of students who are entering the statewide voucher program for the first time would lose state aid for each new voucher entrant regardless of whether that student was ever enrolled in the district. And because those school districts can't raise property taxes to make up for this lost aid, this will be another cut for public school students. Beginning in 2016-17, affected districts would be eligible to receive aid on these new voucher students.

The WASB opposes the proposed voucher expansion and the changes to funding.

Accountability, Assessments and Academic Standards

Already, three competing versions of school accountability legislation one from Assembly leaders, one from Senate leaders, and one from the governor — have been introduced and two versions have been the subject of lengthy public hearings.

Key differences between the versions include: whether persistent low performance should trigger sanctions, such as a school's closure or its conversion into an independent charter school not overseen by the locally elected school board; whether all publicly funded students must take the same assessment or whether multiple tests will be used to gauge student academic performance; and whether (A-F) letter grades will be assigned to schools.

Sources indicate the State Assembly may move forward on its own version of accountability legislation, which includes sanctions on low-performing schools.

The proposed budget would effectively end the use of the Smarter Balanced assessment in grade 3-8 after 2014-15 by prohibiting the state superintendent from adopting or approving examinations developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and by prohibiting the state from participating in the Smarter Balanced Consortium upon the effective date of

the budget act. (The proposed budget, however, continues to provide state funding to cover cost increases associated with administering ACT testing for students in grades 9-11 and Dynamic Learning testing for students with disabilities.)

Under the proposed budget, schools and districts would be allowed to choose which assessments are administered to their students in 2015-16 and beyond. Assessment options would include a state test adopted and approved by the state superintendent as well as three to five alternative tests certified by the Value-Added Research Center (VARC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison although no funding is provided to VARC for this purpose. Presumably, if these provisions remain in the budget bill, the DPI would be required to put out an RFP to a variety of test vendors.

The WASB has argued strongly in favor of maintaining the current law requirement that all publicly funded students take the same test so student performance across all schools and sectors can be accurately compared.

Although the proposed budget doesn't explicitly prohibit the state superintendent from adopting or implementing a new and different test (other than Smarter Balanced) that is aligned to the Common Core standards, it prohibits the state superintendent from giving weight to any Common Core standards currently in effect and from adopting or implementing any new Common Core standards.

Sen. Paul Farrow (R-Pewaukee) appears poised to introduce a separate bill outside the budget that would give districts a one-year waiver from having to report student results on the Smarter Balanced exams for purposes of school report cards and Educator Effectiveness. An earlier proposal he floated to allow districts to opt out of administering the Smarter Balanced tests may be shelved because the state is required (at the possible risk of losing federal funding) by the No Child Left Behind (a/k/a ESEA) law and subsequent waiver to administer the same test to all public school students statewide that is aligned to college-and career-readiness.

WASB's Day at the Capitol

& Other Opportunities for Board Member Advocacy

learly, public school advocates, including board members, administrators, and the WASB government relations staff, have their work cut out for them. The WASB is here to help you. We especially encourage you to attend the WASB Day at the Capitol on Wednesday, March 18. It's your chance to join a broad-based coalition of school leaders who will gather in Madison to share common concerns and meet with legislators.

WASB staff will arrange meetings for you with the lawmakers who represent your district. Before your meetings you will receive briefings on the key provisions in the state budget, key talking points and training on how to effectively meet with your legislators.

Watch for Legislative Alerts on key budget provisions in your email inbox and read the weekly Legislative Update in the WASB eConnection weekly newsletter for more information about the budget bill, including information about any budget hearings in your area. Also, please visit our State Budget website for additional information. (On the WASB website, wasb.org, click on Advocacy and then State Issues.)

We encourage you to sign up for your legislators' E-Updates (e-newsletters) on their websites and check those websites for upcoming listening session announcements. These listening sessions are a great opportunity for you to meet locally with you legislators and to bring concerned parents and community members with you to share their concerns with. \Box

Every Child, Every Day

2014 WASB President Mike Blecha celebrates the role of public schools and urges school leaders to advocate for their schools

n a passionate address wrapping up his year as WASB President. Mike Blecha celebrated the important role public schools play in "educating every child, every day."

Blecha proudly pointed out that public schools educate those students going on to college, technical college, the military, and careers. Public schools also educate and support those students with special needs, students in poverty, homeless students, and students with little or no English.

"We educate them all," Blecha said. "We don't tell them, 'Sorry we don't have a program for you, you'd be better served elsewhere.""

Blecha listed several examples of Wisconsin public schools building partnerships in an effort to bring more opportunities to students. Several examples included school districts working with business, higher education, and community organizations to connect students to career pathways and post-secondary opportunities. Another example was a diverse school district working with stakeholders to identify the root causes of underachievement.

"We must continue to convince parents and their students that their school of choice and their best chance at academic success is their local, public school," Blecha said.

Not only do school districts need to refocus and reinvent themselves, but, Blecha said, the WASB is also evaluating its services and value to members. After input from the WASB Board of Directors, it was decided that the organization needs to focus on advocacy and board governance.

In the case of advocacy, Blecha said all school leaders, not just WASB staff need to be involved.

"Advocacy means far more than sending our lobbyist into the Capitol," Blecha said. "Advocacy



means standing up for the constitutional guarantee for all students to be provided a free and equitable public education."

Unfortunately, at this time, advocating for public education often means opposing certain mandates. Blecha warned that the WASB and school leaders cannot build a platform on negativity.

"If WASB becomes an organization that is simply opposed to certain things — opposed to private and religious school vouchers, opposed to special education vouchers, opposed to privatizing the charter school process — we become less effective," he said.

However, Blecha made clear that the WASB will continue to advocate

against these issues but also support those initiatives that help public education.

"We will continue to lobby on those critical issues along with advocating for the right for local school districts to implement the Common Core, and for a fair and equitable accountability system that assists, not demonizes struggling schools," he said.

Blecha left school leaders with a pertinent quote from Tom Brokaw, a graduate of a public school in North Dakota.

"Public education is the engine that moves us as a society to a common destiny," he said "It is in public education, Brokaw said, that the American dream begins to take shape."

Owens to Lead WASB in 2015

WASB Region 9 Director Wanda Owens was elected by the WASB Board of Directors as the 2015 WASB President. Owens is a member of the Barneveld School District.

Region 1 Director, Stu Olson, a school board member in the Shell Lake School District, was elected 1st Vice President. Capt. Terry McCloskey, USN Retired, a school board member in the Three Lakes School District, Region 2 Director was elected 2nd Vice President.

2015 **WASB**

Board of Directors



Wanda Owens President Barneveld, Region 9



Stu Olson 1st Vice President Shell Lake, Region 1



Capt. Terry McCloskey 2nd Vice President USN Retired Three Lakes, Region 2



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Share your success. Submit a proposal.

The WASB is inviting school districts to submit a proposal to present a one-hour session at the 2015 Summer Leadership Institute, taking place July 18 in Green Lake. Help other districts learn from your success.

We're looking for sessions on the following:

- Leadership
- Community engagement
- Student achievement
- School funding

Presenters receive complimentary registration.



2015 Summer Leadership Institute | Heidel House Resort & Spa | Green Lake |

Visit wasb.org

Convention Highlights



Thanks to the hundreds of school leaders from around the state who attended the 94th State Education Convention, Jan 21-23 in Milwaukee.





Of the Part of the

Students from the Auburndale School District, Cornell School District, Waukesha School District, and Wautoma School District participated in the School Fair where students share innovative programs in their school. Here students from **Auburndale High School** talk about a special hands-on class in which students learn about food preserving and processing.



District administrators from **Algoma** and **Southern Door** along with representatives from M3 Insurance, lead an interactive session on strategies to engage staff in healthy lifestyles.







NSBA President **Anne Byrne** attended the convention and gave an inspiring address. "The greatest legacy anyone can leave behind is to make a difference in the life of a child," Byrne said.



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UPCOMING PROGRAMS



March 18, 2015

DAY AT THE CAPITOL

MADISON,
THE MONONA
TERRACE &
STATE CAPITOL

Join school board members and administrators from around the state to take our message to state legislators at the Capitol!

On the agenda:

- 2015-17 State Budget
- School Accountability
- Student Achievement
- Voucher Expansion

MAY 2, 2015

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The Spring Academy will provide attendees with a foundation in board governance and policy-based decision making. Contemporary strategies for effective governance and emerging education issues will also be discussed.

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