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WISCONSIN SchoolNews

August 2025 | Volume 80 Number 1

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

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Wisconsin School News (USPS 688-560)
is published 10 issues per year by the
Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.,
122 W. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703.

Contents © 2025 Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.
Subscriptions are available to nonmembers for \$95 per year.
Periodicals postage is paid at Madison, Wis., and other
additional entry offices.

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

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



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The views of the authors and sources don't necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the WASB.

Nearly 100 Schools Named Wisconsin Schools of Recognition

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction announced on June 5 that 98 schools statewide earned Wisconsin Schools of Recognition honors for the 2023-24 school year.

"These awards celebrate the exceptional efforts of educators, students, families and school staff in ensuring educational success for all students, especially among those facing economic challenges," reads the DPI's press release on the Schools of Recognition Program, which launched in 2003 to recognize Title I schools for making significant strides in student growth and achievement.

"These schools exemplify what is possible when educators, families and communities come together with dedication, resilience and commitment to every learner," State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly said in the release. "Their success is proof that when communities come together to support students, remarkable

things happen. I am thrilled to recognize their hard work and continued commitment to student success."

Schools were honored in one or more of the following categories:

- **High Achieving Schools** (15 schools) rank in the top 10% statewide for academic achievement in reading and mathematics and demonstrate small or closing achievement gaps.
- **High Progress Schools** (24 schools) show significant growth in student outcomes or graduation rates, with measurable progress in closing gaps.
- **High Impact Schools** (70 schools) serve a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and demonstrate above-average achievement when compared to similarly situated schools. □

A full list of recipients and their categories can be found on www.dpi.wi.gov.

STAT OF THE MONTH

63%

Percentage of Wisconsin registered voters who are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the job public schools are doing in their community.

Source: Marquette Law School Poll

RECENT POLL

Wisconsin Voters Favor 'Major Increase' in Special Education Aid

Nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin voters favor "a major increase" in state aid for special education for public schools, according to the Marquette Law School Poll. The poll, conducted with 873 registered voters from June 13-19, found that 71% are in favor and 29% opposed. The question has been asked five times since 2019, with more than 70% supporting a state aid increase each time.

Additionally, the June poll found that 75% support providing comprehensive mental health services in schools statewide. The poll also found that 63% are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the job public schools are doing in their community, up from 58% in the February poll. □

Visit www.law.marquette.edu/poll/ to find the full results of the June poll.

Five Wisconsin Educators Named Teachers of the Year

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in partnership with The Herb Kohl Educational Foundation, have named five educators as 2026 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year. State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly surprised each honoree with the news during ceremonies at their schools.

The 2026 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year, released in full in a May 16 DPI press release, are:

- **Mark Acherman**, science teacher at Darlington Elementary/Middle School in Darlington Community School District
- **Joel Coyne**, business education teacher at Sun Prairie East High School in the Sun Prairie Area School District
- **Megan Dixon**, second grade teacher at Glenwood Elementary School in the School District of Greenfield
- **Toni Fink**, second grade teacher at Milwaukee Spanish Immersion School in Milwaukee Public Schools
- **Lisa Van Hefty**, special education teacher at O.H. Schultz Elementary School in the School District of Mishicot

Each Teacher of the Year will receive a \$3,000 award from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation. One of the five educators will also be selected to represent Wisconsin in the Council of Chief State School Officers' National Teacher of the Year Program. □

More information on the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year Program can be found on www.dpi.wi.gov.



Celebrating Engagement and Looking Ahead

As I write this month's column, I find myself filled with gratitude — for summer vacation adventures, the long golden hours of daylight and the abundance of garden-fresh produce. I hope you, too, are enjoying the warmth of the season, the joy of local fairs and festivals, and the simple pleasures that make Wisconsin summers so special.

August brings subtle yet unmistakable signs of change — earlier sunsets, later sunrises — gentle reminders that our glorious summers are fleeting. Soon, teachers will return for in-service days, fall sports will kick off and families will begin their familiar back-to-school preparations.

It's a time of renewed routines and shared energy — perfectly in sync with this month's theme: participation and engagement.

I'm especially thankful for the many school boards that have renewed their WASB membership and for the board members who continue to invest in their growth and development. Your commitment — your participation and engagement — strengthens our collective work.

We were thrilled to receive more than 200 breakout session proposals for the 2026 State Education Convention — from individual boards, CESAs, collaborative teams and business partners across the state. Your ideas and insights ensure the convention will be rich with relevant, timely content that addresses the real challenges facing our schools. Thank you for stepping up and sharing your expertise.

Now it's time for boards to consider submitting resolutions for the Delegate Assembly, which takes place in January during the convention. These resolutions shape the WASB's

policy direction, and your voice matters. Resolutions are due by September 15, and we encourage every board to participate — not just by submitting resolutions, but by attending the Delegate Assembly and casting your vote. To review the process and submit your resolution, visit [WASB.org/advocacy-government-relations/delegate-assembly](https://wasb.org/advocacy-government-relations/delegate-assembly).

I recently returned from our Summer Learning Symposium in Stevens Point, energized by the passion and dedication of the board members who joined us. Thank you for taking time out of your summer to deepen your understanding and strengthen your leadership. If you were unable to join us this year, recap the dynamic event by reading the September issue of the School News and following the WASB's YouTube channel.

Looking ahead, our next opportunity to engage in person is the Fall Regional Meetings, which will be held across the state from Sept. 23 through Nov. 6. These gatherings are a great opportunity to connect, learn and celebrate. At six of these meetings, members will elect representatives to the WASB Board of Directors. Every member board has a vote — your participation is vital.

We'll also be recognizing board members who have reached milestones in our Member Recognition Program — those who have shown a strong commitment to growth through active participation in WASB events and training. I look forward to celebrating each of you award winners in person. Turn to Page 26 for a deeper look at the Fall Regional Meetings.

I'm also grateful for the dedicated work of our Government Relations

team and the many board members and other school leaders who advocated for increased special education funding. Thanks to your efforts, the new state budget includes a significant boost in special education reimbursements, a long-standing WASB priority. For more on the 2025–27 state budget, see the Capitol Watch column on Page 28.

We recently welcomed three new interim directors. To the WASB Board of Directors, to read more about them and the regions they serve, visit [WASB.org/about-wasb/regionsdirectors](https://wasb.org/about-wasb/regionsdirectors). We've also had some staff changes this summer. Since welcoming Kara Conley to the Legal Services team in June, we have also bid farewell to a valued employee and congratulated another on a well-deserved promotion.

Turn to Page 27 to read the latest WASB staff updates and get an early look at the first keynote speaker announced for the 2026 State Education Convention. I'm excited to hear her story in Milwaukee, and I can't wait to reveal the rest of our keynote lineup in the coming weeks.

Now, let's dive into stories of amazing students making a difference in their communities. This issue highlights how participation in activities and athletics fosters achievement and belonging. You'll find stories on an adaptive triathlon in Kaukauna (Page 4), the impact of student board representatives (Page 6), the WIAA Student-Athlete Leadership Team (Page 20) and more.

Thank you for all you do to support your students, your schools and each other. Your participation and engagement makes a difference — every day, in every way. Enjoy the rest of your summer. ■



Breaking Boundaries and Expectations

By Anne Davis

For the Hoppe family, the Breaking Boundaries triathlon in the Kaukauna School District is a family affair.

Last year, Gabe, then a junior at Kaukauna High School, competed in the annual event for the first time, with his sister, Ava, serving as his mentor. The senior siblings participated again this spring, while their freshman sister, Emma, also mentored Gabe.

“This is probably the only thing that the three of them have been able to do together in their entire school career,” says their mother, Sarah Hoppe. “It’s really cool. They know this is a big deal for Gabe and they want to be there to support it.”

The event was a big deal, not just for Gabe but for every student from the Kaukauna, Kimberly and Little Chute high schools who participated in the 2025 adaptive triathlon for students with special needs on May 16. The students swam four lengths of the pool at the Heart of the Valley YMCA, then biked 3.4 miles along a nature trail and walked or ran 1.2 miles to the finish line at Kaukauna High School.

In preparation for the event, the athletes work with mentors, who are fellow students from their school.

“It means more for their peers to come alongside them and support them,” says Jill Lotzer, the work-based learning and transition coordinator at

Kaukauna High School.

Lotzer started the triathlon in 2019 after taking students to a similar event in Pulaski for several years. As interest and participation grew, she decided it was time to host an adaptive triathlon in Kaukauna. Besides promoting a healthy lifestyle, one of the goals is to give students with special needs a chance to experience pride in their athletic accomplishments, just as members of school sports teams do. The athletes are given a huge send-off at the high school and are cheered by elementary students and a crowd of community members along the route. They are welcomed again at the finish line. They wear custom

“This event brings all students together

to celebrate perseverance, teamwork and achievement, while building deeper understanding and connections across our school community.”

— Mike Slowinski, Kaukauna Superintendent

t-shirts, earn medals and even have their lockers decorated.

“That’s what it’s all about,” Lotzer says. “Making these kids feel like they’re part of something special.”

Kaukauna Superintendent Mike Slowinski calls the triathlon “a powerful reflection of our commitment to inclusion, empathy and community in the Kaukauna Area School District.”

“This event brings all students together to celebrate perseverance, teamwork and achievement, while building deeper understanding and connections across our school community,” he adds. “We are incredibly proud of our student-athletes who train year-round for this moment, and grateful for the community partners who help make it possible. Together, we are creating meaningful opportunities that uplift every student and reflect the strength, unity and heart of Kaukauna.”

Community sponsors help defray the cost of the t-shirts, medals and food served that day.

Sarah Hoppe and her family heard about the event after moving from Texas to Kaukauna last year. Sometimes cautious about trying new things, Gabe was initially a little reluctant to participate. That quickly changed.

“Gabe loved the event,” Sarah says. “He was exhausted by the end, but he was so excited. This was something that was Gabe’s. He really felt like it was awesome.”

She could tell how much it meant to him when he kept wearing his triathlon shirt. Gabe, who has autism, always wears exactly the

same brand and type of shirt. To make an exception “was huge,” according to his mom.

It was clear Gabe would be competing again in 2025. After watching her siblings participate the first year, Emma decided she wanted to be part of the experience.

“I thought it would be a good opportunity to get to do something to bond with my siblings,” she says of serving as a mentor.

Ava agrees, calling it a “great experience, not just for the athletes but the mentors as well.”

“I think it’s a real good way to raise awareness that people with disabilities are just as able as people without disabilities,” she says of how the event sends an important message to the community.

This was the third year Kaukauna senior Michael D’Amico participated in the event. Lotzer suggested it to him when he was a sophomore, and he was all in.

“He was adamant about doing it right away,” says his mother, Katrina D’Amico. “Even though it was a lot of hard work, he was very proud of himself.”

Michael, whose favorite leg of the triathlon is swimming, says he made new friends and was happy when he completed the event.

Gabe didn’t hesitate to describe his feelings about the triathlon.

“It was great. It was amazing. It was awesome.” In other words, an incredible day. ■

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

PARTICIPANTS...



SWAM 4 POOL LENGTHS

at the Heart of the Valley YMCA.



BIKED 3.4 MILES

along a local nature trail.



WALKED OR RAN 1.2 MILES

to the finish line at Kaukauna High School.



Bringing Student Voice to the Table

How student board representatives influence decisions, share input and advocate for their peers

By Brock Fritz

Tune into a School District of Lodi School Board meeting, and you'll see a student at the table. And not just metaphorically. For the past two years, 2025 Lodi High School graduate Caleb Rotzoll has pulled up a chair alongside the rest of the board members to talk about everything happening in the district.

"They sit at the table. They're up there the whole time," Lodi Superintendent Vince Breunig says of the district's student board representative, a position that was created about five years ago. "They wanted to have some student voice. We have nametags in front of every board member. On the back, it says, 'Do what's best for kids.' That's what faces them. It's hard to do that if you're not listening to kids."

While the nametag is a good reminder, so is the talented, engaged student sitting across the table from them. As a non-voting advisory member, Rotzoll and his predecessors are there to remind the board that their decisions aren't made in a vacuum.

"It's my responsibility to inform the board of the consensus of my

classmates regarding certain decisions," says Rotzoll, an incoming UW-Madison freshman who plans to student political science before going to law school to become a prosecuting attorney. "It is easy for students' opinions to be drowned out and pushed aside. I wanted to change that and cultivate an environment where the student body felt comfortable sharing their opinions on key issues. I'm fortunate to have sat on a board where my voice and my peers' voices were always heard and valued."

Across the state in Altoona, Amaia Mohr and Mary Fedie served as student board reps during the 2024-25 school year. Their role? Provide the student perspective and communicate the student body's needs and wants to the board.

"The fact that there's an allotted time in every single board meeting for my fellow representative and me to share our student experiences goes to show how genuine the school board's desire is to learn and improve," says Mohr, a rising senior. "I like to think of myself as a messenger as well as a representative. I participate in many

different clubs and activities in order to get to know as many students as possible."

■ Joining the board

Just as regular board members are elected to serve terms, the students are selected by their peers. In Lodi, candidates put together a campaign video prior to the fall election by the student body. After the election, Breunig sits down with the new student board rep to discuss the role and the process.

"Caleb ran because he's thinking law and politics might be something he wants to do when he gets older," Breunig says. "During COVID, a student ran who wasn't happy with what the district was doing COVID-wise. She was not shy about sharing her opinion with the board during board meetings, which was great. She brought the student perspective. Just like with every public official, it's not everyone's perspective, but it's a lot closer to the student perspective than I'm going to bring or any board members are going to bring."

In Altoona, Fedie's teachers inspired her to become a student rep.

“As someone who wants to be a teacher, I wanted to learn more about what goes on behind the scenes,” says the two-year student representative. “Special education and inclusive environments are topics that are important to me. Having diversity in school, whether it be diverse students or diverse opportunities, is such an important part of education and something that I have come to love learning about and discussing.”

“I saw a chance to provide a service for my fellow students that, if done correctly, would result in real change,” Mohr adds of why she applied for the role.

■ Engaging in the process

It’s a role the student representatives don’t take lightly. Fedie, who will attend the University of Kansas this fall to study Unified Early Childhood Education, was so nervous before her first official meeting that she and her dad attended the previous one to prepare for the role.

Mohr says her first meeting was “an organized blur of speedy roll call and important, foreign discussion of budget and curriculum policy.”

The more they engaged in the process, the less “blurry” the meetings became.

“Honestly, I had a very vague idea of what the school board was and did when I applied for the school board rep position. I had little idea of the government process that took place in those school board meetings — the learning process was endlessly interesting,” Mohr says. “I’ve learned how much the people leading the school care about students’ everyday lives. The board makes even the most seemingly inconsequential aspects of our day a priority. I’ve learned how much thought and effort go into every single lesson we’ve been taught, and how wide the impact of board decisions reaches across the school.”

“Education policies have always been something that I was interested in, so once I started researching, I don’t think I’ve ever fully stopped,” Fedie adds of her growth. “I’ve

ASK THE STUDENTS

What advice would you give to other students who might be interested in serving as a student board rep?



AMAIA MOHR “Find out where your passion lies and pursue it. If that passion has anything to do with leadership, helping others, learning and listening, or having new experiences, I think that a student school board rep is a great role to pursue.”



CALEB ROTZOLL “Consult your peers as much as possible and look for other points of view. As you’re elected by them, you should present the board with the complete picture of what your peers are thinking. It is not enough to present them with one point-of-view, inform them of everything people think. Next, take no piece of student opinion lightly. Your peers elected you to represent them at the highest calling they can. When someone comes to you with a problem they’re facing, it is your responsibility to make an attempt to help them fix or overcome that. If that is talking to the admin team, or counselors, or student groups, or including it in your board report, you absolutely should do everything you can to help that problem be resolved. Even if you’re not the one who necessarily fixes it, you should connect them with the people who can.”



MARY FEDIE “If education is something that they are passionate about then there is no better way to learn about education than being a representative on the school board. I would say that while sometimes at school board meetings the topics aren’t always positive or happy, that the change that you can make by sharing your student perspective is something that is worth every minute of every board meeting.”

learned what it truly takes to run a school and create successful learners. From maintenance on a roof to getting new pencils for a classroom, all of these things are essential in helping students be successful. There is this trickle-down process where something will start at the school board and, eventually, I'll start to see those changes reach individual students. Policies, curriculum and funding are the backbones of education when it comes to supporting students and their teachers."

The student board reps also get a behind-the-scenes look at that decision-making process. Rotzoll says one of his biggest takeaways has been the importance of discussion versus debate.

"Often in our society, when politics are discussed, it becomes a debate of opinions and egos," Rotzoll says. "However, being a part of the board has taught me that discussions and, eventually, decisions, while heavily influenced by personal politics, are the means by which decisions are made. Therefore, the healthy manner in which they are carried out is the seed of democracy."

■ Unlocking all-around benefits

While the students get an opportunity to share their voice, prepare for their future and engage in decision-making, Breunig believes that every aspect of the school district benefits from the arrangement:

1. The student board representative.

"I hope they get a great experience and understand what it's like to serve your community, and that you can't please everybody," Breunig says. "You see these people on the board who you get to know and like as people who sometimes say things that you don't agree with. Yet they're still nice to each other, they still get along. You hope they learn that's how it should work, versus what we see on TV or social media sometimes when it comes to politics."

"Do what's best for kids."

It's hard to do that
if you're not
listening to kids."

— Vince Bruenig,
Lodi Superintendent

2. School board members. "I hope the board gets a connection with kids," Breunig says, noting that Lodi's board has enjoyed getting to know each of its student reps. "And it's a constant reminder that every decision they make is impacting kids. It's a constant reminder of why those decisions they make are so important, and how they frame them."

3. The school district. "I hope we get to hear the student voice, and we make better decisions because of it," Breunig says. "Every decision's not perfect, we make mistakes, but the more we take into account how it's going to impact kids and their families, the better decisions we're going to make."

■ Creating positive change

That scenario recently played out in Lodi, where a group of students approached the board about the stall doors in the women's bathroom. Swinging inward, it was a tight squeeze for anyone looking to use the stall. However, simply flipping the hinges around to swing outward became another accessibility hurdle. Therefore, the student group engaged, attended committee meetings and recently presented in front of the board, where their proposed modifications were approved.

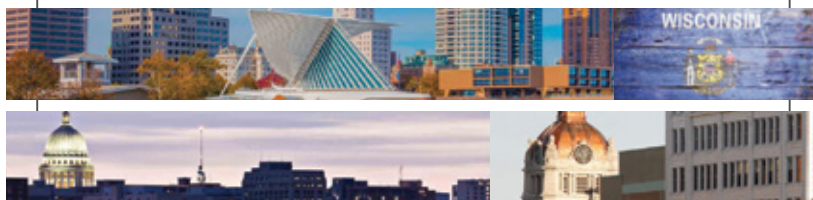
Breunig saw lightbulbs going off throughout the process, noticing that members of that group also picked Caleb's brain about the board and the student representative position. It's a role that Fedie is glad she pursued.

"By sharing my experiences and my voice, I have been able to reach others and allow for positive changes to be made," Fedie says. "Students or parents will come up to me and ask about policies. Being someone people feel comfortable approaching has been so rewarding."

For Rotzoll, the most rewarding part of his two-year experience is simple: "Watching my peers make the high school they want." ■

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DECLINING Enrollment

HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE STATE CAN RESPOND

By RJ Larson

The phrase “numbers don’t lie” rings true when looking at the impacts of declining enrollment on Wisconsin’s public schools. Data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction shows that 73% of public school districts faced declining enrollment in 2023-24.

Enrollment studies by Sarah Kemp at the UW-Madison Applied Population Lab indicate that Wisconsin public schools lost 4.8% of their students between 2019 and 2024, with enrollment projected to decline by another 7% by 2028-29.

The issue is widespread, raising the question: What are the local and statewide impacts of declining enrollment on public education in Wisconsin?

Anne Chapman, research director at the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, explained

that because school district revenues are driven by enrollment, even a 1% loss of enrollment can have major impacts on a district’s financial picture. As a district loses enrollment-based revenues, its resources diminish more rapidly than its costs are reduced – especially in the short term. Even losing a few students throughout the K-12 grade span can result in thousands of dollars in lost revenue per student. Yet, in that scenario, the district will retain most, if not all, of the costs.

“Left unaddressed, enrollment losses could increase costs beyond available revenues,” says Chapman. “This forces districts to remain mired in damage control mode, with the potential to cause the breadth and quality of educational programming to suffer.”

According to Chapman, rural districts are especially vulnerable because their high per-pupil costs and narrow financial margins for

spending on educators, transportation, administration and other needs place them at greater risk for resorting to deficit spending. The students who suffer the most from this situation are economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and English learners, all of whom are projected to increase in numbers over the next five years.

Chapman explains that these students require additional resources that districts struggle to find because state funding to address their needs is scarce and general revenues for schools have lagged behind inflation for the past 16 years.

Declining enrollment also hurts districts’ ability to keep up with routine maintenance, make facility improvements and develop educational offerings that would



Anne Chapman

73% of public school districts
faced declining enrollment in 2023-24

“The state has a role to play to ensure districts have resources to activate long-term strategies that equitably mitigate harms to students and communities.”

— Anne Chapman, Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials research director

help retain and attract students. This not only hurts students but also taxpayers, often causing districts to resort to operating referendums.

Although many school districts in Wisconsin are dealing with these issues, Chapman believes they can work with the state to counter the negative impacts.

“This is a statewide and a state-level problem. Districts cannot solve this issue alone,” Chapman says. “The state has a role to play to ensure districts have resources to activate long-term strategies that equitably mitigate harms to students and communities.”

■ State policy options

So, what strategies are available to the state and local districts to address the effects of declining enrollment? Chapman suggests a selection of promising ideas that have been studied or proposed by education policy experts, featured in Wisconsin’s 2019 Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding recommendations or implemented in other states, including:

1. Modify hold harmless provisions to smooth transition to lower enrollments. This strategy calculates revenue limits using a longer time horizon than the three-year rolling average that is used in current law. Instead of using the prior year’s rolling average as the base year, a fixed base year is picked for all subsequent years. Districts could receive 90% of what an enrollment decline would have generated (up to a loss of 10%). This gives districts more time to adjust to decreasing revenues and lets them plan for referendums and build long-term

strategies to “right size” for permanent enrollment losses.

This is not a long-term solution, as it can divert state and local resources away from other high-priority needs. Additionally, it may penalize districts that see enrollment rebounds or increases. The state should design hold harmless provisions to balance district revenue stability with the need to make long-term changes to finance structures.

2. Invest resources into highest need areas. Rather than addressing enrollment variations directly, policy-makers could invest in areas of greatest student need, such as special education and other programs that have the potential to narrow achievement gaps, close funding disparities and advance the educator workforce. The state could also reinstitute inflation indexing for the revenue limit, which would restore a prior statutory guarantee of general spending authority that, at minimum, matches inflation.

3. Provide state incentive grants and support for enrollment transition. Alongside hold harmless policies, the state could provide guidance and incentive grants to support school districts with structural shifts in operations and facilities that position them for long-term financial sustainability amid enrollment losses.

4. Provide incentives to districts to consolidate or share services. The state could offer incentives for districts to work together in a number of ways:

- Allow two or more districts to create new K-8/Union High School districts.
- Provide funding to undertake

whole grade-sharing agreements.

- Provide per-pupil adjustment through state aid or revenue limit to consolidating districts.
- Provide grants for feasibility studies.
- Provide gradually phased-out state aids to help smooth out disparate property tax rates between consolidating districts.
- Provide incentive aid for districts sharing administrative positions.

5. Increase per-pupil funding. Keeping total state appropriations and local spending flat as enrollment goes down (i.e., allowing revenue limits per pupil to increase with neutral effect on property taxes) could generate more per-pupil resources for schools without raising state/local investments. This would allow districts to provide more educational opportunities for remaining students amid declining enrollment.

Because referendums have become a key tool for districts to try to offset enrollment-based losses, Chapman believes this could be a win-win for everyone since there would be no increase in state and local spending, but possibly fewer referendums.

6. Place funding priority on district schools. Just as districts have to consider “right-sizing strategies” to adjust their facilities planning and educational resources to enrollment declines, the state could ensure the districts it is constitutionally required to support have sustainable funding and that their students’ needs are met before increasing resources for alternative K-12 options, such as voucher and independent charter schools.

The most important thing districts must do is be honest with the community about the struggles of declining enrollment.

In recent history, state policy has not adequately addressed the needs of students in public schools. Although the fiscal challenges posed by declining enrollment cannot be fully addressed without changes to state policy, Chapman identifies several strategies within district control to help them cope financially with enrollment losses.

■ School district strategies

The first task for districts is identifying the sources and reasons for falling enrollment. These may include a population decrease of school-age children, families migrating out of the area, families choosing other schools before trying the local public school and students leaving the district to attend other schools.

“Families leave for legitimate reasons. Listen to families who are staying, not just critics,” says Chapman. “Keep doing what’s working for them.”

Once districts determine their local reasons for declining enrollment, potential strategies include:

1. Explore methods to attract and retain students. One option many districts employ to combat declining enrollment is district-run charter schools. Districts can use these to attract new families and staff with specific preferences through specialized offerings and academic interests.

Districts can also partner with local business leaders to develop and offer specialized career pathways/academies. Additionally, districts may explore learning options and platforms that cater to diverse student needs, such as flexible scheduling, dual enrollment and high-quality virtual or blended learning.

While each of these programs has

upsides, Chapman notes that they offer limited cost savings and have upfront costs.

2. Share/consolidate services. Districts can address declining enrollment by exploring shared or consolidated services, with the goal of retaining instructional flexibility while consolidating administrative and operating costs.

A popular choice for districts has been sharing services such as special education, art, music, library and extracurriculars between school buildings or districts. Others are sharing costs by offering dual enrollment with institutions of higher education for certain programs. Additionally, districts can share/consolidate administrative positions and functions through multiple buildings.

3. Close schools. Although it’s not a popular choice for districts, Chapman notes that closing schools is an option that many districts may need to consider depending on the extent of enrollment losses they are confronting. Reducing the number of school buildings can save districts in facility maintenance and staffing costs while providing opportunities to consolidate offerings for specific grades or student groups in one building to improve equity.

However, Chapman adds that there are many challenges associated with closing schools, such as:

- Longer bus rides.
- Limited savings from staff reductions, with many teachers relocated to the remaining schools.
- Staff departures due to unwillingness to move.
- Declines in staff morale.

- Loss of a major employer in the community.
- Fewer opportunities for small, rural schools with less economies of scale.
- Higher short-term costs.
- Program cuts can harm student achievement and outcomes.

4. Communicate and engage with the community. Chapman says the most important thing districts must do is be honest with the community about the struggles of declining enrollment. Districts need to explain the challenges associated with the lack of state funding and the growing costs of educational programming.

Additional strategies include:

- Listen and gather feedback from parents, students and the community through surveys, listening sessions and monitoring social media.
- Be honest and initiate conversations about long-term structural solutions to operating as a smaller school system.
- Help the community understand and support district plans. Avoid putting off needed major structural budget strategies to adjust to the new smaller revenue reality. Show how it will preserve resources for existing students.

Districts may be able to achieve some savings from these techniques, but they will not solve the issues caused by state policy that results in insufficient funding for public schools. The state plays a critical role in enacting policies and providing support that put the right tools in districts’ hands to confront enrollment losses efficiently, equitably and sustainably. ■

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Student Voice

in School Climate and Culture



Holmen High School builds a program that works for them

By Ross Herdina

One reality to face when building a successful student leadership program in a school district is that success doesn't happen overnight.

Culture and connectedness take time to build, but they pay dividends. However, this can't be forced onto kids. They need to be part of building and carrying out the culture and connectedness they wish to see.

The success of Holmen High School's student leadership team has taken 28 years. Their commitment to student-centered leadership wasn't about a trendy idea, but a purposeful vision to create a school where all belong and feel included.

"Our student leadership team is a testament to the impact of student-driven culture," Holmen High School Principal Wayne Sackett says. "As we continue to evolve and grow, our focus remains on living out our mission: Belong – Serve – Succeed. Their success hasn't come from chasing trends, but from a steadfast commitment to inclusivity, connection and authentic leadership — created by students, for students."

In the summer of 2024, the program's staff advisers decided to do an in-house leadership workshop for their student leaders. The kids were engaged, driven and owners of their culture. They were hungry to know how to be good leaders so that all students in their school felt seen, valued and like they truly belonged.

The workshop allowed the students to dive deep into what leadership in action looks like. Each student discovered their leadership



style and an understanding of how they would live out their program's mission: The commitment to building a positive school environment, the students' love for their school, and their desire to create a welcoming atmosphere that excites them to show up every day.

■ Why students should lead culture

Research highlights the strong link between a student's sense of connection to their school and their academic and mental health outcomes. EdResearch for Action reported that positive school experiences significantly influence academic performance, attendance, graduation rates and post-secondary success. The stronger the connection, the more favorable the outcomes.

Most students find engagement through extracurricular activities like clubs and sports. However, school leadership committees often lack diversity among participants. To foster school connectedness, embracing cultural diversity through inclusive curricula and family involvement is a proven, evidence-based practice. This approach is equally important in

student leadership committees, ensuring diverse representation that reflects and inspires the broader student body.

At Holmen High School, inclusion was a top priority. It had to be effective, not just another fad around student-led ideas. They recognized that success required representation from all student groups within their leadership committee. Embracing every facet of diversity — from diverse backgrounds to unique lived experiences — was essential.

As society changes and students change, schools also change. It's important that students feel empowered to create their own environments and cultures they identify with. This builds ownership and connectedness.

"Leadership here isn't imposed; it's nurtured through trust, support and a shared mission to build a school community where every student feels seen, heard and valued," Sackett says. "The journey of our Holmen student leadership team invites us all to consider how we create spaces where students lead the way in shaping our school culture to actualize our mission."

EdResearch's Findings agree with what students have been asking for all along — that student culture be built by students, for students.

Holmen's school advisers heard this loud and clear. Rather than dictate what the student leadership team experiences, their mission is to guide students as they create the culture they want to see. What happens and how it happens are developed by the students, with guidance that empowers them to learn about themselves and each other.

The students get together, brainstorm ideas and receive guidance. Advisers work hard to develop a sense of family. Most of their time is spent coordinating the schedule, connecting resources and listening to the students to show they deeply care.

"Our role is not to dictate but to guide. We have built a leadership team that reflects the diversity of our student body and empowers students to take ownership of their school culture," adviser Lindsey Seipp says, noting that when students plan activities and events, they develop leadership skills while celebrating and uplifting their peers. "We provide training and opportunities for students to explore what leadership looks like, sounds like and feels like in action. Their lived experiences and

vision for their school drive our work, and we are here to help them navigate discussions and decision-making. Ultimately, this is their journey, and we are honored to walk alongside them."

■ Building on a strong history

According to Erin Foster, a lead adviser to the committee, the results stem from years of commitment.

"Holmen High School has been a Jostens Renaissance School since 1997, when the principal at the time embraced the idea of celebrating student academic achievement, recognizing staff for their dedication, and fostering a culture and climate that promotes success," Foster says, noting that the Renaissance program has evolved over the past 28 years.

Holmen experienced many changes — different advisers, students, administrators and a growing student population. Yet, one thing has remained constant: The commitment to building a positive school environment, the students' love for their school, and their desire to create a welcoming atmosphere that excites them to show up every day.

The School District of Holmen has worked hard to increase awareness of the student leadership

team among the entire student body. This encourages students from all groups to apply to join. Within the student group, it is crucial that every voice is heard and that all students feel represented.

The student learning team's officers and students work not only to communicate with their social peer groups but also to engage with classmates outside of their tight-knit circles, listening to students' needs and desires.

■ Inclusivity with intention

According to Hanna Niccum, one of the advisers, "The large group meetings are where they strive to foster inclusivity. To make this possible, we've created small groups within the larger meeting, organized and led by student officers. This allows for a more intimate, family-like atmosphere, where students can share ideas and concerns if the larger group feels overwhelming."

Recognizing her personal growth, sophomore Adalyn Xiong was nervous to be in a group with upperclassmen but quickly adapted and learned how to show her true self to others. She says one of the biggest things she has taken away from the student leadership team "is that it's OK to be yourself, and it's even better to connect with others and be inclusive."

Commitment is not only expected during advisory time but also beyond it, as the team works to make Holmen a better place by celebrating both staff and students.

What happens and how it happens are developed by the students, with guidance that empowers them to learn about themselves and each other.



“This is their school.

**They have a pulse
on the student body
and a vision for the
environment they
want to create.”**

— Erin Foster, Holmen Student Leadership Team lead advisor



The members dedicate a lot of time and effort to this role. This family dynamic shines most when students struggle to manage the many responsibilities of being a high school student.

“When members are overwhelmed with academics, extracurriculars and other commitments, we support one another by sharing responsibilities, cheering each other on and reminding ourselves of our collective commitment to being student leaders,” Niccum says.

This close-knit feel of the group is what keeps the students engaged and dedicated to being active members of the student leadership team, with senior student leader Tanvi Shenoy saying, “it is easy to get caught up in the differences, but the student leadership team has taught me to prioritize the similarities I have with others ... and promote positivity with everyone.”

■ Managing challenges from fundraising to student schedules

High school leadership groups face constant challenges, starting with the need for effective fundraising to support their initiatives. While the student leadership team has a small budget from the school, most money is brought in through fundraising efforts that support the mission of promoting school culture. This is done through cupcake and candy programs, a school dance, middle school fun nights, a golf outing and the

concession stand at district events.

However, maintaining student motivation proves the most difficult, especially with academic pressures and competing interests in clubs, sports, and other school and community activities. The lack of time, coupled with a lack of a clear understanding of teen leadership, has required the advisers to dedicate time to teaching principles and characteristics of leadership, and identify ways to allow practical leadership opportunities within the school.

With all the variables that come into play with designing a successful leadership program, Holmen took the step to customize their program in a few ways.

“We utilize the resources provided by Renaissance while also empowering our student-led leadership group to take the lead,” Foster says. “This is their school — they have a pulse on the student body and a vision for the environment they want to create. Our focus is always on building character, fostering a positive atmosphere and celebrating everyone, ultimately strengthening students’ sense of belonging.

“We take pieces from different places and have been able to create a truly unique and tailored program that meets the needs of Holmen High School. We ask our student leaders and officers to be actively

involved in the decision-making process and focus groups.”

■ Evolving and growing

As the student leadership team evolves, the advisers are continually seeking ways to increase engagement and involve more students. The opportunities for their work and impact have also grown. In the past, any student who wanted to join the team could participate. Now, the students have implemented an interview process to ensure commitment and alignment with leadership responsibilities. To aid in being as inclusive and equitable as possible, embedding it in the school day will continue to be a central component.

“We have grown to be bolder with our actions,” says junior Isaac Vue, a student leader “We carry our influence as individual leaders and hand it off to others — not just making others copy us, but making them their own leaders.”

Any school district looking to empower student voices can begin employing that same thought process by asking themselves, “What steps can we take to drive student-led school culture and leadership teams?” ■

Ross Herdina is a leadership development facilitator and education consultant working with the Holmen School District. He can be reached at rossherdina@gmail.com.



Making Smart Energy Choices

How districts can invest in renewable energy technologies

By Mike Herbst and Carolyn Hahn

The West Allis-West Milwaukee School District recently faced a problem that has become common in schools throughout the state and country.

Their energy needs were quickly outgrowing their energy resources.

District leaders took their first step toward solving their energy deficit by addressing lighting issues in 2018. They contacted Faith Technologies Incorporated, which procured, installed and optimized a network lighting system and supported the existing warranty for all 17 schools in the district for five years (the district consolidated to 15 schools in 2023-24).

While lighting controls can be complex, the district sought to optimize energy savings while ensuring a functional, reliable system that was easy to use.

This project was part of the district's broader efforts to improve energy efficiency and explore sustainable solutions.

"It's our responsibility to be thoughtful stewards of our resources, both financial and environmental," West Allis-West Milwaukee Director of Communications and Engagement Carolyn Hahn says. "Reviewing our energy systems allows us to identify

areas for improvement, increase efficiency and plan for the future. These efforts not only help us reduce costs and extend the life of our buildings, but also reflect our commitment to creating sustainable, healthy learning environments for our students and staff."

Just the beginning

Many school districts have outdated, inefficient lighting systems, but lighting is just the beginning. There's an entire energy system. And factors such as rising energy costs and evolving regulations can lead school leaders to assess their district's overall energy usage and consider solutions.

Exploring energy conservation and generation can help schools manage costs while ensuring reliable power for their operations. Renewable energy options, like solar or wind power, are becoming more cost-effective, and advancements in battery storage can enhance energy reliability.

Below is a step-by-step approach for school districts looking to assess their energy use and determine what solutions are right for their school community:

STEP 1: Energy usage assessment. Understanding real-time energy

consumption is a critical first step in making data-driven energy decisions. Districts that assess energy usage and identify ways to improve it can save energy and costs while reducing emissions through energy modeling, which helps eliminate uncertainty in energy projects. Running iterations of solar, storage, electric vehicle charging, grid tied- and backup scenarios turns a complex process into simple visual outputs that are easy to understand. Financial assessment of energy projects demonstrates utility costs, energy savings and project economics in a transparent way.

STEP 2: Energy conservation.

Switching to light emitting diode lighting and installing building automation to monitor and control energy use are common applications of conservation. There are many other ways that school districts can consume less energy, which is often the simplest first step to take.

STEP 3: Energy generation.

Energy generation is an important consideration for future and current energy needs, especially with options to lease. Producing renewable energy onsite via wind



Rising energy costs and evolving regulations can lead school leaders to assess their district's overall energy usage and consider solutions.

or solar can accelerate clean energy goals while sustainably powering and heating campus buildings and reducing costs. Districts may find solar energy solutions too costly, but by regularly evaluating their energy systems, school leaders can follow price fluctuations and engage in a cost-benefit analysis.

Additionally, as renewable energy sources are becoming more common, there are more commercial and industrial applications of electrical vehicle charging stations with renewable energy systems.

EV charging not only creates community by supplying energy to faculty and student drivers, it can also effectively power school buses.

STEP 4: Energy storage and independence.

Energy storage can mean independence for a school district. Battery energy storage systems are a key component in resiliency and grid independence, helping to achieve net-zero goals. Energy solutions are customized and can be scaled to fit any budget. However, be aware that spending less early in the process doesn't always add up to savings. District leaders must look at the long-term project. An installation may cost less in the beginning, but need to be replaced more frequently and end up costing

more over time.

■ Operate, maintain and optimize

Energy asset optimization is a crucial step to maximizing the value of an energy component.

Optimization begins with monitoring the performance of an asset after it is installed. Using the data collected, energy experts can examine the modeled production versus the actual production taking place, comparing the information to key performance indicators that have been established with the customer prior to installation.

Those KPIs are often tied to:

- Carbon-neutral initiatives.
- Environmental, social and governance goals.
- Revenue streams, such as Renewable Energy Credits and Power Purchase Agreements.

Tying in the data collected through the analytics platform provides a solution that supports the school's energy and financial goals, enabling short-term planning for total cost of ownership for existing assets and long-term planning for future energy needs. Energy specialists monitor production data to help schools operate, maintain and optimize their distributed energy assets as efficiently as possible. This enables districts to prioritize work based on the most

important factors aligned with their key performance indicators.

This closed-loop energy asset optimization process provides effective and efficient use of assets today and in the future.

■ Looking toward the future

In the case of West Allis-West Milwaukee, the lighting components they bought in 2018 had a five-year factory warranty. Once that warranty expired, they bought a five-year service level agreement to secure service whenever there is an issue with their lighting system.

Through a defined process of assessment, conservation, generation and energy storage, districts can achieve energy independence—if the leaders determine it fits their district goals. Finally, developing a suitable maintenance plan through a service level agreement — like West Allis-West Milwaukee did to operate, maintain and optimize performance — can maximize school districts' operational efficiency and cost savings into the future. ■

As a project manager, Mike Herbst provides the overall management and staff oversight for Faith Technologies projects. He can be contacted at mike.herbst@faithtechinc.com.

Carolyn Hahn is director of communications and engagement at West Allis-West Milwaukee School District. Carolyn can be reached at hahnc1@wawmsd.org.

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Lessons in Leadership

Members of the WIAA Student-Athlete Leadership Team detail what they've learned through sports

By Nick Debner

People participate in athletics for all sorts of reasons — competitive, social, physical and mental health, etc. Wisconsin School News caught up with several members of the WIAA's Student-Athlete Leadership Team to hear why they participate in sports, what benefits athletics have provided throughout their childhood and what they'll remember about their playing days.

The Student Leadership Team launched prior to the 2024-25 school year, selecting juniors and seniors from across the state "to serve as ambassadors for their peers and the WIAA while learning more about the sports industry."

The following are thoughts from three of the 2024-25 team members.

PARTICIPATING TEAM MEMBERS

CAMPBELL BOOTH The 2025 Plymouth High School graduate says, "Sports have shaped every aspect of who I am. From the moment I laced up my sneakers for my first basketball and soccer games, I knew I had found my passion. Sports have pushed me to my limits, taught me life-changing lessons, and connected me with people that have become my second family. Through every game, practice and challenge I've discovered what it means to persevere, lead and grow."

CHARLES STRAYER A 2025 graduate of Eau Claire Memorial, Strayer will attend UW-Madison this fall to begin pursuing a communications degree.

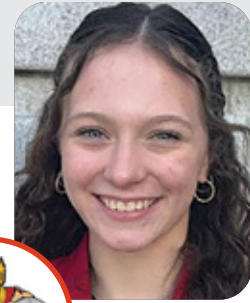
ELIZABETH CURTIS The incoming Westby High School senior competes in cross country and track while also participating in a variety of clubs and organizations, including FCCLA. After high school, Curtis plans to attend college and major in nursing, with hopes to run at the collegiate level.



CAMPBELL BOOTH
Plymouth High School



CHARLES STRAYER
Eau Claire Memorial



ELIZABETH CURTIS
Westby High School

How has being involved in sports helped you grow as a person?

CB Sports have taught me the importance of discipline, resilience and teamwork. I've learned to set goals for myself, work diligently to achieve them and persevere through setbacks. The challenges I have faced throughout my athletic career have built my confidence, leading to greater success in the classroom and in my personal life. Through sports I've grown stronger, both mentally and physically.

CS Sports has taught me the value of an individual's unique strengths in the context of working towards a shared goal with others.

EC Being involved in sports has truly made me the person I am today. I've developed essential life skills like communication, teamwork, and time management. Sports have taught me discipline, resilience, and how to stay positive even when things get tough.

How has being an athlete helped you develop healthy habits, such as nutrition and exercise?

CB Athletics has instilled in me the value of a balanced, healthy lifestyle. I have become more aware of my body's needs, particularly within my nutrition and recovery. Proper hydration, fueling my body with nourishing foods and getting adequate rest have enhanced my athletic performance and overall well-being.

CS Being involved in sports for so many years has led to a high level of motivation to keep active in the off-season, both to stay ready for the coming season and to improve endurance.

EC Being an athlete has increased my knowledge about how to take care of my body. I've learned the importance of eating balanced meals, staying hydrated, getting enough rest, and keeping a consistent workout routine. It's helped me build habits that I know will benefit me for life.

Has being part of a team helped you cope with challenges in your life outside of sports?

CB Being part of a team has provided me with a support system that extends beyond the game. The friendships I have built with my teammates are some of the most amazing aspects of my athletic career. These relationships have been valuable in navigating life's challenges as they are always there to lend a hand and be a listening ear.

CS Sports have helped me find an internal source of motivation in many non-athletic aspects of my life.

EC Absolutely. My cross-country team is like my second family. The girls are always there for me, whether cheering me on during races or listening when I need someone to talk to. Having that kind of support system has helped me through both athletic and personal challenges.

What led you to be an athletic leader? Why does leadership appeal to you?

CB Leadership has become a natural part of my athletic career. As a captain for both my basketball and soccer teams I have learned that effective leadership goes beyond giving directions or making decisions. It's about setting a positive example and embodying the values of a good teammate. My leadership is rooted in accountability, a positive attitude and a strong work ethic.

CS As an upperclassman, I feel it's my responsibility to help grow the program and ensure its future success by being a devoted team player.

EC I love stepping up and being a voice for student-athletes. Leadership gives me the chance to inspire others, build team spirit and create a positive impact. There's nothing better than helping teammates feel seen, heard and motivated to push their limits.

What has been your biggest challenge and proudest moment as an athlete?

CB Two of my proudest moments as an athlete would be winning back-to-back state championships with my soccer team and being selected as a member of the WIAA Student-Athlete Leadership Team (SALT). Winning those championships was a result of years of hard work, dedication and teamwork, and the feeling of achieving that success with my best friends is something I'll always



cherish. Additionally, being chosen for SALT was also very meaningful as it recognized not just my athletic abilities, but my commitment to leadership and making a positive impact within my school.

However, one of the greatest challenges within my athletic career has been managing anxiety. Before games I often felt nervous about performing well. I would constantly think about making mistakes, which in turn created pressure and at times it was difficult to focus on the game itself. However, over the course of my high school years I have come to accept anxiety as a natural part of the process. Rather than allowing it to overwhelm me, I have learned to channel that energy into focus and determination. Through positive self-talk, growing in my faith, and having strategies like chewing gum to calm my nerves, I've found ways to turn that anxiety into strength. Confronting my fears has made me more resilient and has directly improved my performance.

CS Deciding to leave the football program after my freshman year was a challenge but being able to earn a starting role for a varsity tennis meet my junior year was one of my proudest moments.

EC My biggest challenge was recognizing when I was overworking myself, which led to an injury that sidelined me for most of my junior

cross-country season. It was hard to take a step back, but I learned the importance of rest and recovery. My proudest moment was coming back from that injury and leading my cross-country team to win conference and sectionals and place third at state. That moment made all the hard work worth it.

What impact have athletics had on your relationships?

CS I've been able to make connections with a lot of great players and coaches through athletics, be it through spectating or playing.

EC Some of my teammates are my closest friends, and our bond goes beyond just running. We support each other in school, in life, and everything in between. I honestly can't imagine going through high school without them.

How do you balance schoolwork, sports and personal life?

CB Balancing schoolwork, sports and my personal life has also been a challenge at times, though it has taught me skills of time management and prioritization. I've developed a schedule that allows me to stay on top of my academic responsibilities while still dedicating time to practice and games. I've also recognized the importance of making time for relaxation and personal time. The

support from my family, teachers and coaches has been essential for helping me balance this.

I'm also active in a variety of extracurricular activities, including National Honor Society, Student Council, Team Panther, FFA and FBLA. I've served as Class President for the past two years. In my free time, my family and I exhibit our show pigs and Holstein dairy cattle at local, district, state and national shows. I believe this experience of raising and caring for our animals instilled in me a strong work ethic that carried over into my athletics.

CS With lots of support from my family and very little sleep.

EC Balancing everything isn't always easy, but I've learned to stay organized and prioritize my time. I use a planner, set goals for each week, and make sure to carve out time for homework, practice and rest. Staying on top of my schedule helps me avoid stress and burnout as a student-athlete.

Do you think the lessons you've learned in sports will help you in your future career or life? How so?

CB Looking ahead, I plan to attend the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, where I will pursue a double major in Agriculture Food and Business Management and Animal

Science. The resilience, work ethic and collaboration skills I've gained through sports will be valuable as I pursue my future career and life goals. While I won't be playing a collegiate sport, I intend to stay involved in athletics by participating in intramurals, refereeing youth basketball, and supporting my former teammates back home.

CS The lessons I've learned about the importance of cooperation to achieve a common goal will undoubtedly help me be an effective communicator and colleague as I prepare to attend UW-Madison.

EC The discipline, work ethic and mental toughness I've learned from sports will help me in any career or challenge I take on. I've learned how to set goals, handle pressure, and work with others, which are all skills I'll use for the rest of my life.

What advice would you give a younger student looking to get involved in middle school or high school sports?

CB I would encourage them to embrace the experience with an open mind and a commitment to growth. Progress in sports takes time, so it's important to stay patient and be persistent. Focus on developing your skills, building meaningful relationships, and enjoying the process. Sports offer so much more than competition; they are an opportunity to form meaningful relationships and develop valuable life lessons.

CS Even if you don't make the cut or find a particular sport isn't for you, there's always a positive way you can make an impact on the game you love, so explore all aspects of athletics.

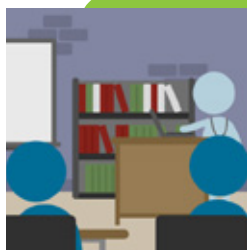
EC Don't be afraid to try something new. You don't have to be the best right away. What matters is showing up, working hard and being part of a team. Sports can open so many doors and teach you things you won't learn anywhere else. ■

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JILL UNDERLY

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Dr. Jill Underly was reelected as Wisconsin's State Superintendent of Public Instruction on April 1, 2025. A native of Indiana, she holds degrees from Indiana University Bloomington, IUPUI, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she earned her doctorate. With a career in public education spanning more than two decades, Underly has served at every level — from classroom teacher to district administrator, including roles as a principal and the superintendent for the Pecatonica Area School District. She is the parent of two children, both in high school, and lives with her family in southwestern Wisconsin.

In a June conversation with WASB, Underly reflected on her path in education, key accomplishments from her first term, and her vision for the next four years. She also discussed the major challenges facing Wisconsin's public schools, how districts and the DPI can work together to strengthen public education and offered insights for new school board members and administrators. Watch the full interview on the WASB YouTube page.

WSN: You began working in public education in 1999. What got you started working in education and why do you continue being involved in it?

Jill Underly: I began working in public education because I wanted to do meaningful work. It was work that aligned with my values. I've always loved kids and learning. I've had a strong commitment to public and community service as well, even as a child. When I was in college, I studied history and sociology, and that natural curiosity that I had about people and the world, education felt like the perfect fit.

My first job was in a large rural high school in central Indiana, and it had a significant migrant student population. I was drawn to students who struggled and often found themselves in trouble. Even when I worked at UW-Madison, I connected with the kids who struggled as an academic advisor. That connection fueled my passion for teaching.

I also reflected on how much it meant to me to belong when I was in school, because I didn't always feel like I belonged. When my teachers created that environment for me, I made sure



that I did everything I could to make sure that all kids had that experience of belonging when I worked with them.

I do remain a teacher at heart. Every experience that I've had in the classroom informs how I lead and serve today. Education has the power to transform lives. It's a place where relationships, purpose and learning intersect, and I can't imagine doing anything else.

What made you want to run for state superintendent?

JL: One of the things that moved me to run was the fact that often doing what's best for our kids can be used as a political football. I saw that as a school superintendent. I saw how politics negatively impacted the experience of public education for kids. I think it's detrimental, not just to kids but to our body politic too. Instead of talking about real solutions and real issues, a lot of folks want to gesture at ideas or concepts that have nothing to do with the real experiences and the needs of kids, teachers and communities.

I wanted to bring my perspective, which is grounded in that deep knowledge and experience of children in educational settings and how our systems do and, frankly, sometimes don't best serve them. I know that there's always going to be someone, somewhere, who's going to want to paint things as a partisan issue. However, I think I've proven that I'm willing to listen and work with anyone who truly wants to make things better for kids.

What do you feel were the highlights during your first term as superintendent and what are your goals for the next four years?

JL: I'm proud of the bipartisan work that we did to bring Act 20 to fruition. I'm proud of the work that we've done to implement the Special Educator Workforce Recruitment and Retention Program. I'm also proud of the fact that we're seeing a rise in graduation rates, especially coming out of COVID, with the class of 2024 having the highest graduation rates since the current way of calculating was introduced 15 years ago.

I'm going to continue to challenge myself and my colleagues to be visionaries on behalf of public educators and public school students to address the challenges that we face, but also to look at the challenges to create more opportunities for what can be. I'm proud of our budget proposals because we've handled a lot of uncertainty. When you look at the shifting federal funding environment, we have to address this with patience. We also have it centered on our legal authority and our statutory duties. We have duties to the kids of Wisconsin to keep our boat upright and even keel, no matter the weather.

Over the next four years, you're going to see a DPI that's going to take a much more active and visible role in supporting educators across Wisconsin. Last year, we kicked off a strategic planning process that helped us bring focus and clarity to work, making sure that everything we do is directly aligned with what our schools, libraries and communities need. We spent a lot of time traveling across the state listening to educators, families and community members, and we gathered a ton of valuable input. As we continue to roll out this plan, you'll see a strong, consistent effort to bring our vision to life, which is to have engaged learners creating a better Wisconsin together.

What are the biggest challenges that Wisconsin's public schools face right now?

JL: At the top of my mind is that we get our biennial budget passed that truly meets the needs of our students, educators and districts. A major piece of that is raising the special education

reimbursement rate to at least 60%. School districts are being forced to dip into their general funds to meet basic, legally mandated services. It's unsustainable. We need to stop putting districts in the position of going to referendum just to keep their lights on.

At the same time, we've got student mental health, which remains one of the most pressing challenges we face. Too many kids are struggling. While we have excellent training, dedicated staff and effective resources and knowledge, we need support to scale those efforts so that kids can thrive. Every student deserves to feel safe and supported, to know that they belong at school, and to know that if they're in crisis, someone is there to help.

If we want a strong future for Wisconsin, we have to invest in our public schools. Our schools need resources that are flexible, spendable, predictable and allow local districts to address their unique needs.

What is life like for you outside of the education world?

JL: I live on a small hobby farm in southwest Wisconsin. I have a flock of chickens to keep us entertained and fed with their eggs. I spend a lot of time with my husband John and my kids, David and Rachel. We like to explore Wisconsin. I love going and visiting small towns. I'm fascinated by their history. Every time I go out, I learn something new. Personally, I like to do embroidery, cross-stitch and read.

What misconceptions about the DPI would you like educators to understand better?

JL: I'd like educators to have the sense that the DPI is made up of people just like them, many of whom are educators or were educators themselves. There are technical things that the DPI is tasked with doing, like the information we have to collect for compliance reasons. I know that it can be frustrating to deal with. I was on the receiving end of that for many years.

However, the people who are doing the work are doing it here because they care about education. They care about kids and educators. We want to see and treat people as individuals with dignity and respect, and I hope that comes through. When we fall short, I feel like it's important to know that we

encourage an environment where we learn, modify and work with people and systems to move forward in a productive way.

As we implement our strategic plan, we're actively working to make sure that everything we do is aligned with what our schools, libraries and communities need. As part of that, we've outlined critical priority areas that you'll see us actively working to accomplish. Those are creating innovative educational opportunities, improving educator recruitment and retention, focusing on learner and educator mental health, and modernizing and improving the DPI. These are key focus areas that we're using to bring our vision to life.

How can school districts help the DPI achieve its goals for education in Wisconsin?

JL: Every time I go out, school districts want to know: how can we work in concert? School districts are doing an incredible job balancing so many competing interests. They're sandwiched between state and national directives on one side, and then they're trying to be responsive to their local needs. The key thing that I'd like folks to focus on is: what's best for kids? When things get contentious and folks get loud, that's the time to get quiet, listen, be careful and thoughtful, and ask that question. I would also encourage school districts to reach out to us at the DPI and offer feedback about how we can better align with their district needs, as well as the needs of their students, educators and communities.

What's your advice to the new educators and board members who will begin their first school year shortly?

JL: Before I offer any advice, I want to start by saying thank you. Thank you for going into public service and standing up for kids. Make sure to see everyone around you as a colleague. Look for mentors and share your knowledge freely. Be a person who lifts other people up. That energy is contagious, and it makes us all better educators, public servants and people. Finally, it's always good to ask questions just because you're supposed to be the person who has the answers. ■



2025 Summer Learning Symposium: WASB Executive Director Dan Rossmiller (far left) joins Larry Dux (Region 15 Interim Director, Pewaukee School Board), Connie Kincaide (Cedarburg School Board), Marquette Law School Poll Director Charles Franklin, Kathleen Wied-Vincent (Region 11 Interim Director, Greendale School Board) and Nancy Tischendorf (St. Francis School Board) following Franklin's presentation on public sentiment toward education during the Summer Learning Symposium on July 11 in Stevens Point. Stay tuned for a full recap and additional conference materials in upcoming issues of Wisconsin School News.

Regional Meetings

REGION 1 | Oct. 14 – Ashland, The Landing at

Best Western / Hotel Chequamegon **and**

Oct. 15 – Rice Lake, Lehman's Supper Club

REGION 2* | Oct. 16 – Minocqua, Norwood Pines Supper Club

REGION 3 | Oct. 22 – Green Bay, Rock Garden / Comfort Suites

REGION 4 | Oct. 28 – Eau Claire, The Florian Gardens

REGION 5* | Nov. 4 – Rothschild, Holiday Inn Wausau-Rothschild

REGION 6 | Oct. 9 – Onalaska, Onalaska Middle School

REGION 7* | Oct. 23 – Neenah, DoubleTree by Hilton Neenah

REGION 8 | Oct. 21 – Kiel, Millhome Supper Club

REGION 9* | Oct. 8 – Fennimore, Southwest Tech

REGION 10 | Oct. 7 – Wisconsin Dells, Trappers Turn

REGIONS 11* & 15* | Oct. 2 – Brookfield, Sheraton Milwaukee Brookfield Hotel

REGION 12 | Sept. 30 – Sun Prairie, Hilton Sun Prairie

REGION 13 | Sept. 23 – Burlington, Veterans Terrace

REGION 14* | TBD – Milwaukee, MPS Administration Building

Online Virtual Meeting | Nov. 6 at 12 p.m. – Zoom link to come via email

**Denotes regions with elections for WASB Board of Directors*

NOW OPEN!

Business Honor Roll Nominations Due Aug. 8

The WASB is now accepting nominations for the 2025 Business Honor Roll. School boards can submit the names of up to five local businesses, including newspapers and other media, that have been helpful to their school district over the past year. Tell us who they are and what they have done for your schools, and we will help you promote your business partnerships. Nominated businesses will be posted on the WASB website and several will be profiled in Wisconsin School News. Districts will be provided a sample press release and personalized certificate to give their businesses. In 2024, 59 school districts nominated a total of 186 businesses. Visit WASB.org to nominate a business by Friday, Aug. 8, 2025.



Delegate Assembly Resolutions Deadline

The deadline for school boards to submit resolutions for the WASB Delegate Assembly is Monday, Sept. 15. To review the resolution process and find the submission form, visit WASB.org/advocacy-government-relations/delegate-assembly.

Follow the WASB on YouTube

Follow the Wisconsin Association of School Boards on YouTube @TheWASB. Subscribe and stay up to date on the latest with WASB convention, strategic planning and other happenings in Wisconsin public education.

Stay tuned for a special video featuring student voices promoting public education.



Convention Updates

Registration opens Nov. 3, 2025 for the 2026 Wisconsin State Education Convention, scheduled for Jan. 21-23 in Milwaukee.

NEW this year: Hotel room blocks open at 8 a.m. on Monday, Nov. 3, 2025. A link to book hotel rooms will be included in a confirmation email upon convention registration.

Keynote Speaker Announced: Anne Marie Anderson

will give the opening keynote during the Wednesday general session. The three-time Emmy Award winning broadcaster, keynote speaker and author walked through ESPN's doors fresh out of college, embarking on a career that led her into the boardrooms and locker rooms of some of the most successful franchises in sport. Utilizing the methods observed through behind-closed-doors coverage of high-performing coaches, athletes and executives, Anderson applied their penchant for taking bold, sometimes surprising, risks to her own personal and professional life.



The knowledge and experience she has gained through making one surprising career move after another lead her to becoming one of the most experienced female play-by-play announcers in the country. In *Cultivating Audacity*, Anne Marie shares the system she developed to find the courage to confront her hesitation and break down barriers that stood between her and the life she wanted.

Anne Marie is known for delivering keynotes that are alternately funny and touching; she connects with the audience through the power of storytelling. □

Convention Call for Proposals

Get involved in the 2026 Wisconsin State Education Convention! The convention, scheduled for Jan. 21-23 in Milwaukee, is your opportunity to highlight your innovative programs and talented students. The WASB is now accepting proposals for the School Fair, student art exhibit and the student video team. School Fair proposals are due by Sept. 19, 2025. Student art exhibit and student video team proposals are due by Nov. 15, 2025.

Submit your proposal at [WASB.org/convention](https://wasb.org/convention).

SAVE THE DATE
**2025 WASB Fall
Legislative Conference**
Nov. 7-8, 2025 | Stevens Point, WI

Upcoming Webinars

NAVIGATING INSURANCE TRENDS: UPDATES ON EMPLOYEE BENEFITS & PROPERTY AND CASUALTY COVERAGE

August 6 | 12 p.m.

Presented by: TRICOR, M3 Insurance Solutions and USI Insurance Services

This webinar will explore key trends in Employee Benefits and Property and Casualty Insurance, uncovering the reasons behind rising premiums and strategies to mitigate costs. Learn how deductible structures are shifting, discover emerging plan options, and gain essential knowledge on new offerings and potential pitfalls.

This webinar is complimentary, and no registration is required. The Zoom link will be emailed to you as the event approaches.

WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

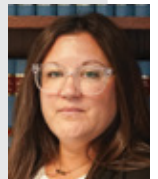
August 20, September 17 | 12 p.m.

Each month, WASB staff counsel and government relations staff address current topics of interest to WASB members. The topics are typically driven by recent developments affecting schools in the state Legislature, Congress, governmental agencies and the courts.

This webinar is complimentary, and no registration is required. The Zoom link will be emailed to you as the event approaches.

Jessica Woodburn Promoted

Congratulations to the WASB's Jessica Woodburn, who was recently promoted to Assistant Director of Finance and Administrative Services! Jessica, who has been with the WASB for 14 years, can be reached at jwoodburn@wasb.org. Congrats!



Thank You, Jenn

Jenn Diaz recently resigned from her position as WASB Staff Counsel. Jenn, who was hired in 2023, was a valued staff member who accepted a new job closer to her family in Chicago.



2025-27 State Budget Signed Into Law

*From deal announcement to the governor's signature
in less than 48 hours*



As summer enters its final stretch, many of you are likely taking those final vacation days and getting out to explore the state's natural beauty. Between dodging the heat, seeing friends and family, and preparing for the next school year, it was easy to miss all the action this summer. Perhaps you wanted to avoid the news and buried your head in that hot summer sand for a few weeks. Well, even in the split second it takes to blink, you may have missed the conclusion of the budget process this year.

In less than two days, the legislature and Governor Tony Evers reached a compromise deal and passed it into law. Racing to beat the federal government's reconciliation bill, the two sides came to an agreement that largely saw tax cuts balanced with new spending for K-12 education, childcare and the University of Wisconsin System. So how did we get here and what exactly was in the deal?

Turn the page to see a timeline of how the budget came together. But first...

■ What's in the budget?

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- **General:** Estimated 42% in 2025-26, 45% in 2026-27. Sum certain appropriation (if funds are insufficient, reimbursement rate will be prorated).
- **High Cost:** Estimated 50% in 2025-26, 90% in 2026-27. Sum certain appropriation.

GENERAL AID/PER-PUPIL AID/ LOW REVENUE CEILING

- Zero increases

SPARSITY AID

- Provide an additional \$896,000 general purpose revenue (GPR) in 2025-26 and \$1,116,000 GPR in 2026-27, estimated to fully fund eligibility.

TRANSPORTATION AID

- **General:** Modify statutory language to increase the reimbursement rate for pupils transported over 12 miles to and from school in the regular school year from \$400 to \$450 beginning in the 2025-26 school year.
- **High Cost:** Modify the eligibility threshold for the high-cost transportation aid program from 140% of the statewide average transportation costs to 135% of the statewide average beginning in the 2025-26 school year.

EARLY LITERACY

- Provide \$37,100,000 GPR in 2025-26 for early literacy initiatives for grants to reimburse school districts, independent charter schools, and private choice schools that adopt a literacy curriculum from the recommendations made by the Early Literacy Curriculum Council, and to

reimburse for the cost of professional development training in literacy.

- Provide \$1,450,000 annually above base level funding of \$2,151,000 in the appropriation for assessments of reading readiness.

MENTAL HEALTH

- Provide a one-time increase of \$30 million GPR solely in 2025-26 above base level funding of \$10 million for grants for school-based mental health services.

CHOICE/CHARTER/OPEN ENROLLMENT PER-PUPIL PAYMENTS

- **MKE/ Racine/Statewide Choice Programs:**
 - K-8: \$10,877 in 2025-26 and \$11,305 in 2026-27
 - 9-12: \$13,371 in 2025-26 and \$13,799 in 2026-27
- **Independent Charter:** \$12,369 in 2025-26 and \$12,797 in 2026-27
- **Special Needs Scholarship Program:** \$16,049 in 2025-26 and \$16,477 in 2026-27
- **Open Enrollment:**
 - General Education Students: \$10,102 in 2025-26 and \$11,030 in 2026-27
 - Special Education Students: \$14,454 in 2025-26 and \$14,882 in 2026-27

OFFICE OF SCHOOL SAFETY

- Twelve full-time employees, stable funding through concealed carry weapon licensing fees.

DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS

- Roughly \$6 million in increases to raise per-pupil award amount to an estimated \$1,000 and fund new participation in the program.

4K FUNDING STATUTE CHANGES

- Removes requirement for 87 hours of outreach activities for 4K pupils to count as 0.6 FTE for funding purposes. The result is that all 4K students will count as 0.6 FTE.

TOP LEVEL ITEMS OUTSIDE K-12 EDUCATION

- **UW Systems:** Invest more than \$256 million in the UW System over the next two years; \$840 million to support capital building projects on UW campuses across the state.
- **Healthcare Funding:** Increases federal healthcare revenue for hospitals by more than \$1 billion by leveraging increased state funds. Provision had to be implemented prior to changes made in the federal reconciliation bill.

- **Child Care:** Over \$330 million in Wisconsin's child care industry, including \$110 million in direct payments to child care providers. Additionally, a School Readiness program was created for child care providers using a 4K curriculum who are not contracted with a school district, providing a per-pupil payment of \$7,045 (tied to 60% level of revenue ceiling and per-pupil payments moving forward).
- **Tax Cuts:** Approximately \$1.5 billion in tax cuts; \$695 million in retirement tax exemptions, expanding the second income tax bracket, and eliminating the sales tax on residential electricity and natural gas, nearly \$178 million.

With the state budget being signed into law with bipartisan support, regardless of how you feel about the K-12 provisions, it is time to reach out to your state legislators. The goal of these contacts is to maintain your relationship and influence, while keeping the dialogue moving forward. If your legislator voted for the budget, consider expressing gratitude for their work to reach a bipartisan compromise and for the parts of the budget that you support (like the increases in special education). Then take the opportunity to move on to the challenges created by other provisions

(like no increase in general aid).

Even though the budget is done, the state legislative session continues. During the remaining weeks of summer, legislators will begin to hold committee meetings on more policy-focused issues. Once September starts, legislators will be coming back to Madison for the first fall floor session. With the budget behind us, the door opens to begin working on new challenges. Perhaps you have an issue with administrative paperwork, or a state mandate is placing burden on your budget and time. This is the opportunity and moment to work on these issues.

It will be equally important to proactively communicate budget-related information and the impact on your district to your community. With local taxpayers responsible for a large share of supporting your district's operations, being open and transparent is key to building trust and support at home.

The WASB will continue to track developments in both the state and federal governments to provide our members with the best, most up-to-date information available. Be sure to subscribe to our Legislative Update Blog and tune into our monthly Legal and Legislative Video Updates. We wish you all the best in your advocacy efforts and upcoming school year! ■

HOW DID THE NEGOTIATIONS PLAY OUT?

FRI, June 27

The Joint Finance Committee convened and took up a few of the remaining outstanding budget areas. Amid reports that changes were being considered to sway holdout GOP Senators, the committee adjourned shortly before midnight without finishing their work.

SAT, June 28 – MON, June 30

The decision is made to shift to Senate Democrats for votes.

TUE, July 1

A tentative budget deal is announced by the governor and legislative leaders. The JFC approves the deal, clearing way for floor votes in both houses.

WED, July 2 – THU, July 3 (early morning)

The state Senate and Assembly both debate and approve the budget with bipartisan votes. Gov. Evers signs the budget with limited partial vetoes less than an hour after it passes the Legislature.



Understanding Student Record Laws and Directory Information

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Wisconsin Statute § 118.125 (state pupil records law) provide privacy protection to information contained in certain student records. State pupil records law covers “pupil records,” and federal law covers “education records.” For ease of reading, this Legal Comment refers to these records collectively as “student records,” except when quoting a law.

These laws permit certain information in these records to be released without parent consent, including information that the district has classified as “directory information.” However, schools must notify families about the information the district classifies as directory information and must provide parents (or adult students) with the ability to opt out of those disclosures. This Legal Comment will review what information from student records can be released without parent consent, what information can be classified as directory information, what should be included in the annual FERPA notice, and how parents (or adult

students) can choose to opt out their child out of disclosure of directory information without their consent.

■ What information may a school release without parent consent?

Personally identifiable information located in student records cannot be disclosed without consent unless an exception applies. Personally identifiable information includes any direct or indirect identifiers as well as other information “alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty.”¹

FERPA and Wisconsin law allow the release of personally identifiable information located in student records under certain conditions without consent. A school may release student records to other school officials (such as teachers) whom the district has determined to have a legitimate educational interest in the information. It is also permissible to release student records to a “contractor, consultant,

volunteer, or other party to whom an agency or institution has outsourced institutional services or functions.” These third parties are considered school officials if they perform a service or function for which the district would otherwise use an employee and are under the “direct control of the agency or institution with respect to the use and maintenance of education records.”² These third parties must also maintain the confidentiality of the information in accordance with federal and state law. Examples of these third parties include individuals or organizations with whom the district contracts to provide pupil services, such as occupational or physical therapy.

A school can also disclose personally identifiable information contained in student records if a school is presented with a lawful court order or subpoena for that information. However, the school must follow the state and federal student records laws when disclosing these records, which is more involved than just turning over the records directly to the requestor. Additionally, the state and federal

“Schools must notify families about the information the district classifies as directory information and must provide parents (or adult students) with the ability to opt out of those disclosures.”

“Some districts include this directory information notice as part of their annual FERPA notice to avoid having to provide separate notices.”

laws both have narrow exceptions that permit disclosure of student records without consult to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency “if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.”³ This is a high legal standard requiring “an actual, impending, or imminent emergency, such as a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, [or] a campus shooting.”

Finally, schools may release a student’s directory information without consent, provided the school previously gave parents notice of the information that would be classified as directory information.

■ What can be classified as directory information?

Each district likely has a policy or rule specifying what information is classified as directory information that can be disclosed without consent. FERPA defines directory information as “information contained in an education record of a student that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed.”⁴ This definition includes, but is not limited to, a student’s name, address, telephone number, email address, photograph, date and place of birth, grade level, enrollment status (e.g., undergraduate or graduate, full-time or part-time), dates of attendance, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, degrees, honors and awards received, and the most recent educational agency or institution

attended. Wisconsin has a more narrow definition of “directory data” which only includes “those pupil records which include the pupil’s name, address, telephone listing, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, photographs, degrees and awards received and the name of the school most recently previously attended by the pupil.”⁵

Because state law is more restrictive than federal law, by policy, districts can only choose which of the types of data established by state law that they want to classify as directory information. Districts are also permitted to limit their disclosure of

directory information to certain parties, such as a yearbook publisher or class ring manufacturer. Directory information is often shared for use in school publications such as school theatre or music playbills and programs, school yearbooks, honor roll and graduation lists, and programs distributed at athletic contests. If a parent does not opt out, directory information must be shared with technical colleges and law enforcement.⁶

■ The annual FERPA notice

FERPA requires schools to provide notice regarding student records.⁷ Many schools include this notice at the beginning of the school year during student registration. However, schools may provide this information to families in any

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“In the directory information notice, schools must state that parents have 14 days to opt out of disclosure of directory information.”

reasonable manner that ensures parents are aware of their rights. Schools should also provide the annual notice to families in their home language. The Department of Education provides a FERPA Model Notification of Rights for Elementary & Secondary Schools on its website in both English and Spanish. Districts might consider using these models as starting points, provided they customize them to the district as appropriate.

This annual notice must inform parents that they have the following rights:

- To inspect and review their child’s student records.
- To request the amendment of their child’s student records that they believe is “inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the student’s privacy rights.”
- To be provided with a request to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in their child’s student records.
- To be provided with information on how to file a complaint with the Family Policy Compliance Office.
- To be provided the criteria for who constitutes a “school official” and what is a “legitimate educational interest.”

This annual notice can also include the required notice to families regarding the disclosure of directory information.

■ The right to opt out of disclosure of directory information

In addition to notifying families about what type of information the district classified as directory information, schools must also provide a way for parents to elect to opt out of the school’s ability to share their child’s directory information without their consent.⁸ Some districts include this directory information notice as part of their annual FERPA notice to avoid having to provide separate notices. In the directory information notice, schools must state that parents have 14 days to opt out of disclosure of directory information. After that deadline passes, if the parent has not opted out, the parent is deemed to have consented to the disclosure of directory information. However, if a parent asks to opt out their child after that deadline has passed, a school should make reasonable efforts to honor that request. Circumstances can change throughout the year, and the parent may have a new situation that makes them want to limit disclosure of their child’s directory information going forward. Parents can choose to exclude some or all of their child’s directory information from disclosure by notifying the school in writing. Some districts have a form that parents can complete to opt out of the disclosure of directory information.

■ Conclusion

School staff should be reminded about FERPA and state pupil record

law requirements routinely so the district can remain in compliance. Administrative staff in the main office often field phone calls and handle student paperwork, so schools should be sure to include them in any training regarding student records. Additionally, school officials should remember that FERPA and Wisconsin’s pupil records law apply to a student, even when a student turns 18, at which point the rights of the parent with respect to FERPA and state pupil records law may transfer to the student.

These federal and state law requirements can get complicated, especially because the federal and state laws are not always in alignment. In general, districts should err on the side of following the law that is more protective of these records. ■

This Legal Comment was written by Sandra G. Cohen, Brian P. Goodman, and Richard F. Versteegen of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For related articles, see Wisconsin School News: “Video Recordings and Photos: FERPA Guidance” (April 2019); and “Caution Required When Confronted with Student Privacy Issues” (Feb. 2001).

1. 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.
2. 34 C.F.R. § 99.31(a)(1)(i).
3. 34 C.F.R. § 99.36(a); Wis. Stat. § 118.125(1)(p).
4. 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.
5. Wis. Stat. § 118.125(1)(b).
6. Wis. Stat. § 118.125(2)(j).
7. 34 C.F.R. § 99.7.
8. 34 C.F.R. § 99.37; Wis. Stat. § 118.125(2)(j)1.



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

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

Financing, Banking, Consulting

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

Our team provides school financing solutions including: long range capital planning, services related to debt issuance, investment advisory services and referendum assistance.

► PMA Financial Network, LLC

414-436-4584
ekass@pmanetwork.com
pmanetwork.com

PMA has serviced Wisconsin school districts since 1988, currently providing financial services to more than 230 Wisconsin districts. Our financial services include public finance, investment, banking, cash flow and bond proceeds management.

Insurance and Employee Benefits

► Community Insurance Corporation

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

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

► EMC Insurance Companies

262-717-3900, emcins.com
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► Foster & Foster Consulting Actuaries, Inc.

262-522-6415, foster-foster.com
colleen.atchison@foster-foster.com
Actuarial and employee benefit consulting services.

► Gallagher

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

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

► M3 Insurance Solutions, Inc

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

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

► National Insurance Services of Wisconsin, Inc.

800-627-3660
slaudon@nisbenefits.com
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Over 82% of Wisconsin school districts are already working with NIS! Since 1969, we've helped school districts find creative solutions to their employee benefit plans. We offer health, dental, disability, life, insurance, worksite benefits, retirement income solutions, full benefit consulting, exclusive proprietary arrangements, and our own online enrollment and benefit administration system, NIS Enroll.

► R&R Insurance

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

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

► TRICOR, Inc.

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

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

► UnitedHealthcare

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

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

► USI Insurance Services

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

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

► WEA Member Benefits

800-279-4030
aerato@weabenefits.com,
weabenefits.com

We have provided retirement savings and investment programs, financial planning services and insurance to school employees and their families for nearly 50 years. We also provide financial education and employee benefit solutions to help districts recruit and retain staff.

Leadership Consulting

► Excel Leadership, LLC

262-420-0799
brian@excelleader.org
excelleader.org

We facilitates development of strategic plans for school districts, workshops to improve board and administration relationships, tools and processes for more effective board governance, and mentoring of district leadership.

Legal Services

► Buelow Vetter Buikema Olson & Vliet LLC

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

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

► Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c.

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

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

► von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

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

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

► Weld Riley, s.c.

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

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

School/Community Research

► School Perceptions, LLC

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

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



SUPPORTING, PROMOTING AND ADVANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION



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September - November

Dates and locations vary by region



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Nov. 7-8, 2025

Holiday Inn Convention Center - Stevens Point

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