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

Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District Adds Electric School Bus

The Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District added an electric school bus to its fleet this year to advance the district's sustainability goals, according to a district press release.

"The bus itself is much quieter, and there are no emissions for kids to inhale," Middleton-Cross Plains Transportation Manager Mike

Hamstra said of how the 2026 Blue Bird All American electric bus will help the district reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save on long-term fuel and maintenance costs. Funded in part by an EPA Clean School Bus Program grant, the bus was approved by the Middleton-Cross Plains Board of Education in October 2024.

"The board's sustainability reso-

lution and actions demonstrate our commitment to being a responsive leader in this area," said Board of Education President Bob Hesselbein.

Along with servicing Sunset Ridge Elementary School and Glacier Creek Middle School on morning and afternoon routes, the bus — which has a capacity of 78 students — will also be used to transport students to athletic events. □

STAT OF THE MONTH

\$998,114

Money spread across 19 school districts throughout the state by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Wisconsin Fast Forward grants.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

DWD Awards Nearly \$1 Million in Equipment Grants

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development awarded \$998,114 in Wisconsin Fast Forward grants to 19 school districts throughout the state, according to a Sept. 3 DWD news release.

The Advanced Manufacturing Technical Education Equipment grants address the state's skilled workforce needs by preparing "our future workforce for careers in high-demand, high-skill industries," DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek said in the news release.

The 2025 Wisconsin Fast Forward grants will benefit 4,223 students, with projects including modernizing welding labs, acquiring bioengineering equipment, launching robotics programs and more.

The grants were allotted to Alma, Augusta, Campbellsport, Durand-Arkansaw, Elk Mound Area, Franklin, Lake Mills Area, Lena, Milwaukee, Mosinee, Portage, Random Lake, Rosholt, Beloit, Shiocton, Sparta Area, Superior, Union Grove and Waupaca school districts. □

Annual Program Funds Driver's Education for Low-Income Students

In 2024, Wisconsin began offering state-funded driver's education for the first time in more than 20 years, according to Wisconsin Public Radio.

About 10,000 low-income high school students in Wisconsin benefited from the Wisconsin Driver Education Grant Program in its first year of existence. The program is now permanent due to an annual \$6 million allocation, Brenda McMurtry of Common Ground, a southeastern Wisconsin nonpartisan coalition, told WPR.

On Aug. 25, the state released \$1.5 million in funding for driver's education grants and will release \$1.5 million every three months in perpetuity.

The Wisconsin Driver Education Grant Program provides students with classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction. High school students who are ready for driver's education and qualify for free or reduced lunch can apply online through the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

WPR reported that the state of Wisconsin funded driver's education from 1961 until 2004. The Driver Education Grant Program was authorized by bipartisan legislation signed into law in December of 2023 by Gov. Tony Evers. □

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

General Fund Tax Collections Higher Than Preliminary Estimates

General fund tax collections for 2024-25 were \$88.3 million above the Legislative Fiscal Bureau's preliminary estimates.

On May 15, the Legislative Fiscal Bureau's final estimate of 2024-25 tax collections was \$22,274.3 million. According to the Department of Revenue, general fund tax collections totaled \$22,362.6 million, which was 4.8% higher than 2023-24 — and 0.4% above the estimated amount.

Final general fund tax collections, along with departmental revenues and expenditures for 2024-25, will be available in mid-October when the state's Annual Fiscal Report is released by the Department of Administration.

View a comparison of the estimated and preliminary general fund tax collections by tax type, along with the differences between the estimated and preliminary actual amounts at [WASB.org/legislative-update](https://wasb.org/legislative-update) and subscribe to the Legislative Update Blog. □



See You at the Regional Meetings

October is a wonderful time to travel our beautiful state, and I am excited about visiting your area soon.

In route to WASB Fall Regional Meetings throughout Wisconsin, I get to see the leaves change color and the flocks of birds gather for their migration.

Although a couple of regional meetings have already been held, the bulk of them take place during October. These meetings are a special opportunity for board members to network and share stories with other board members in their region. The pre-meeting workshops this fall will focus on steps boards and districts can take to address chronic absenteeism and truancy. As the workshop title says, “Students Can’t Learn If They’re Not There.”

An important reason for these meetings is to give you an opportunity to elect the WASB Board of Directors. Directors play a key role in guiding the association’s work, managing its resources and setting its legislative agenda. Director elections are a way you can shape the WASB and its direction.

My favorite part of regional meetings is recognizing board members for their progress in our Member Recognition Program. Board members receiving awards this year received a personal invitation from me to attend their regional meeting, where I will present their awards in person.

Speaking of recognizing school board members, Wisconsin School Board Week is Oct. 5–11. It’s a time when I hope you will get some well-deserved recognition for the work you put in as school board members. Take a bow, you’ve earned it. Please visit WASB.org to find School Board

Week promotional materials, including a press release and graphics to use when recognizing board members on social media.

I will be out on the road for much of this month, attending regional meetings and visiting with as many first-time superintendents as I can. I want to let those new superintendents know that while the WASB is here for school board members, we are here to help district administrators as well. The more boards and administrators know about the WASB’s resources for its members that are available and how to access them, the better they can work with you to accomplish your shared goals.

Among those resources are roughly 50 free videos on WASB’s Online Learning Platform, covering all aspects of school board service. Additionally, the complimentary WASB Finance 101 webinars help school board members understand school finance and feel comfortable being careful stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Other programs available to WASB members — either as a member benefit or requiring an additional subscription — include the Annual Board Development Tool, Superintendent Evaluation Framework, and newly released Title IX training. If you are interested in any of these resources, please reach out to us — we’ll connect you with the materials that best suit your needs.

Another of my favorite parts of Regional Meetings is talking about the State Education Convention and our keynote speakers. We have a dynamic slate of speakers and breakout sessions in store this January. Stay tuned to WASB.org for sneak peeks of everything you’ll see, learn and hear

at the annual celebration of public education. Convention registration opens Nov. 3. When you register, you will receive your link to book hotel rooms.

Registration is already open for the 2025 Fall Legislative Conference, taking place on Saturday, Nov. 8, in Stevens Point. I look forward to seeing you there to discuss advocacy and the issues facing your students and communities. We’re excited to welcome respected presenters from throughout the state and country. Turn to page 27 for more.

This issue focuses on school infrastructure — the places and spaces where students learn, grow and thrive.

Read how two rural districts — Westfield and Jefferson — used long-term planning and community outreach to pass successful referendums (page 20). Meanwhile, Manitowoc Public School District leaders are right-sizing facilities and leveraging a capital referendum to align with their long-term vision (page 8).

In Pulaski, the results of a 2022 referendum show how revitalizing existing buildings can create modern, dynamic learning environments (page 16). On page 4, explore additional strategies for districts facing aging facilities amid tight budgets and limited resources.

And finally, turn to page 18 to see how technical education prepares students for careers in construction and skilled trades. In Stratford, a student-run business is not only building real-world skills but also serving the community.

I encourage you to read on to explore how Wisconsin’s public schools are innovating, adapting and building brighter futures for every student. ■



Breaking the Cycle of Band-Aid Fixes

How proactive
school facilities
planning sets up
school districts
for the future.

By Gail Shore

School districts across the Midwest face a growing challenge: aging facilities where unexpected breakdowns in plumbing, boilers, HVAC or roofing can derail budgets and disrupt learning. A building that once supported the curriculum of the 20th century may no longer meet the needs of today's students.

So, what's a district to do when facilities are aging but budgets and resources are limited? Many are turning to facility condition assessments as a roadmap for long-term planning to break the cycle of costly short-term fixes, safeguard resources and keep learning environments reliable and efficient.

■ The facility condition assessment: What is it?

"The FCA is a tool that school districts can use to sort and analyze the components of a facility into individual building systems," says Kraus-Anderson Facilities



Assessment Manager James Rognstad. “It’s designed to lay out all the infrastructure in a usable format, highlighting current condition, remaining useful life and associated replacement costs. This helps districts clarify where they have immediate, intermediate and long-term need, supporting them in making better decisions as they plan for the future.”

Rognstad believes the facility condition assessment’s bird’s-eye view of these needs becomes especially important for districts with multiple facilities as they prioritize where to put funding.

“The key areas of concern that we most consider with schools are those that impact health and safety,” he says. “What’s going to impact students most? Does a building provide a safe and healthy environment for kids and staff?”

According to Rognstad, well-planned, secure entries have been a trending need for the last 10 years



ELLSWORTH SCHOOL DISTRICT updated facilities after an assessment of five district buildings provided a clearer picture of building life cycles.

and “a big push for a lot of school districts.” Many schools are also in need of updated ventilation systems to meet new indoor air quality requirements after the pandemic. With this comes a need for higher efficiency mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.

■ **Shifting needs in K-12 construction**

Working out of Kraus-Anderson’s Madison office, Rognstad has more than 15 years of experience working with K-12 schools in Wisconsin. He reports that FCAs in Wisconsin schools — and those around the country — are finding similar areas in need of improvement. One of the largest of these? Space.

Many school districts are reportedly too tight on square footage to accommodate growing class sizes and evolving curriculums, leading to either a need for a new building or addition. Not every district, however, can afford this easily. Rognstad says this is where repurposing old classrooms becomes crucial.

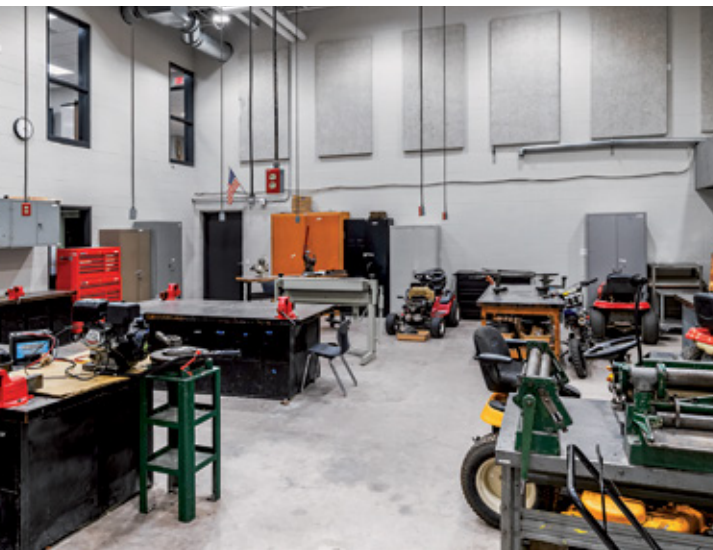
“When we’re talking about repurposing a space, usually the

space that was originally built isn’t suitable for what is needed for today,” he explains.

There can be a couple reasons for this. First, many schools constructed decades ago didn’t account for evolutions such as modern technology, interactive learning spaces and robotics. Second, even classes that may have been offered years ago and today — the trades, for example — are not equipped for the modern tools necessary to give kids a competitive, career-oriented education.

“There’s a lot of schools that have transitioned to certificate programs for carpentry, welding and even healthcare,” Rognstad says. “Back when I was in industrial arts classes, wood shop was about making small crafts to help us gain knowledge of using power tools safely. Today, kids are learning how to frame a house and preparing for a career in the trades. Because of that, the space requirements have changed dramatically.”

While some school districts, specifically in urban areas, are seeing an influx of students, Rognstad says rural schools are experiencing the opposite problem.



HAYWARD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS,

after assessing all facilities, completed prioritized work at the elementary and high schools.

“In rural Wisconsin — and rural districts in general — they actually have a problem where their student body is reduced to a level where they don’t need the extra space,” he says. “So it’s also about looking at what they currently have and then rethinking how to utilize this extra space in a meaningful way.”

In these areas, there is a trend to provide for community spaces like daycare services and fitness centers.

Another change Rognstad sees in school construction and redesign is a modern awareness of mental health and well-being that wasn’t accounted for decades ago.

“Mental health in schools is a growing trend. Because of it, there’s a need for additional security around information,” Rognstad says, giving the example of insulating student counseling rooms to meet HIPAA requirements. “We don’t technically analyze that through the FCA, but we do highlight spaces that are inadequate for that particular use.”

■ How the FCA ties in

So why is an FCA necessary

considering all these evolving needs and growth?

“I think one of the other trends that I’m seeing in Wisconsin, which may not be an anomaly here, is with the turnover in administrators. There’s a significant need for FCAs to help new administrators understand the condition of their facilities early in their tenure,” Rognstad advises. “A lot of school districts actually have good information, but it either isn’t easily accessible or is in a format that makes it hard to use.”

Maintaining all the information regarding what’s been completed or still needs to be completed enables districts to plan year over year and gain control over their annual budget and planning.

“The FCA should be used as the initial starting point in the planning process, creating a baseline of where the existing facility infrastructure is in its life cycle. This enables the district to consider the buildings holistically,” Rognstad says. “In

many cases, educators already know they have issues, but don’t have enough information to address them adequately. The FCA is a data-driven approach that can guide school boards and administrators as they consider the future needs of their districts.”

■ Facility assessments in action

Across Wisconsin, school districts have used FCAs to guide decisions about renovations, additions and long-term maintenance priorities. In Grantsburg School District, a 225,100-square-foot assessment, spanning three buildings, helped the district prioritize additions and preventative maintenance.

“[This] was an exceptional experience,” Grantsburg Superintendent Josh Watt says. “[The FCA] ensured that every aspect was thoroughly considered and addressed. The collaboration we experienced in supporting our task force meetings and dedication made us feel confident in moving forward

THE GRANTSBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT

underwent a 225,100-square-foot assessment, spanning three buildings, which guided the district to prioritize additions and preventative maintenance.

knowing we had a solid foundation for a successful project.”

Similarly, Hayward Community Schools completed assessments across all campuses, enabling the district to focus first on priority work at the elementary school before addressing projects at the high school.

“It has been a pleasure,” Superintendent Craig Olson says of his experience. “I’m looking forward to finishing the project with the same enthusiasm and excitement as which we started.”

In Campbellsport, FCA services on four district buildings identified the most pressing issues, helping provide district leadership with the information to plan and transition during the retirement of a key member. Furthermore, the South Milwaukee School District is building a 20-year plan to support ongoing operations, enabling the district to plan for changing priorities while managing each of their six facilities.

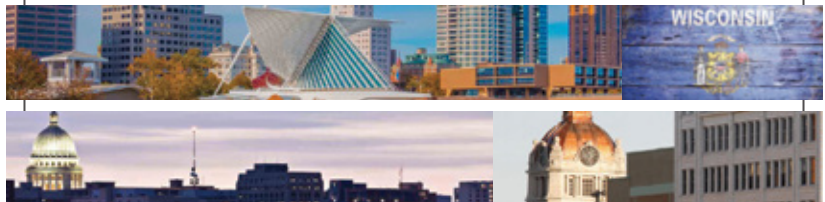
In Ellsworth, assessments of five district buildings, along with several additional spaces, identified deferred maintenance and provided a clearer picture of building life cycles. According to former Ellsworth Superintendent Barry Cain, “This is valuable information to our community about life cycles of buildings to help the public better understand the ideas of remodeling costs versus building new. The assessments provided the data necessary to communicate facts to the public about investing in our infrastructure, so we are poised for growth for years to come.” ■

Gail Shore is founder and executive director of Shore to Shore Communications, Inc., which provides public relations management and consulting to Kraus-Anderson. Gail can be reached at gshore@winternet.com.



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INVESTING **in** TOMORROW

Manitowoc right-sizes district and makes needed improvements after first capital referendum in 20 years.

By Brock Fritz

With a \$25 million capital referendum behind them, big decisions lie ahead in the Manitowoc Public School District. The district's leaders have intentionally worked to make sure that the community isn't surprised by them.

"We're pretty much faced with the reality that we're going to have to close an elementary school or two," Manitowoc Superintendent Lee Thennes says, noting that declining enrollment is leading the district to create a long-term facilities plan that will right-size the district. "The first thing you have to do is educate the community on the difference between operations and capital referendums, as well as the need, the solution and what it means for them. We tried to do a good job of communicating."

To get the message across, the

district set up a website dedicated to facility maintenance, including pictures of the buildings that needed to be repaired. District leaders also held public tours of the buildings and informational sessions.

A staff facility advisory committee and a community facility advisory committee were formed to examine enrollment, trends, the buildings, grade configuration and more.

"The goal is that at the end of this calendar year we'll have some considerations to bring to the board, which will help us build this long-range plan," Thennes says, commending the support the community has shown the school district in recent years.

While the \$25 million referendum — which passed on April 1 with 59.9% of the vote — was the first capital referendum the district proposed since 2005, the community

has approved every operational referendum over the past 10 years.

"We've gone to referendum for operational about every couple years since 2015, and the community has supported every ask," Thennes says. "This was coming off the heels of two fairly significant tax increases they've seen over the last two years. So we knew we had to be very clear about this being for critical maintenance. Part of it is admitting that we've balanced our budget over the years by cutting monies that would have taken care of some of these issues. We have to put that aside and say the past is the past, but we know we have to be better at



Lee Thennes

coming up on these things. We were very transparent and ended up getting 60% support, which is hard to come by. We saw a lot of referendums around us go down. That failure rate crept up around the state because people are getting tired of it. We have to take care of what we have, and we haven't done a good job of that over time."

And the buildings have seen some time. Manitowoc Lincoln High School is 101 years old, while the district's middle schools are 94 and 89 years old, respectively. The high school had limited updates in the late 1990s, but water intrusion and deferred maintenance have threatened the integrity of the historic buildings.

A detailed facilities audit conducted by CESA 10 resulted in a 330-page report that detailed the district's maintenance needs.

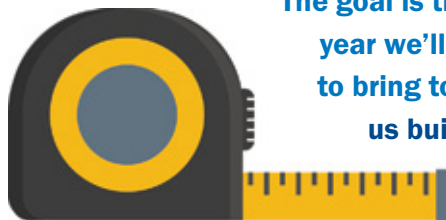
"We contracted with CESA 10 and went through every building, inside and out... We know exactly where we're at," says Mike Schwarz, manager of buildings, grounds and custodial services. "It was a great exercise. We got down to the brass tax. We know exactly where we're at.

"We have a few projects going on right now. One is up at the high school — we're re-roofing about 60% of the building, which should be done right before school starts. It was a large enough project that we could start concentrating on it, and we knew the high school wasn't on the list of schools for possible closing, so we felt comfortable going after that building."

"Water's been a problem for a while in that building," Thennes adds. "I was the principal there for seven years, and we had water issues every single year I was there. There were some repairs made and some Band-Aids, but not like this."

A regular at board and committee meetings, Schwarz believes the district's communication has been successful.

"I hear it when I'm out and about that the public is pretty well versed in



"The goal is that at the end of this calendar year we'll have some considerations to bring to the board, which will help us build this long-range plan."

— Lee Thennes

what we're doing," he says. "They're happy that we're keeping the water out of our prized possession, Lincoln High School. It's a beautiful structure. We are so close to determining which buildings we're keeping and which we're working on. They're anxious to hear that and they're happy that we're taking care of things. I'm getting a good idea of what the public is feeling."

Jefferson Elementary, the newest grade school in the district, is also undergoing about \$500,000 of general maintenance and exterior work.

"We're getting that done so we've got one of our elementaries in great shape," he adds. "Jefferson isn't on the list of ones that might close."

However, closures are likely coming to the district.

"We're a declining enrollment district that probably has some space," Thennes says. "I came to Manitowoc in 2001 as a social studies teacher and at the time we had about 5,500 kids. Fast forward almost a quarter century and we have 4,500 kids, so we lost about 1,000 kids in a quarter century, which you go like, 'OK, that was slow and over time.' We just had a large class graduate, and now our largest class is our senior class, and those numbers at the bottom aren't coming in near what are leaving, so we'll see an accelerant to our decline over the next several years. Then it'll flatten out a bit, but if it took us 25 years to lose 1,000 kids, we're projected to lose another 1,000 in 10 years. That's a pretty quick decline. We're prepping for that. On the other side of that coin, we lose several hundred kids to open enrollment. So how can we better communicate what we do here to slow that decline. Maybe by

bringing some families back into the fold, we can slow that decline. We're also really focusing on our school-to-work programming and our college prep programming. For example, we have 177 youth apprentices (out of 1,400 about high school enrollment) working in our community. The goal is to keep some of them here. We knew the only way for declining enrollment to truly slow down is to have more kids. Our goal is to try to create an environment where kids are proud to be part of this community and want to stick around for the betterment of its future."

■ Open enrollment, school vouchers

Manitowoc has two prominent parochial schools. We're one of three districts in the state that have maxed out vouchers. 435, we hit the top, along with I think West Allis and Watertown. We're in an environment that has other options. So when I do the math on the total, whether it's open enrollment out of our district to other publics, or to privates, we have a gap of 700–800 kids. Not that you'll ever get all of them, but if you get a chunk back, that's what we need."

"We're trying to right-size things, both from a facilities and staffing perspective. One of the promises we made to the public is that we would find the payments within our operational budget so that we didn't necessarily have to pass on the cost of this borrowing to them. The \$25 million. We have plenty of places that could go across the district, but we really want to make sure we're spending that money wisely."

"By the end of the calendar year, we'd like to have a good idea of where we're headed," Thennes says. "Then the question is, 'Can we pull off

“It’s ultimately going to be [the community’s] choice, but there’s something to educating them about that decision, getting them involved in the process of discussing it, asking their opinion... so they’re able to tell you what they want to do.” — Lee Thennes

closing a couple schools?’ As soon as we begin to right-size the district, one of the promises we made to the public is that we would find the payments within our operational budget so that we didn’t necessarily have to pass on the cost of this borrowing to them. A list of about \$10 million of projects earmarked for this year that they have to get going on. We know no matter what schools are closed, there’s emotional attachment. That won’t be easy but what we do feel good about is we’ve let the community know this is coming. There isn’t a person in this town that’s surprised to hear that we have to close an elementary school or two. That’s like taking the bandaid off. From here on it, it’s reminding them that we have to make some decisions and do what’s in the best interest of our district. We feel pretty

good about being able to do that. We did have to make some reductions in staff this year, but we were able to do that but three of the 22 through attrition. It’s not like we’re having mass layoffs. We’re trying to right-size things, both with facilities and the staffing perspective. We’re trying to build that trust with the community. Because ultimately, there will be decisions that the community needs to make. One of them that I can see is, ‘What are we going to do with our two middle schools? If you want to fix them up, it’s going to cost between \$60–70 million. If you’d like to build one brand-new school, it’s likely going to cost between \$100–110 million.’ It’s ultimately going to be their choice, but there’s something to educating them about that decision, getting them involved in the process of discussing it,

asking their opinion through a survey or some type of advisory vote, so they’re able to tell you what they want to do. Psychologically, we’re then not asking if we should borrow a significant amount of money and put it into our schools, we’re asking how we should do that. As they get through that process, whatever is the decision they could get behind, because the question hasn’t been ‘Do we need this?’ or ‘If we need this,’ it’s really just ‘What should we do?’ If we do a very good job of what we’re getting done with this \$25 million, it can give some insurance that we’ve been good stewards and we did what we said we’re going to do.” ■

Brock Fritz is the WASB director of communications and editor of the Wisconsin School News. He can be reached at bfritz@wasb.org.

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**BREAKOUT SESSION PROPOSALS
WERE DUE JUNE 20.**

*If you haven't heard whether your breakout session proposal was
selected, please contact WASB Director of Communications
Brock Fritz at bfritz@wasb.org.*

Growing Through Summer

Teaching and Empowering Madison Students Through Reading, Culture and Community

By RJ Larson

When kids head back to school in the fall, the most common question they get asked is, “What did you do this summer?” For 50 students in the Madison Metropolitan School District, they get to say they were part of Freedom Schools.

The national program began during the 1960s as a model of summer learning, literacy development and youth empowerment. It is designed to address the needs of children who lack access to high-quality literacy programs during the summer. According to the Children’s Defense Fund website, there were 199 Freedom School programs in 26 states in 2024.

The first Freedom Schools program in Wisconsin began last summer at Mendota Elementary Community School in Madison, serving students in first through third grade. The full-day program ran Monday through Friday in June and July.

While operating during typical hours, it’s not your typical summer school program; it’s a movement that empowers young people to realize their full potential.

According to MMSD, Freedom Schools students — referred to as scholars — are guided by servant leader interns. While not yet licensed educators, many of the interns are studying to become teachers through





MMSD's Grow Your Own to Associate Degree program, which supports current employees on their path to becoming educators and helps address workforce needs across the district. These servant leaders manage classroom learning, with support from a licensed site coordinator, while forming powerful bonds with scholars.

"Freedom Schools is different because it allows the scholars to have freedom," explains Miss Courtney, a servant intern leader. "While Freedom Schools does have a curriculum, at the end of the day, we're still here to be safe and have fun. That's the number one rule that I have for our scholars."

The MMSD website states that the program is "designed to provide a safe, fun and academically enriching environment where young minds can grow, learn and thrive."

Its mission is to create a supportive and empowering environment where all children are inspired to reach their full potential and to ignite a love of learning and leadership. The program stresses high-quality academic and character-building enrichment, parent and family involvement, civic engagement, intergenerational servant leadership development, nutrition, health, and mental health.

As Freedom School Project Manager Sarita Foster explains, although the program follows a set schedule each day, no two days are alike.

"We have breakfast in the morning with scholars, family members and people in the community. Even community members who don't have scholars in the program are welcome to come have breakfast with us every day," says Foster, who also serves as



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**All children are
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creativity and critical
thinking to promote a
sense of community
and responsibility.**

MMSD community schools manager. "We then transition into Harambee (a Swahili word meaning "let's pull together"), which is essentially a morning meeting — Freedom Schools style. There's lots of singing, we do cheers, chants and recognitions for scholars. We also go over the afternoon agenda for their afternoon activities, which do change every day. We also have a weekly field trip, some that we go to and some in-house, where we have partners that come to us and host workshops or activities for our scholars."

The daily curriculum is focused on reading. The program aims to ensure that scholars can find opportunities to be supported in reading and help them be more prepared for the upcoming school year.

"The kids that came into our program this year just need a little bit of support. To ensure that we are seeing gains, we bring in an assessor to assess the scholars right at the beginning of the summer program on where they are with the reading," says MMSD Freedom Schools Executive Director Sonia Spencer, who is also MMSD's senior strategic partnerships coordinator. "Then we assess them midway through the program and close to the end to see where they are. We want to make sure that this is not just a program where we're providing scholars with literacy and reading, but to make sure that we're adding these other measures and metrics that are really allowing them to thrive."

The curriculum is designed to go beyond traditional metrics. After reading a book, scholars will engage in an activity that plays into the integrated reading curriculum and reinforces concepts they learned in their reading.





Freedom Schools encourages parents, family members and community members to participate in the program, support scholars and show how the collaboration impacts everyone.

“We have weekly themes. This week is about community, so all of our books this week are about community. Today, we read ‘Jayden’s Impossible Garden,’ where his whole community came together and made gardens throughout the city where there was not much nature,” Miss Courtney says of an early-July theme. “Later today, we’re going to go out to our garden and make a Venn diagram comparing ourselves to our special garden. Earlier this week, we read an inclusion book where they had different friends who had different things going on with them within their lives, physically and mentally, where everyone felt included. Then we all made a banner to include all of us, as well as everyone in the book.”

The program stresses the importance of community engagement. Freedom Schools encourages parents, family members and community members to participate in the program, support scholars and show how the collaboration impacts everyone. Along with having breakfast with scholars, parents and community members provide snacks, participate in the Harambee session in the morning, eat lunch with scholars and teachers, and join different activities and learning sessions.

“We want to find opportunities for parents and people in the

community to be involved. We want our scholars to be able to see who our community partners are and put a name to a face,” says Spencer. “If they hear a name, we want to make sure that we’re inviting that community partner in so they can say, ‘Mr. Smith, we know what you do. It’s good to meet you in person.’ It takes a village and it’s really important for us to ensure that the program just doesn’t live here at Mendota Elementary, but it lives in our entire community.”

The program teaches important life skills like reading, but also introduces students to real-world problems. It embeds lessons in history, civic engagement, family engagement and community engagement.

Spencer believes the program's diverse student body helps every scholar understand their identity,

heritage and history.

“We need to make sure that we have a collective for building up allies to support not only our curriculum, but also to help others understand the importance of Freedom Schools and what Freedom Schools means,” she says. “It’s important for them to know that they are in a program that allows them to be authentically who they are. Regardless of your culture or nationality, you can come into this space and be authentically you.”

“We’re teaching them that we’re here to have fun and be safe with everyone,” adds Miss Courtney. “We’re also teaching them to respect our community, ourselves, our country, our education and everyone around us.”

A significant change from the school year environment is that scholars aren’t expected to raise their hands. If they want to answer a question, they can shout out the answer. If they have a question, they can just ask it. They have the freedom to speak up without waiting to be called upon. Each afternoon, the kids choose what activities they take part in — such as sports, talent shows or games they create themselves.

“We kind of just make up activities that the kids like to do, but also what we like to do,” says Miss Courtney. “I like to incorporate what I like to do for the kids, but also I like

The curriculum is designed to go beyond traditional metrics. After reading a book, scholars will engage in an activity that plays into the integrated reading curriculum and reinforces concepts they learned in their reading.



to hear the input from the scholars about what they want to do, and then we incorporate that into our afternoon activities.”

Spencer hopes that with the momentum of this year, similar programs will start up in other Wisconsin districts.

“There are lots of benefits for embedding the Freedom School model into other school districts,” says Spencer. “This program connects with scholars in a different form, where they understand their worth. It’s important for us as educators to embed that within our scholars.”

While Freedom Schools has a lot of benefits for scholars and communities, it can’t happen without dedicated staff and administrative support from the school district. It took years of planning from multiple people in different roles to make Freedom Schools happen in Madison.

Serving as a Freedom Schools site administrator or servant intern leader required hours of in-person training in Tennessee to ensure a strong understanding of the curriculum and readiness to support scholar success. However, the staff believed that the time was well worth it after seeing how rewarding the program was for the scholars and community.

“What I’ve found most rewarding has been hearing from families about

how much their scholars really enjoy the program. I recently saw one of our scholars out in the community, and they ran up to me and we embraced each other. The scholar started telling everybody, including his parents, ‘This is my teacher at Freedom Schools and I love Freedom Schools.’ Those are the moments where you’re like, ‘Wow, kids are really enjoying this program,’” says Spencer. “Another is seeing how our scholars interact with our guest speakers and the questions that they are asking. If it’s not something centered on the book, it’s a question centered on who they are and where they come from. That’s really telling of how scholars are being mindful, paying attention and being observant of who’s coming into our space and wanting to know more about them. That’s fulfilling because it’s opening up their view — there are so many people in our community that we don’t know yet and we want to ask them questions about who they are, why they choose to read this book to us, or what this book means to them.”

Another rewarding aspect for Spencer was seeing how quickly the kids showed growth.

“The first day, a lot of the kids didn’t want to

sing during Harambee,” she says.

“They were shy, had their heads down, didn’t know any of the music, chants or our names. Now they can participate in Harambee, express themselves through song and be comfortable enough to articulate what they need to say without being ridiculed or stopped. That makes a difference when a scholar can share their thoughts and feelings at any moment, and we are ready to receive that. It’s very telling of how much the program is embedding change into our scholars.”

To learn more about Freedom Schools, visit www.madison.k12.wi.us/academics/freedom-schools or contact Sonia Spencer at stspencer@madison.k12.wi.us or Sarita Foster at snfoster@madison.k12.wi.us. ■

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“That makes a difference when a scholar can share their thoughts and feelings at any moment, and we are ready to receive that. It’s very telling of how much the program is embedding change into our scholars.”

— Sonia Spencer





Reviving Sunnyside

Inside a \$30 million transformation that brought new light to the Pulaski Community School District.

By Brock Fritz

For more than 40 years, the basement of Sunnyside Elementary School — accounting for nearly half the building’s square footage — had no natural light. The Pulaski Community School District set out to change that — and create a dynamic, modern learning hub — with its 2022 referendum.

The district’s \$69.8 million referendum was contracted by C.D. Smith Construction and included investments in seven buildings across a three-year period. The most transformative renovations may

have occurred at Sunnyside Elementary, which accounted for \$30.1 million of the referendum.

“Growing population in the area causing an increase in students at Sunnyside,” C.D. Smith Project Manager Marc McGuire says of the need for renovating the school, which was built in 1980. “The building was at capacity. The addition created more space and allowed for the transformation of existing spaces. Options included creating a larger addition and abandoning the basement or a mid-

size addition while keeping the basement and providing it with natural light.”

The district opted for the latter — a phased 22-month project that featured a 45,700-square-foot addition on top of renovations to the existing 64,000-square-foot facility. The addition created modern learning environments for 4K, kindergarten and first-grade students, as well as a new library, kitchen and a secure main entrance connected to a bright, double-height cafeteria. The new Student



Sunnyside boasts upgraded systems that are crucial to the health and safety of the building, as well as spaces that allow for collaboration and dynamic educational environments.



Collaboration Hub features a learning stair with tiered seating, flexible classroom areas, and soft seating to support group instruction and collaborative projects.

“Central to this project design are collaboration stations and flexible seating, which fundamentally transform how students engage with their education — and how teachers facilitate learning,” Pulaski Community School District Superintendent Allison Space says. “These features promote increased engagement, creativity and autonomy, allowing students to work in ways that best suit their learning styles. Whether they’re huddled around a collaborative table brainstorming ideas or choosing a soft-seating option to read independently, students are empowered to take ownership of their learning in a dynamic setting that mirrors real-world workspaces.”

The design shift reflected Pulaski’s broader commitment to fostering 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking. The district also sought adaptability, giving teachers the flexibility to reconfigure spaces for varied instructional needs. With that in mind, the hub was designed to promote cross-grade-level collaboration, group projects and interdisciplinary learning.

By creating that space, the district also brought light to an existing space. Rather than abandoning the basement, a large skylight was installed to flood the new Student Collaboration Hub with natural light.

“Its creation involved thoughtful planning to maximize the once dark spaces,” Space says of the skylight remodel, which ran from November 2024 until July 2025. “The design of the build was to allow as much natural light in as possible, as well as create an easy learning flow from the classroom

to the collaboration spaces.”

The skylight also allowed the district to find an innovative solution that rejuvenated an old building, created a state-of-the-art learning space and saved a bit of money in the process.

“Cost can be significantly reduced by remodeling a building as opposed to building new,” McGuire says. “Generally, the structure and enclosure are left intact and reused in a renovation. Mechanical, electrical, plumbing systems are usually upgraded or modified slightly, not an entire new system as in a new build or addition. Between the structure, enclosure and systems, this can account for more than 50% of the project cost.”

Now, Sunnyside boasts upgraded systems that are crucial to the health and safety of the building, as well as spaces that allow for collaboration and dynamic educational environments. However, creating capacity was just the first step. Space

believes that the success of the Sunnyside project is defined by the investment the district made to prepare staff to fully leverage the collaborative learning environments.

“Simply adding modern furniture and open spaces wasn’t enough — true transformation requires a deep understanding of how to use those spaces effectively,” Space says, noting that district leaders went on many site visits throughout the referendum process. “Through targeted professional development, research-based strategies and ongoing training, our educators were equipped with the tools to foster authentic student collaboration. Teachers learned how to design lessons that extend beyond the traditional classroom, set clear expectations for student engagement in shared spaces and promote meaningful peer-to-peer interaction. As a result, our collaboration areas are not just visually appealing — they are purposeful extensions of instruction that enhance learning every day.” ■

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DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR THE ‘REAL WORLD’

How Stratford’s student-run business serves the community while developing future professionals.

By Brock Fritz

Walk into Stratford High School and you might see students constructing a deer blind, crafting metal signage or building a doghouse.

Drive around town months later and you’re likely to see those same products in the woods, outside of SC Swiderski buildings or housing a member of the Marathon County Police K-9 unit.

That’s the result of the Tiger Technology Club, a student-run business that designs, builds and sells products to the Stratford community.

“Our program specializes in giving students exposure in a wide variety of courses and career fields,” Stratford Technical Education

Teacher Blake Lehman says of the high school’s technical education department, which includes courses on woodworking, construction, graphic design, engineering, metalworking, automotives, electricity, small engines and manufacturing. There’s also a Youth Apprenticeship program and a class that teaches do-it-yourself skills, such as basic plumbing, electricity, drywall repair, small engine maintenance, siding repairs and everything else students should know before graduating and entering the “real world.”

“These skills are important to help them safely do basic, hands-on things on their own once they

graduate,” says Lehman, who is entering his seventh year of teaching. “Soft skills will help them become more college, career and life ready, which are the three big things our district focuses on.”

The Tiger Technology Club provides these skills by giving students the ability to create and sell a variety of custom products. The club produces items like custom fire truck vinyls, conference tables, banners, doghouses, metal signage and more.

Many of the products rely on community partnerships. The deer blinds are a result of a partnership with Stratford Homes, which donates most of the materials needed for construction.



DEER BLINDS, built by students in partnership with Stratford Homes, provide students valuable opportunities to gain technical skills and connect with potential employers.



“Community partnerships are crucial for us to do what we do,” says Lehman, who advises the Tiger Technology Club alongside Marshall Lehman. “Many local businesses donate materials to help us grow our program and allow students to gain access to larger, more advanced projects. Partnerships also allow our students to gain connections with potential employers.”

The Stratford construction students, typically juniors and seniors, then build the blinds from scratch before marketing and selling them to community members.

“They use all basic construction skills,” Lehman says of the skills the

students develop. “They learn how to read a blueprint, as well as framing, insulation, siding, shingling, etc.”

Once the blinds are ready to sell, the students post on the school’s social media page to market their products. When someone purchases a blind, they drive to the Stratford High School, pick it up and bring it home.

The 6x6, fully insulated blinds are modular, coming apart in six pieces. Therefore, they can stack the sections on a trailer and transport them to their desired location without specialized equipment. One-way vision vinyls are applied to the windows to conceal the hunters inside.

The start-to-finish process fits the tech ed program’s desire to create confident, capable students.

“We hope our students gain confidence in themselves to take on basic projects once they graduate high school,” Lehman says. “We want our students to continue doing hands-on things, and not have to rely on hiring people to do things that they could do themselves. We also hope some students are able to find a career that interests them due to the wide variety of courses we offer.” ■

Brock Fritz is the WASB director of communications and editor of the Wisconsin School News. He can be reached at bfritz@wasb.org.



Facility Planning for Progress

By Erika Freeman

The realities facing rural Wisconsin school districts are challenging. Some need millions of dollars in improvements across multiple facilities. Others haven't passed a capital referendum in decades. Low enrollment levels can leave school boards with urgent infrastructure needs and inadequate budgets to fund them. But with careful strategic planning and thoughtful community outreach, these challenges can be successfully overcome.

■ Early starts = Better results

For rural school districts, facilities maintenance and improvements can present unique opportunities. Aging infrastructure, fluctuating enrollment and leadership transitions can all complicate long-term planning. Building awareness, particularly among residents without direct ties to school districts, can be another tricky task. Tight budgets linked to enrollment levels further complicate matters, requiring school boards to invest wisely in only the most effective tactics.

To overcome these obstacles, school boards must embark on careful, long-term planning early in the process. That means starting preliminary assessments 12–24 months before a potential referendum date.

The school districts of Westfield and Jefferson offer incredible examples of successful community outreach campaigns. By carefully developing data assessments and

smart communication strategies, launching key partnerships and planning leadership transitions, these districts were well positioned for successful outcomes.

■ Westfield: A comeback story

Tucked away in pastoral Marquette County, the School District of Westfield faced a daunting challenge. Its facilities were in such a deteriorated state that its long-time property insurance provider declined to renew coverage. Leaks in the high school's plumbing were costing millions in emergency repairs. Large systems like HVAC units, boilers, and water softeners were failing across multiple schools. Without funding, the future looked bleak.

The district faced a second big hurdle: Westfield hadn't passed a referendum in 30 years. Adding to that, both the district administrator and business manager were transitioning out of their positions.

With a total enrollment of 1,000 students, a limited budget and a vast community spanning 22 municipalities, how would Westfield leaders manage to build trust, raise awareness, and mobilize community

support to meet the district's funding needs?

Westfield's journey began two years before holding a referendum. By starting the planning process far in advance, they set themselves up for success. In 2022, Westfield's first step was hiring Findorff to guide long-range facility planning, including a comprehensive facility study. These efforts, combined with bringing on Somerville Architects & Engineers for the educational adequacy, capacity, and utilization analysis, laid the groundwork for a strategic communications campaign designed to engage the community and address decades of deferred maintenance.

The focus turned to the impending leadership changes. Leadership upheaval can cause significant disruptions to the progress of capital improvement projects. The board thoughtfully hired replacements, District Administrator Michelle Johnson and Business Manager Veronica VanDerhyden, with deep ties to Westfield, both being born and raised in the region and graduates of the district. This ensured that district

leadership retained a local connection at the highest levels.

Transparency and dialogue with residents, both in person and online, was critical. The district hosted 12 community and staff meetings in late 2023 and early 2024, drawing more than 360 attendees. These sessions helped shape the referendum proposal and ensured that community voices were heard.

A district-wide survey conducted in April 2024 revealed strong support for a \$27 million referendum, with 61.5% of respondents in favor. The survey also identified preferred communication channels – newsletters, local newspapers, the district’s website and Facebook – that became the backbone of Westfield’s outreach strategy.

Partnering with Findorff, the district launched a robust, multi-channel communications campaign. Over 30 digital and print pieces were distributed, including articles from Johnson, referendum information sessions, newspaper ads, mailings, e-newsletters, social media updates and website FAQs.

Visual storytelling played a key role, as did efforts to reach residents with no ties to the school system, accounting for 70–75% of eligible voters. For example, rather than simply stating that the pipes at school facilities were corroded, Johnson and other district leaders attended community events and displayed real samples of the school’s corroded plumbing. Many of these events provided residents without school-age children with first-hand understanding of the urgency of these improvements. Visually impactful tools like a corroded pipe offered a

tangible, impactful message.

“Our focus with engagement was to help people see the role they play in our school system,” Johnson says. “Schools are a part of the economic health of the community, and we need all stakeholders to remember the value we bring to them regardless of their connection to our district.”

On election day, the results spoke volumes. In its first successful referendum in three decades, Westfield’s question passed with 62% of voter approval, marking a historic victory for the district.

The district credits its success with launching a campaign rooted in authenticity and responsiveness. The board proactively met residents where they live, congregate and scroll, ensuring that the right messaging reached the most people.

Today, construction is underway at Coloma, Oxford and Westfield elementary schools, along with the Westfield Area Middle/High School. The district continues to share progress updates through its website, ensuring that transparency remains a cornerstone of its relationship with the community.

The Westfield project stands as a testament to the power of strategic

communication, community engagement and perseverance.

■ Jefferson: Framing a brighter future

The School District of Jefferson faced a different set of challenges: significant operational and facilities needs, declining enrollment and historic facilities with sentimental value for the community. The district, which serves 1,600 students across five schools, identified urgent facility needs that required costly repairs and upgrades. With mixed referendum results in the past, community engagement would be the key to success.

In 2022, Jefferson launched its “Framing Our Future Facilities” initiative, forming a Facility Advisory Committee comprised of 17 members representing a broad cross-section of the community. Findorff led the initial facility assessment, followed by collaboration with EUA for option development and long-range planning. Early survey data revealed strong support for the proposed improvements, signaling an optimistic future.

Construction needs were ambitious and far-reaching, touching all five schools in the district: Jefferson High and Middle Schools, East Elementary, West Elementary,



Many of these events provided residents without school-age children with first-hand understanding of the urgency of these improvements.

Visually impactful tools like a corroded pipe offered a tangible, impactful message.



WESTFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT hosted 12 community and staff meetings prior to their referendum, drawing more than 360 attendees to help shape the proposal.

and Sullivan Elementary. Proposed work included:

- Enhancing security at main entrances and fire alarm replacements for improved student safety.
- Upgrading and repairing several failing and inefficient building components.
- Modernizing learning environments with new high school agriculture and technical education labs to support hands-on learning.
- Renovating classrooms for more dynamic and flexible instructional environments.

The renovations were particularly complex and had to be mostly executed during the school year. This included 57,200 square feet of renovations at East Elementary, an early-20th-century building with deep historic significance to the community. Findorff assisted in developing a phased plan to ensure students' safety and success were not negatively impacted, underscoring the need for careful planning and coordination behind these types of projects.

Like Westfield, Jefferson changed superintendents during the planning phase. In this case, a four-month long exit strategy facilitated a seamless transition. Charlie Urness, the new superintendent became the "face" of the campaign, leading community meetings, attending workshops, and speaking directly to

residents. Highly visible leadership instills a sense of confidence, transparency, and partnership with the community, but broader district involvement is essential, too. Steady, engaged involvement by school board members, administrators, and principals helps amplify messaging, spread awareness, and build trust.

"We incorporated the phrase 'Strong Schools = Strong Communities' into our presentations and communications," Urness says. "The equal sign is vital because the statement/equation works both ways."

The district's extensive planning and communications strategies were a success. The referendum passed in November 2022, allowing construction to kick off in March 2023.

Jefferson's outreach strategies weren't a means to an end — they were the beginning of an ongoing conversation. After the referendum passed, the district continued informing the community with project updates to show how it had faithfully delivered on its promises and was investing taxpayer funds judiciously.

Another way in which Jefferson continued its community outreach was by involving students in the construction itself. By inviting students to participate in facilities demolition, site tours and other engaging activities, it helped students learn about the unique needs of educational infrastructure and encouraged the next generation to consider a career in the trades.

■ A blueprint for success

Both districts' experiences illustrate how facility assessments are an essential first step in strategic planning and fostering community trust. For rural (or any) districts embarking upon their own referendum journeys, consider the following recommendations:

- **Start with data.** Assessments reveal urgent needs, guide prioritization and provide vital information for future communications. Surveys reveal insights into the level of community support.
- **Engage the community.** Transparent conversations build support and shared ownership. Hold open houses, attend local events and meet people, including those outside of the school system. Learn where residents congregate online, and share information there, too.
- **Leverage partnerships.** Experts in construction, architecture, finance and demographics provide critical insights. Consider hiring a district communications professional to help manage external messaging and strategy, long before a referendum.
- **Adapt to change.** Leadership transitions are inevitable — continuity comes from clear vision and local commitment. Make smart choices to avoid disruption.

As districts across Wisconsin look to the future, the stories of Westfield and Jefferson offer a powerful reminder: with the right tools and voices at the table, even the most rural communities can achieve lasting progress and help support the next generation. ■

Erika Freeman is director of education market client services at Findorff. She can be reached at efreeman@findorff.com.

How Well Do You Know the WASB?

New to the WASB? A public education whiz?

Test your knowledge with this quiz covering historic facts and trivia about the WASB and public education in Wisconsin. Find answers at the bottom of this page.

1. When was Wisconsin's first free public school opened? And where?

- | | |
|---------|--------------|
| a. 1820 | a. Kenosha |
| b. 1845 | b. La Crosse |
| c. 1870 | c. Racine |
| d. 1895 | d. Wausau |

YOUR SCORE

/9

2. When was the WASB formed?

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| a. Feb. 16, 1921 | c. March 21, 1931 |
| b. March 6, 1925 | d. Feb. 10, 1940 |

3. How many directors serve on the WASB Board of Directors?

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| a. 10 | c. 15 |
| b. 12 | d. 18 |

4. Where are the WASB offices located?

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. Madison and Milwaukee | c. Madison and Wisconsin Rapids |
| b. Madison and Winneconne | d. Madison and Green Bay |

5. How many WASB Executive Directors have there been? (Bonus points if you can name them.)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| a. 4 | c. 9 |
| b. 6 | d. 12 |

6. How many school districts were in the state of Wisconsin as of the end of the 2024-25 school year?

- | | |
|--------|--------|
| a. 411 | c. 421 |
| b. 416 | d. 426 |

7. One WASB region consists of only one school district. What district is that?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| a. Green Bay Area Public School District | c. Milwaukee Public Schools |
| b. Madison Metropolitan School District | d. School District of Superior |

8. Which 1970s TV star gave a keynote at the 2007 Wisconsin State Education Convention?

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| a. Carol Burnett | c. Henry Winkler |
| b. Carroll O'Connor | d. Lynda Carter |

9. How many people attended the 2025 Wisconsin State Education Convention?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| a. 2,573 | c. 3,013 |
| b. 2,884 | d. 3,316 |

ANSWERS

1. BA (Kenosha, then known as Southport) 2. A 3. C 4. B 5. A (George Tipler, Ken Cole, John Ashley, Dan Rossmiller) 6. C 7. C (Region 14) 8. C 9. D

BARBARA HERZOG OSKHOSH AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Barbara Herzog has dedicated her career to public education, serving as a teacher, building administrator and central office leader in four Wisconsin districts before joining the Oshkosh Area School District Board of Education in 2013. Since then, she has led as WASB Board of Directors president, chaired the WASB Insurance Plan Trust, served on the Policy and Resolutions Committee and was the WASB liaison to the Wisconsin School Music Association. Herzog holds bachelor's and master's degrees from UW-Oshkosh and a doctorate in educational administration and adult learning from UW-Madison. A passionate advocate for equity, closing achievement gaps and parent engagement, she is also deeply involved in community service, serving on several nonprofit boards to strengthen Oshkosh.

With her nine-year tenure on the WASB Board of Directors ending in January, Herzog sat down with the School News to reflect on her career in education, her time on the WASB Board, key changes she's witnessed in education, what drives school district success and the importance of parent involvement — while also sharing a few fun facts along the way.

WSN: Tell us a little about yourself.

Barbara Herzog: I'm the oldest of three children. We are all UW-Oshkosh grads. We were raised in an extended family of grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles. I come from a family of teachers. Hobbies of mine include traveling, attending concerts, researching family history and I'm a dog owner. I've been the proud owner of a corgi named Hank and, before that, a corgi named Oliver.

How long have you lived in the Oshkosh area and what do you think makes it unique?

BH: I attended kindergarten through fifth grade in Oshkosh and then my family moved to Fond du Lac, where I graduated from high school. After high school, we moved back to Oshkosh, and I began my college career as an education major. Other than a semester in Manitowoc as an intern teacher, a year in Madison as a grad student and three summers working in summer girls' camps, I've lived in Oshkosh for the duration of my life.

What makes Oshkosh unique to me is that it's a good place to learn, live,



work and play. We have a strong K-12 educational system, which interacts well with the vocational system and UW-Oshkosh as strong educational partners to benefit our students. I enjoy the variety of cultural and sports activities that occur here all year long. I also like to see the variety of religious practices, housing options, language and ethnic backgrounds that are found in our community.

Prior to serving on the Oshkosh school board, you had a variety of roles in four school districts. Could you guide us through what your journey in public education has been like?

BH: I was an intern teacher for one semester at Manitowoc Lincoln High School. I served as a junior high school teacher in Fond du Lac for about a dozen years, where I was also the cheerleading and yearbook advisor. I was better suited to the yearbook advisor because I really couldn't do the jumps that were required for the cheerleaders, but I did know how to run a video camera, so that helped.

I was an assistant principal at a junior high school in Neenah for three years and then came to the Oshkosh Area School District as a central office administrator to oversee K-12 curriculum and professional development of teachers, guidance and counseling, gifted and talented media computer labs, and English as a second language programs. Finally, I've been an ad hoc instructor at UW-Oshkosh, where I also worked for nearly 10 years in an alternative licensure program.

Everyone in our community has a stake in how well our students are educated, and parents and students probably have the biggest stake of all in terms of how well our students are educated. John F. Kennedy once said, “children are our most important resource and our best hope for the future.”

What have been the biggest changes in public education since you were first elected 12 years ago?

BH: There have been a lot of changes over the last 12 years. Part of that is what I call the COVID cloud, which has accelerated some of those. We’ve seen an increasing focus on facilities, not only in our district but throughout the state. There were many schools that were built after World War II, so those facilities are now 50–70 years old.

From my perspective as a long-time board member, we’ve seen an increase in people advocating for individual interests, not for the group, but for their own special interests. Compared to when I first became an Oshkosh school board member, it seems that we’re seeing increased involvement of political parties in ways we’ve not seen before. We’ve seen them providing monetary assistance, endorsing candidates and advocating for only voting for their political party’s candidate over other candidates in what is supposed to be a nonpartisan election. We’ve also seen increased support for vouchers, with public money going to private schools.

What makes for a well-run school board and school district?

BH: I think there are many components, and there are lots of examples around the state of well-run school districts. One of the ways that I would define a well-run school district is to turn to the WASB Essential Elements of Governance, which include quality leadership, a strategic focus on the future, accountability, and communication and engagement — all surrounding governance for high levels of learning for all students.

To support those elements, we need respect and trust among board members and the superintendent. We need integrity of board members and

the superintendent. We need to focus on student learning and growth for all kids. Finally, we need a commitment to the success of public education. We need respect for our financial, physical and human resources in order to be good stewards of the resources that are that are afforded to us as board members.

You’re committed to involving parents in the educational process. Why do you feel that’s important?

BH: Parents are the first teachers of our students, so we can learn from them as they learn from us about how our students behave in our schools. Everyone in our community has a stake in how well our students are educated, and parents and students probably have the biggest stake of all in terms of how well our students are educated. John F. Kennedy once said, “children are our most important resource and our best hope for the future.”

As a teacher and definitely as an assistant principal, I learned the value of reaching out to parents and asking them to help me be more successful with their students. They’re probably in a better position to know what students know, what they like and how they respond when they’re encouraged. Parents have always been a key component in making sure that we’re coordinating our efforts.

What have you enjoyed most about serving on the board for the past nine years?

BH: This has been an awesome journey. It’s been an honor and a privilege to be able to serve as one of 15 board members throughout Wisconsin. I have learned so much from my fellow board members. There are so many dedicated and caring public school board members throughout Wisconsin. I’ve had the

privilege to meet and get to know many through the workshops and convention sessions I’ve attended, as well as through the policy and resolutions process.

I’ve learned about educational issues on a state and national level that I would never have had an opportunity to, had I not served on the WASB board. However, I think the main thing has been meeting the dedicated and caring board members throughout the state and learning about the needs and concerns of their districts.

How has the WASB helped you become a more effective board member?

BH: This is something I reflect on often. Service on the board has helped me improve my listening skills. I thought I was a good listener before I joined the WASB Board, but I’ve found myself trying to put myself more in the shoes of other board members, maybe those who come from smaller or more rural districts than what I’ve experienced. My experience has been in larger districts, so learning from people who have transportation issues and challenges of getting students to school in a timely manner has had a big impact on my thinking as a board member.

I’ve made attending workshops and conferences a top priority throughout my tenure because I wanted to improve my knowledge and skills as a board member at the state and local levels. It was important to me to serve as a role model for other board members across the state by participating in my own professional growth. I still learn every day how to be a better board member. Service has largely helped me with my listening skills, my ability to put myself in other people’s shoes, review their points of view and look at multiple sides of issues to better understand what’s truly going on. ■

2025 Regional Meetings

The WASB's Fall Regional Meetings are underway!

Meetings are taking place in every WASB region — as well as virtually — and provide an opportunity to network with area board members, celebrate accomplishments and learn what the WASB is doing for you. Regions 2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14 and 15 are also voting on a WASB regional director.

All meetings will begin at 6 p.m., with registration and networking followed by a 6:30 dinner and 7 p.m. programming. The pre-meeting workshop, titled “Students Can’t Learn If They’re Not There,” will begin at 4:30 p.m. The member fee is \$42 for the meeting, which includes dinner, and \$75 for the pre-meeting workshop. Register for both and receive a \$10 discount. Visit WASB.org for more details and to register.

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 14* | TBD – Milwaukee, MPS Administration Building

Online Virtual Workshop | Nov. 4, 12 p.m. – Zoom link to come via email

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

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

SAVE THE DATE
WASB School Law Conference
FEBRUARY 18–19, 2026
The Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake, WI

REGIONAL MEETING WORKSHOP

Prior to each Fall Regional Meeting, WASB consultants and staff counsel will host a 4:30 p.m. workshop in the same facility in which the meeting will be held. This year’s workshop covers student absenteeism and attendance laws:

Students Can’t Learn If They’re Not There

Student success starts with showing up. Yet in the 2023–24 school year, nearly 1 in 5 Wisconsin K–12 students missed more than 10 days of school. That’s a challenge we can’t afford to ignore — and one we can address.

Join us for a focused 90-minute workshop designed to help school leaders take meaningful action. We’ll begin with a clear overview of Wisconsin’s compulsory attendance laws, presented by WASB legal counsel, to ensure your district understands its responsibilities and options. Then, WASB consultants will share proven, practical strategies that districts across the state are using to improve attendance and re-engage students.

You’ll leave with:

- A solid understanding of the legal framework around attendance and truancy.
- Tools to communicate effectively with families.
- Policy ideas that support student engagement.
- Real-world examples of what’s working in Wisconsin schools.

Whether your district is already tackling chronic absenteeism or just starting the conversation, this session will equip you with the insights and strategies to make a difference.

REGISTER NOW and help ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed.

An online workshop for all members will be held at 12 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 4, on Zoom.

Celebrating Student Voices

The 2025–26 school year is underway!

Don’t miss our powerful Student Voices video — now live on WASB.org and all WASB social media platforms. Hear from passionate students across Wisconsin as they share why public schools matter and inspire others to stand up and support them. Watch now and share with your community!

Stay in the loop and never miss a moment — 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.



UPCOMING WEBINARS

■ WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

OCT. 15, NOV. 19, DEC. 17 | 12–1 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.

Enhanced Title IX Training

The WASB and Boardman & Clark recorded new Title IX training videos over the summer. All modules are now available! Mandatory sessions include modules on Title IX Coordinators, Investigators, Decision-Makers and the Informal Resolution Process. Trainings for all employees and administrators are also available, as is content on athletics, retaliation and compliance.

Stay tuned for a virtual Title IX Q&A, which is complimentary to Title IX subscribers and is your opportunity to ask attorneys from WASB and Boardman & Clark your questions about the regulations.

Subscribe today! If your district already subscribes, all new content is available — just log in to access it. For more information, visit [WASB.org](https://wasb.org) or contact info@wasb.org.

Register for the Fall Legislative Conference

November 8 | Stevens Point, WI

Registration is now open for the 2025 Fall Legislative Conference, taking place on Saturday, Nov. 8, in Stevens Point. This event offers a unique opportunity to gain insight into the future of public education and hear from experts on some of the most pressing issues facing your students and communities.

Attendees will learn about effective advocacy and timely topics, including federal education funding, how to communicate budget challenges and state aid to your communities, how to effectively track legislation and take action, chronic absenteeism, school consolidation and much more.

Visit [WASB.org](https://wasb.org) to register, book hotel rooms and find the agenda, which features sessions from the WASB, COSSBA, the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the Wisconsin State Legislature and more.

The registration fee is \$190 per participant, which includes the program, materials, continental breakfast and lunch. The deadline for registration is Friday, October 31.

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. You can't book a hotel room until you register for convention.

If you submitted a breakout session proposal, you should have already received an email notifying you whether it has been accepted. Contact WASB Director of Communications Brock Fritz at bfritz@wasb.org for more information.

SHOWCASE YOUR STUDENTS

Get involved in the 2026 Wisconsin State Education Convention! The convention, scheduled for Jan. 21–23 in Milwaukee, is your opportunity to showcase your students. The WASB is now accepting proposals for the student art exhibit and the student video team. Student art exhibit and student video team proposals are due by Nov. 15 and Nov. 28, respectively.

Email art submissions to aqualmann@wasb.org, and video team applications to rjlarson@wasb.org. Find more information at [WASB.org/convention](https://wasb.org/convention).



COSSBA Federal Advocacy Conference

From left to right: WASB Government Relations Specialist David Martin, first vice president Sandie Anderson, second vice president Bob Green and executive director Dan Rossmiller attended the COSSBA Federal Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C., from Sept. 7–9.

Fall Legislative Session Preview

What could get done? Where should efforts be focused?



Wisconsin's 2025-26 legislative session will continue through the fall until early 2026.

Insiders are suggesting that legislative floor activity will be limited — particularly in the state Senate. Gov. Evers, who has already announced his future retirement, is still in office through the end of 2026. For anything to become law, bipartisan cooperation will be required. It remains to be seen how much willingness is left for that type of work after the significant negotiation and compromise put into the state budget and with the 2026 election cycle looming.

■ Rehired annuitants legislation

A top WASB priority that stands a real chance to make it into law is legislation that would allow Wisconsin Retirement System retirees to return to work without suspending their annuity. Companion bills, **Senate Bill 170/Assembly Bill 196**, are authored by state Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and state Rep. Robert Wittke (R-Racine) and have strong bipartisan support. Both bills had public hearings held in their respective legislative committees in

May. However, each bill still needs to be voted out of committee before they can advance to full votes in the Senate and Assembly. No one testified in opposition to either bill at the respective hearings and no group has registered opposition.

Meanwhile, the bills are supported by a plethora of groups (including the WASB) representing schools, local governments, public safety, etc.

The Assembly Committee on Local Government was scheduled on Sept. 10 to hold a vote on Assembly Bill 196; however, the bill was pulled from the committee's agenda prior to the vote. The committee chairman, Rep. Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville), is a co-author and supporter of the legislation.

We have heard that there is still pushback from others in the Assembly GOP caucus who believe the bill allows for unfair “double dipping” and will incentivize mass retirements. There has been talk of a potential amendment that we have not seen as of this writing. Two rival bills, which focus solely on law enforcement and firefighters (AB-36) as well as jailers and protective occupations (AB-138), have already passed through their respective committees.

In the Senate, the Committee on Transportation and Local Government, chaired by Senator Cory Tomczyk (R-Mosinee), has not yet scheduled a committee vote on Senate Bill 170.

Ultimately, *action is needed in both chambers* for this bill to become law. **We urge you to contact your state legislators in both the Assembly and Senate and ask them to support the passage of this bill this session.** Read below for provided talking points to assist in your communications.

Under the bill, employers would be required to pay into ETF an amount equal to what the annuitant would have paid had they chosen to forgo their annuity under current law. The bill makes no change to the current law requirement of a 75-day break in service before a retiree can return to work. While the original bill included a 60-month cap on allowing a retiree to return to work while receiving their annuity, an amendment was introduced by the Assembly authors (at the request of the Dept. of Employee Trust Funds) that removes this cap.

Talking points include:

Under the bill [Senate Bill 170/Assembly Bill 196], employers would be required to pay into ETF an amount equal to what the annuitant would have paid had they chosen to forgo their annuity under current law.

- It offers a practical tool for public employers to fill critical vacancies by rehiring experienced retirees, without compromising the long-term integrity of the WRS.
- Retaining the break in service and requiring contributions to the state retirement fund ensures that positions filled by retirees remain sustainable and that the retirement system remains secure for all members.
- The staffing shortages schools are experiencing are real and urgent.
- This legislation is especially vital for hard-to-fill positions—such as special education, computer science, math, physics, advanced placement and music.
- Retired educators bring a wealth of experience, deep institutional knowledge and the ability to step into classrooms immediately, particularly when returning to their former districts. Minimal onboarding is needed, and their impact is felt from day one.
- Other states have already adopted similar measures — recognizing that retired

annuitants are a valuable resource for helping address nationwide labor shortages.

- Under current law, retired annuitants can return to private sector employment without giving up their annuity.

■ **Parties outline their education priorities**

In perhaps a more performative exercise, dueling press conferences were held in mid-September by Assembly Republicans and legislative Democrats outlining K-12 education priorities for the remainder of the 2025–26 legislative session. These are unlikely to become law as Gov. Evers is unlikely to sign any of the Assembly GOP priorities (and the Senate may not be on board either), and the GOP legislative majority is unlikely to advance any Dem priorities. The issues they have decided to focus on could, however, give a preview of their respective K-12 education platforms for the 2026 election cycle.

The Assembly Republican Caucus laid out a series of proposals, which (as of this writing) have yet to be introduced, that will largely center around changes to math curriculum and testing, incentives for school

consolidation and shared services, and a “teacher bill of rights” that will focus on student discipline. Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) is hoping to introduce the GOP bills within the next couple of weeks and get them to the Assembly floor by the October or November floor periods.

Legislative Democrats (of both chambers) focused on increasing general school aids equal to changes in inflation, providing healthy school meals for every student at no cost and creating a line on the property tax bill for parental choice and independent charter school funding.

Speaker Vos also announced the creation of four new Speaker’s Task Forces. These task forces have become a routine part of the Assembly’s legislative session. This year, the task forces will be focused on Protecting Children (Rep. Lindee Brill, R-Sheboygan Falls), Government Efficiency (Rep. Jim Piwowarczyk, R-Hubertus), Elder Services (Rep. Patrick Snyder, R-Weston) and Agency Rulemaking (Rep. Brent Jacobson, R-Mosinee).

For updates in real time on the status of these legislative proposals and other developments, please subscribe to the Legislative Update Blog on WASB.org. ■

2025 FALL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

#WASBLEGCONF2025

Registration is now open for the 2025 Fall Legislative Conference, taking place on Saturday, Nov. 8, in Stevens Point. This event offers a unique opportunity to gain insights into the future of public education and hear from experts on some of the most pressing issues facing your students and communities.

Attendees will learn about effective advocacy and timely topics, including federal education funding, how to communicate budget challenges and state aid to your communities, how to effectively track legislation and take action, school funding challenges, school consolidation and more.

Visit wasb.org/2025-fall-legislative-conference to register and view the agenda.

Hope to see you in Stevens Point! □



Dispute Resolution Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), parents and school districts can initiate two different processes when disputes arise regarding the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to a child with a disability. The two mechanisms to resolve disputes are known as IDEA state complaints and due process hearings. The frequency of disputes between parents of students with disabilities and school districts has increased significantly over the past few years.

A review of the Department of Public Instruction's list of IDEA state complaint decisions indicates that the department received 145 complaints in 2024 compared to 63 complaints in 2021.¹ Consequently, in the short span of just three years, the number of IDEA state complaints more than doubled, increasing by an astounding 130%. Historically, Wisconsin has had significantly fewer due process hearings. For example, there was only one due process hearing decision reported in 2022.² That number increased to four in 2024. Data for 2025 is not yet available, but anecdotally, administrative law judges and education law attorneys alike are reporting significantly higher rates of due process hearing requests.

Given the increased number of requests for both IDEA state

complaints and due process hearings, it is important that boards are aware of the procedures associated with dispute resolution processes and the potential consequences when each process is requested. This Legal Comment will provide an overview of IDEA state complaints and due process hearings, including the differences between the two processes.

■ IDEA state complaints

“Any individual or organization may file” an IDEA state complaint alleging a violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.³ The complaint must be in writing, signed and include the following information:

- A statement that a public agency has violated special education law.
- The facts on which the statement is based.
- The contact information for the complainant.
- If the complaint alleges violations with respect to a specific child:
 - The name of the child.
 - The child's residence address.
 - The name of the school the child attends.
- A description of the nature of the problem of the child, including facts relating to the problem.

- Proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time the complaint is filed.

In Wisconsin, a one-year statute of limitations applies to IDEA state complaints. Consequently, the violation alleged in the complaint must have occurred less than one year prior to the date that the complaint is received.

Once a complaint is received, DPI will notify the school district of the complaint. DPI will also request that the school district send DPI relevant special education records. Typically, this will include the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and any recent special education evaluations. DPI will also conduct interviews with district staff who have knowledge of the alleged violation.

DPI has 60 days to complete its investigation of the complaint and issue a decision. If no violation is found, the complaint will be closed and the school district will not need to take any action. Conversely, if DPI does find that the district violated any provision of the IDEA, DPI will direct the district to take corrective action. Corrective action may come in many different forms, depending upon the violation. For example, if the violation is procedural in nature, such as a failure to abide by timelines associated with a special education

“Any individual or organization may file” an IDEA state complaint alleging a violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

In general, of the two dispute resolution procedures... IDEA state complaints are less adversarial, are resolved in a much shorter timeline, and sometimes proceed without the involvement of attorneys.

evaluation, DPI may direct the district to establish procedures and train staff on those procedures to ensure that the procedural error does not recur. If the violation is more substantive in nature — for example, a failure to provide services set forth in a student's IEP — DPI may direct the district to schedule an IEP team meeting to determine what, if any, compensatory education is owed to the student.

In general, of the two dispute resolution procedures (i.e., IDEA state complaints and due process hearings), IDEA state complaints are less adversarial, are resolved in a much shorter timeline, and sometimes proceed without the involvement of attorneys. Additionally, if attorneys are involved in an IDEA state complaint, DPI does not have the authority to order an award of attorney fees to either party. There is also no mechanism for either party to appeal a DPI decision or to pursue attorney fees in either state or federal court.

■ Due process hearings

Unlike IDEA state complaints, due process hearings are much more trial-like and usually involve attorneys on one or both sides. Due process hearings are initiated when a parent, an attorney representing a parent, or a school district submits a request for a due process hearing to DPI. In Wisconsin, there is a one-year statute of limitations to file a due process complaint, unless a rare exception applies. The request must contain the following information:

- The name and address of the child.
- The name of the school the child is attending.
- A description of the nature

of the problem of the child relating to the hearing request, including the facts relating to such problem, and a proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the parents at the time.

The DPI will forward the request to the Division of Hearings and Appeals, an agency that will assign an administrative law judge (ALJ) to preside over the due process hearing. Pursuant to PI 11, an ALJ must be an attorney licensed to practice law in Wisconsin, must have received approved hearing officer training, and must not have any conflicts of interest, such as being employed by a public school district or DPI.⁴

Due process hearings also have a built-in resolution process. Within 15 days of receiving notice of the due process hearing request, the district and the parent must participate in a “resolution session.” The parties must engage in this session unless both parties agree in writing to waive the requirement or agree to substitute mediation for the resolution session. The resolution session is for the purpose of discussing the issues leading to the due process hearing request and giving the school district an opportunity to resolve those issues.

If the parties have not resolved the issues set forth in the due process hearing request within 30 days of the request, the due process hearing will proceed. Prior to the hearing, each party is required to disclose to the other party the witnesses they intend to question during the hearing and any evidence that they intend to introduce in the hearing. At the hearing, much like a trial, each party will present their case through the testimony of witnesses and the introduction of

evidence. Each party will also have the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses presented by the other party. Also, a stenographer will be present to make an accurate recording (i.e., a transcript) of the hearing. The school district is responsible for paying for the cost of the stenographer as well as the ALJ.

Once the due process hearing is completed, the ALJ has 45 days to issue a decision based upon the testimony and evidence presented at the hearing. The remedies an ALJ may order vary greatly and are based upon any finding of a violation. For example, an ALJ may award compensatory education for any implementation failures or order a district to complete an evaluation in a dispute over special education eligibility. An ALJ may also order a district to reimburse a parent for private school tuition if the hearing involves a disagreement regarding placement. ALJs have a great deal of discretion to craft appropriate remedies to address violations of the IDEA.

Once a decision has been made, any party who is aggrieved (i.e., the party who lost) by the decision may appeal to either a state or federal district court. In addition, the party deemed to be the prevailing party (i.e., the winner) may also pursue reimbursement for attorney fees via an action in state or federal court. However, the standard for obtaining any reimbursement for attorney fees varies based on the party seeking that reimbursement. A parent seeking reimbursement of attorney fees need only to demonstrate that they are a prevailing party. However, a district seeking reimbursement of attorney fees must be a prevailing party and also demonstrate that the parent's

due process hearing request “was frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation,” or was “presented for any improper purpose, such as to harass, to cause unnecessary delay, or to needlessly increase the cost of litigation.”⁵ A school district may also pursue reimbursement directly against a parent if it is a prevailing party, and it is able to demonstrate that the parent’s request for a due process hearing was presented for any improper purpose, “such as to harass, to cause unnecessary delay, or to needlessly increase the cost of litigation.”⁶

■ Conclusion

Best practice is to develop strong relationships with parents and comply with all procedural and substantive provisions of the IDEA.

However, sometimes disputes are unavoidable, and they can have significant consequences, including economic impact, for districts. Regardless, IDEA guarantees parents and school districts the right to request an IDEA state complaint or a due process hearing to resolve those disputes. The information above provides board members with a general overview of the two primary mechanisms of dispute resolution under the IDEA. If and when a district receives a request for a due process hearing or an IDEA state complaint, districts should continue to work with parents and continue to serve the student consistent with the student’s IEP. Districts should also contact legal counsel to analyze the issues alleged by the parent to determine if further legal

guidance is appropriate. ■

This Legal Comment was written by Matthew W. Bell, Sandra G. Cohen, and Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For related articles, see Wisconsin School News: “The Manifestation Determination Process” (Sept. 2021) and “Common Questions About the Student Expulsion Process” (Nov. 2021).

1. Wis. Dep’t of Pub. Instruction, SPED Complaints – Complete History (2025), <https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/dispute-resolution/complain/decisions>.
2. Wis. Dep’t of Pub. Instruction, Index of Available 2022 Due Process Hearing Decision (2025), <https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/dispute-resolution/due-process/decisions-2022>.
3. Wis. Dep’t of Pub. Instruction, IDEA State Complaints (2025), <https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/dispute-resolution/complain>.
4. Wis. Admin. Code § PI 11.12.
5. 20 U.S.C. §1415(i)(3)(B).
6. *Id.*

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

TITLE IX TRAINING SERIES



Provide your staff with mandated Title IX training.

The WASB and Boardman & Clark updated their Title IX Training Series this summer. This series is based on the 2020 Title IX regulations and includes training for Title IX coordinators, investigators, all employees and more.

Subscribe now and begin training.

Visit the WASB Portal to subscribe and start providing the training to all staff members in your district.

The 2025-26 subscription rate is \$395 for members and complimentary for Policy Resource Guide subscribers. To order, contact subscriptions@WASB.org.



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theboldtcompany.com

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

► VJS Construction Services

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

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

Computer Hardware, Software, Consulting

► Skyward, Inc.

715-341-9406
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

► Baird Public Finance

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
Phil.R.Lucca@EMCIns.com
Property and casualty insurance.

► Foster & Foster Consulting Actuaries, Inc.

262-522-6415, foster-foster.com
Sarah.plohocky@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.kurzyske@m3ins.com
m3ins.com

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

► National Insurance Services of Wisconsin, Inc.

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

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



UPCOMING MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS



2025 FALL REGIONAL MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS

September - November

Dates and locations vary by region



FALL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

November 8, 2025

Holiday Inn Convention Center - Stevens Point

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