

2026 STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION REVIEW

WISCONSIN

# SchoolNews

Official publication of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.

March 2026 | wasb.org

*Thursday keynote  
Mickey Smith Jr.  
brought the energy  
with a powerful  
message for  
attendees*

*— story on page 8*

# Finding Your Sound

# one partner every step



**Better Buildings.  
Better Learning.®**

Nexus Solutions is 100% focused on helping PK-12 school districts plan, fund, design and build realistic facility improvements that benefit student learning while bringing communities together. From strategic planning to construction closeout, we are your single-source partner—transparent, trusted, and always by your side.

PLAN

FUND

DESIGN

BUILD

COMMISSION

CONSERVE



**NEXUS**  
SOLUTIONS®

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

**Dan Rossmiller**  
Executive Editor

**Brock Fritz**  
Editor, WASB Director of Communications

**RJ Larson**  
WASB Media Design  
and Marketing Specialist

**Nick Debner**  
Event Planner and Editorial Assistant

▪ REGIONAL OFFICES ▪

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

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

▪ ADVERTISING ▪

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

▪ WASB OFFICERS ▪

**Dan Rossmiller**  
Executive Director

**Sandie Anderson**  
Wild Rose, Region 10  
President

**Bob Green**  
Middleton-Cross Plains, Region 12  
1st Vice President

**Larry Dux**  
Pewaukee, Region 15  
2nd Vice President

▪ WASB BOARD OF DIRECTORS ▪

<b>Linda Flottum</b> Turtle Lake, Region 1	<b>Lauri Asbury</b> Neenah, Region 7
<b>Randy Erickson</b> Prentice, Region 2	<b>Andrew Maertz</b> Reedsville, Region 8 Past President
<b>Sue Today</b> Sevastopol, Region 3	<b>Wendi Stitzer</b> Boscobel, Region 9
<b>Alan Tuchtenhagen</b> River Falls, Region 4	<b>Kathleen Wied-Vincent</b> Greendale, Region 11
<b>Jim Bouché</b> Wausau, Region 5	<b>Rosanne Hahn</b> Burlington, Region 13
<b>Larry Cyrus</b> Cochrane-Fountain City, Region 6	<b>Christopher Fons</b> Milwaukee, Region 14

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

Contents © 2026 Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.  
Subscriptions are available to nonmembers for \$95 per year.  
Periodicals postage is paid at Madison, Wis., and other  
additional entry offices.

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

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



## SPECIAL 2026 CONVENTION REVIEW ISSUE

- 3 Viewpoint** — *Memorable Experiences, Meaningful Connections*
- 5 Q & A** — *Lauri Asbury, Neenah Joint School District*
- 6 Audacity in Action** — *Keynote: Anne Marie Anderson*
- 8 Finding Your Sound** — *Keynote: Mickey Smith Jr.*
- 10 Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired** — *Keynote: Dave Weber*
- 12 How Perspective and Attitude Change Leadership** —  
*Keynote: Aaron Sadoff*
- 14 Governor's Address** — *Gov. Tony Evers*
- 15 State Superintendent's Address** — *Dr. Jill Underly*
- 16 COSSBA's Address** — *Dr. Kathy McFarland*
- 17 Delegates Pass 10 Resolutions** — *Anne Davis*
- 20 How to Build Community Trust** — *Anne Davis*
- 22 New Developments in School Law** — *RJ Larson*
- 26 Teacher Retention** — *Rich Rovito*
- 30 President's Reflections** — *Andrew Maertz*
- 30 President's Welcome** — *Sandie Anderson*
- 32 Awards and Recognition**
- 35 Collaborate, Innovate, Elevate** — *Photos from Convention 2026*
- 36 Capitol Watch** — *10 New Resolutions to Guide WASB Advocacy*
- 38 Legal Comment** — *Licensure and Placement of Substitute Teachers*

# THANK YOU, SPONSORS!

WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THESE SPONSORS  
and applaud the commitment to education exhibited by their generous support.

## PLATINUM



NEXUS  
SOLUTIONS®



Burke  
PLAY THAT MOVES YOU.



LEE RECREATION LLC  
PLAYGROUND & RECREATION EQUIPMENT

## GOLD



KRAUS-ANDERSON



LAMERS  
The Passenger Professionals™



UnitedHealthcare®



WEA  
Member  
Benefits



BAIRD



PAY IT  
FORWARD  
WISCONSIN



network  
health



WIPFLI



hps | PayMedix



DELTA DENTAL

## SILVER



RETTLER  
corporation



Performance  
Services



community  
INSURANCE

## BRONZE



vjs  
CONSTRUCTION  
SERVICES



Findorff



Cahill  
STUDIOS OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Quartz



vip  
visual image photography



Diligent

## ENDORSED INSURANCE AGENCIES



M3  
INSURANCE



USI



TRICOR  
INSURANCE



## Memorable Experiences, Meaningful Connections

### *My takeaways from the Wisconsin State Education Convention.*

**T**hank you to all the school board members, district administrators and school business officials who gathered Jan. 21-23 for the Wisconsin State Education Convention.

I hope you had a memorable experience, built meaningful connections with fellow school leaders, and gained valuable information and actionable ideas to improve student success in your schools.

This issue of Wisconsin School News looks back at the convention and highlights the themes that resonated throughout the week in Milwaukee.

For this column, I've provided my thoughts on what stood out to me about the convention.

One notable takeaway was the positive atmosphere. I received many encouraging compliments about the event, with several board members telling me this was the best State Education Convention they had attended. Other members shared that the keynote speakers were the best they've ever heard, while others were pleased that the new registration system made the process run more smoothly.

Those compliments are the result of a lot of hard work and careful planning by the WASB staff.

On a more serious note, another point that stood out to me is the need for more districts and boards to provide policy direction to the WASB through the Delegate Assembly process.

The WASB's policy positions are determined by the members who vote at the Delegate Assembly, which means the views of those who don't vote may not be reflected accurately. To ensure that the WASB's policy

positions truly reflect the views of our members, it's necessary that as many boards as possible participate in shaping these positions. That means carefully reviewing the proposed resolutions and attending the Delegate Assembly.

I want school boards to know that board members don't have to register for the convention to be their board's delegate. If your delegate can come to Milwaukee for an afternoon, your board's voice can be heard.

I was also impressed by how the Delegate Assembly was conducted. It was a pleasant, orderly process. While different positions were argued, debate was respectful, reasonable and moved smoothly. The misconception that the Delegate Assembly is tedious should not discourage boards from participating.

Something else that stood out to me is how many attendees gave high marks to this year's breakout sessions, saying the learning opportunities were timely, relevant and of high quality. I know the learning opportunities are a major reason board members attend the convention, and this year's event featured 94 high-quality breakout sessions.

The WASB is grateful to our members for providing most of these breakout sessions. The proposal ideas and content of these presentations come from Wisconsin school districts, education researchers, business partners and other stakeholders. Thank you for your ideas, engagement and leadership.

My final thought on the convention is that we do this for you. The event is possible only through your participation.

If you have suggestions for

improvements, please let us know. We're always looking for ways to enhance your experience and create a convention that's engaging, informative and memorable.

With that in mind, and embracing next year's theme of "Leading Today, Shaping Tomorrow," we're already planning for the 106th annual convention: Jan. 20-22, 2027, at the Baird Center in Milwaukee. We'll begin accepting breakout session proposals on April 1 at [WASB.org](http://WASB.org).

If you were inspired by our keynote speakers or if you found the convention to be a great networking and learning opportunity, I hope you will make a habit of attending. Please share with fellow board members how much you gained from your experience in Milwaukee.

For those of you who weren't able to make the trip — or if you've never attended — I hope that hearing from your colleagues and reading this issue will whet your appetite for next year's convention.

As noted, this issue of the School News recaps highlights of the 2026 State Education Convention. It details four engaging keynotes (pages 6-13), transcribes speeches from Gov. Tony Evers (p. 14) and WASB President Sandie Anderson (p. 30), recaps the Delegate Assembly (p. 17 and 36), and explores breakout sessions on building community trust (p. 20), school law (p. 22) and teacher retention (p. 26).

Thank you again for your participation in the convention and for your year-round engagement. While the convention is our biggest opportunity to come together each year, there are many ways to stay connected, so I hope to see you soon.

Happy reading! ■





Diligent Community.  
Governance solutions for education.

# School board meeting management software that fosters transparency and enhances community engagement.

Public transparency and participation continue to be a top concern for most school districts. Agenda and meeting management software is key to improving transparency, inclusivity and positive community engagement. Learn how the premier governance portal for education is helping thousands of school districts today.



Diligent is a proud partner of WASB. Preferred pricing and value-added services exclusively for WASB members.



**LAURI ASBURY** NEENAH JOINT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Elected as the WASB Region 7 Director in October 2025, Asbury began her first three-year term following the State Education Convention. A member of the Neenah Joint School District Board of Education since 2016, she currently serves as the board's vice president, chairs the district's legislative committee and serves on the board policy committee. She received her bachelor's degree from the Univ. of Michigan and Master's from the La Follette School of Public Affairs at UW-Madison. The mother of two Neenah High School graduates is a dedicated education advocate and volunteer, including serving organizations such as the Neenah-Menasha Emergency Society, the Wisconsin Alliance for Civic Trust and the League of Women Voters.

**The WASB sat down with Asbury to hear more about her passion for public service, her goals for Neenah and the WASB, and more.**

**How long have you lived in the Neenah area? What do you enjoy about it?**

**Lauri Asbury:** While originally from Michigan, my family has lived in the Neenah area for over 25 years. We've raised our two kids and enjoy the community greatly. Neenah has a strong sense of community, works to lift up friends and neighbors, and is a great place for history, walks, and enjoying parks and events.

**What are some goals for your school district for the rest of the school year?**

**LA:** In Neenah, we have prioritized closing learning gaps, including literacy for all students, and are working with staff to implement new systems, curricula and professional development. We're also working to increase our two-way engagement with the local community, including strengthening our communication and marketing plan. We've prioritized creating professional learning communities and are working on systems and schedules to facilitate collaboration.

Like many of you, we continue to feel the pressure from decreased state aid, are working creatively to stay within budget constraints and to continue to be able to offer a world-class education and work environment. Moving forward, we will be working on projections for the next school year and planning accordingly to address challenges head-on.

**What make an effective school board vice president?**

**LA:** I strive to offer support to the president and work to be a good

listener, with support for fellow board members to lift them up, provide resources and lead by example. My goal is for board members to know and respect one another, support each other in our important work and provide spaces where board members can share their talent, perspective and skills, working together to lift up all students and staff.

**Why are you so involved and passionate about public service?**

**LA:** Public service has always been important to me. I've had good examples. My grandmother was a public school teacher, active member of her church and someone who cared for others either through direct action or membership in service-oriented organizations. Both of my parents were public school teachers. My mother was a special education teacher, and my father was a counselor. I was able to see the impact their actions had on students, families, friends and neighbors. I have also felt very blessed in my life and feel that it's important to give back and pay it forward!

**What made you interested in serving on the WASB Board of Directors?**

**LA:** I'm interested in understanding a different level of the WASB by being a regional director. This builds on what I learned serving on the Policy and Resolutions Committee, and I want to



understand how member boards can be more involved in determining annual legislative platforms for the organization. I also want to gain better knowledge of what member boards expect and want to see from the WASB. We are in a difficult time

for public education and the WASB is a strong advocate and acts as a respected education expert for legislators and the general public, with support and engagement from our member boards.

**What are your goals for the WASB during your first term as director to help continue to push its mission?**

**LA:** It would be great to survey our regional members to find out more about them, their needs and what they would like to see from the WASB. Part of advocating for public education is knowing what is important to those who are doing the work every day. With this information, member boards could play a more direct role in determining the annual advocacy slate for WASB.

I would also like to continue the great work of our current WASB staff in getting back the story of public education, our success, our positive impact and the essentials for our communities now and into the future. We need to "re-educate" our communities, lift up education and position the WASB as the expert, sharing important information publicly. ■



# AUDACITY in Action

## A Blueprint for School Leadership

CONVENTION KEYNOTE  
ANNE MARIE ANDERSON

by RJ Larson

Anne Marie Anderson didn't take the stage Jan. 21 at the Wednesday General Session of the 2026 State Education Convention to discuss policy, budgets or test scores. Instead, she came to talk about something much harder — and far more important: how to lead when emotions are high, pressure is relentless and children's futures are at stake.

From the opening moments of her presentation, the three-time Emmy Award-winning broadcaster acknowledged the reality that school board members and education leaders live with every day. Whether it happens at church, the grocery store or a Friday night football game, someone is always approaching them with a problem that feels urgent and personal. The person has one issue that matters deeply to them. Board members, however, carry dozens

of issues, all intertwined and all impacting students and staff.

She described this dynamic through the lens of audacity, a word that often gets a negative reputation, but one she believes defines great leadership. "Audacity, by definition, is a willingness to take bold risks," she said, adding that leadership requires taking actions that are not always popular but are necessary for the greater good. With that framing, she thanked school leaders for taking on a role that requires courage, resilience and decision-making under pressure.

Anderson made her connection to public education personal and clear. "I am a huge proponent of public schools. All three of my children attend public schools," she told the audience, speaking as a parent whose family depends on the system

school boards steward.

Anderson discussed the tension between urgency and importance. People approach school boards with issues that feel urgent, and urgency demands immediate action. However, Anderson argued, urgency is not always what matters most. Important work — work that aligns with long-term goals, values and vision — often takes more time and discipline.

"You don't need more time. You need better boundaries," she told the audience. Without boundaries, urgent demands from emails, social media and public pressure crowd out the strategic thinking required to serve students. She used her own life as an example, describing how she wrote her 2025 book "Cultivating Audacity."

"I said I want to spend an hour a day writing my book," she recalled.

## “YOU DON’T NEED MORE TIME. You need better boundaries.”

“I decided I’m going to get up at 4:30 a.m. every morning and write for an hour before the kids wake up. I didn’t even make it a week. Turns out I’m not very inspired as a writer at 4:30 in the morning, but I still needed to get that hour in, especially when life was so urgent. So for me, I got that hour in four 15-minute increments during the day. Almost anything urgent can wait 15 minutes, right? That email, that text, kids saying they’re hungry?”

“If you can put 15 minutes together four times a day, you’ve got your hour to walk toward what’s important to you. Think about that. How much of our lives we say, ‘I’ll do it when I have more time.’”

The lesson? Leadership means protecting space for what truly matters.

Anderson believes that the pandemic made this challenge even harder. Families lost structure. Students lost connection. Communities lost their center. And the effects are still being felt today, with rising anxiety, depression and strained relationships between families and schools. Anderson reminded leaders that schools aren’t just places of instruction; they are communities.

She outlined five characteristics of a healthy community: passion, vision, content, a place to gather and consistency. Schools, she noted, naturally contain all five. But without clear expectations, even the strongest communities struggle.

To illustrate this, Anderson turned to her years at ESPN and a story from the legendary 1992 U.S. Olympic basketball “Dream Team.” Before the team ever played a game, head coach Chuck Daly held a closed-door scrimmage, pitting 11 future Hall of Famers against college players. The Dream Team lost. Daly used the loss to reset expectations, telling each player exactly what role they were expected to play.

“Don’t be mad at somebody for not doing things the way that you

want if you haven’t told them,” Anderson explained. Whether in sports, schools or boardrooms, clarity of expectations is what allows teams to function.

She also emphasized that effective leaders must understand the philosophies of the people they work with. Using the example of Pete Carroll’s stint as head coach of the New York Jets, she showed how misalignment between leadership styles and organizational culture can doom even talented teams. “You don’t have to agree with them,” she explained, “but if you don’t know where somebody is coming from, how can you communicate with them effectively?”

Anderson then introduced the idea of the “shapeshifting leader” who adapts their leadership style to different personalities while keeping everyone focused on the same goal. She illustrated this through the leadership of Phil Jackson, the legendary coach of the Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers. Jackson understood that players like Michael Jordan and Dennis Rodman needed different approaches, yet both were essential to winning championships.

“Rodman did not need us. Basketball was not his identity, but we couldn’t get to our goal of winning a

championship without him,” she quoted Jackson as saying. The message for school leaders was unmistakable: every board member, educator and student brings something different, but all are needed to build something great.

A mother of three, Anderson has seen the impact that a sense of belonging can have on students. She believes that schools save lives, communities save lives, and engaged educators and board members can change the course of families forever.

“What did I say audacity was?” she asked. “It was the willingness to take bold risks, to take risks on kids who would fall between the lines otherwise.”

She closed by thanking school leaders not for the easy wins, but for the hard choices, the patience and the courage to keep showing up for students who need them most.

“Thank you for the work that you do,” she said. “Thank you for elevating the kids that you could have skipped along the way.” ■

*RJ Larson is the WASB’s media design and marketing specialist. He can be reached at [rjl Larson@wasb.org](mailto:rjl Larson@wasb.org).*





# Finding Your Sound

CONVENTION KEYNOTE  
MICKEY SMITH JR.

by RJ Larson

**M**ickey Smith Jr., educator, speaker and Grammy-winning music teacher, centered his Jan. 22 keynote at the State Education Convention on purpose, perspective and what he calls “your sound.”

First, he treated convention attendees to his sound, energizing the room with a saxophone performance of Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk” and later closing the session with an emotional rendition of Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You.” These musical bookends underscored his message: that each person leads with an inner sound

— one defined by significance, connection and love.

To Smith, our “sound” is the core of who we are and the impact we make on others.

“The sound I’m talking about today has nothing to do with the saxophone,” he said. “My sound today is not an audible sound. Instead, sound is the invisible influence we bring into rooms, classrooms and communities. It is the ethos we live by.”

He encouraged attendees to reflect by asking one another, “What’s your sound?” He emphasized that sound is often drowned

out by what he calls “the noise” — the uncertainty, pain and constant work that every individual faces.

“You can’t stop the noise, but you can transform it with your perspective,” Smith said, arguing that perspective, not circumstance, determines our ability to lead and live meaningfully.

Smith believes in the transformative nature of human connection, stressing that teaching and leadership are rooted in relationships.

“Life moves at the speed of relationships,” he said, highlighting that our interactions — more than our accolades or positions — are what

determine our impact.

To prove this point, he led the audience through a visualization, asking them to close their eyes and think of their favorite teacher. He noted how people's faces softened when visualizing that individual, pointing out that "You didn't think about their lesson plans ... you thought about the way that person made you feel."

Much of Smith's philosophy comes from his upbringing in rural Louisiana and the lessons taught by his grandmother. Though she had only a third-grade education, her wisdom shaped him. One of her lessons — "We're not special, we're significant" — is a distinction he believes leaders desperately need to understand. He explained that being "special" is temporary and fragile, while being "significant" is lasting and relational.

Smith also recounted the foundational story of how she bought him his first saxophone — an act of sacrifice he didn't fully comprehend until adulthood. It became symbolic not just of his musical journey but of the power of seeing value in others before they see it in themselves.

That gift eventually sparked Smith's years-long pursuit of the Grammy Music Educator Award. He lost repeatedly — year after year — before finally winning in 2020. It was the losses that transformed him.

"Change is a mirror, not a window," he said, noting that growth requires looking inward for answers.

His sixth attempt at the Grammy was particularly emotional. Believing he'd win, he gathered his family around the television, but the award went to someone else. His daughter cried. His son cried. And Smith admitted he considered quitting the pursuit. But after speaking with his cousin Lisa, he was reminded to keep going and persevere. He applied one more time. Shortly after, she passed away unexpectedly.

When he eventually received the

bittersweet Grammy-winning phone call, he cried because "she saw I was walking the mission."

Smith believes that no one succeeds alone. He encouraged convention attendees to build what he called an "ensemble" of support — four types of people everyone needs in their life: a cheerleader, a coach, a mentor and an advocate.

Smith's ensemble stepped in at a time when he was considering resigning from teaching, and he received handwritten letters from seniors thanking him for making a difference. One student wrote that she was struggling when he told her, "I see you," a phrase that carried her through some of her darkest days. Those words kept a student alive and gave him the encouragement he needed to keep teaching.



In Smith's mind, leadership is love. Not a sentimental kind, but a committed one: "When I say I love you, it means I'm committed to you." He says love must be expressed with consistency, care and action — the three qualities he urges all leaders to embody.

Smith believes that love is the answer, and that every person carries a sound that someone else desperately needs to hear. ■

*RJ Larson is the WASB's media design and marketing specialist. He can be reached at [rjl Larson@wasb.org](mailto:rjl Larson@wasb.org).*

**"Sound is the invisible influence we bring into rooms, classrooms and communities. IT IS THE ETHOS WE LIVE BY."**





# SICK and TIRED of Being Sick and Tired

BREAKFAST KEYNOTE  
DAVE WEBER

## WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS MUST UNDERSTAND ABOUT STRESS IN 2026.

by RJ Larson

**D**ave Weber’s “I’m Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired” keynote energized the crowd Jan. 22 during the WASB Breakfast at the 2026 State Education Convention in Milwaukee. Weber, a former school board member himself, reminded attendees that the sometimes-lighthearted sentiment reflects a serious and escalating reality. Stress has become education’s defining occupational hazard — not because educators lack resilience, but because the demands placed on them have grown increasingly unpredictable, urgent and unrelenting.

To underscore this point, Weber reflected on a symbolic moment in recent history: April 18, 2022, the day the FDA lifted the federal mask mandate. Many people saw this as a

turning point back to “normal.” But for educators, normal never returned. Instead, the stress reshaped itself.

The aftermath brought staffing shortages, intensifying student mentalhealth needs, parent conflict and ongoing community polarization. Weber emphasized that these pressures must be understood not as personal failings, but as biological responses to continuous change.

Weber’s message? Stress is inevitable. Suffering doesn’t have to be.

### ■ Understanding the stress cycle

Weber explained that human beings are biologically wired for stress — but only in short bursts. In a healthy pattern, the body experiences stress, manages the challenge and then

recovers. But today’s educators rarely, if ever, reach that final step. The result is chronic stress, which distorts both health and effectiveness.

Weber walked the audience through three versions of the stress cycle he teaches: the healthy cycle, the normal (but unhealthy) cycle and the target cycle, which leaders should aim to restore. Weber’s four stages of stress that educators move through are:

1. Stress energizes. Leaders feel focused, sharp and motivated — often even better than usual.
2. Energy declines. Sleep suffers. Tension increases. Many educators spend most days in this stage, unaware that it is already a form of stress overload.

3. Irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating and creeping negativity emerge.
4. Panic, trembling, overwhelming fatigue and a full physical alarm response.

There's also burnout, a collapse of the human spirit marked by emotional exhaustion, personal devaluation, disillusionment and feelings of ineffectiveness. However, people don't have to move through all four stages to reach burnout — they may jump straight there from stage two.

According to Gallup, K-12 educators are the most burnt out occupation in the U.S., and there are more than 600,000 fewer teachers today than there were prior to the pandemic.

“Burnout is marked by personal devaluation,” Weber explained. “It's the negative things that we say to ourselves to put ourselves down.”

At the school level, a principal stuck in stage two cannot lead a school effectively. A superintendent in stage three cannot make strategic decisions. Yet many leaders operate in these states daily without recognizing the danger.

### ■ The warning signs

To help leaders identify when stress has moved from manageable to harmful, Weber's Top 25 Warning Signs of Stress Overload are:

1. Irritability
2. Insomnia
3. Fatigue
4. Intestinal disturbance
5. Weight change
6. Respiratory problems
7. Heart irregularities
8. Psychological upsets
9. Increased substance abuse
10. Pain in head, neck or back
11. Dryness of the throat or mouth
12. Inability to concentrate
13. Accident-prone
14. Floating anxiety (can't figure out what you're afraid of)
15. Trembling or nervous tics
16. Easily startled by small sounds
17. Bruxism (grinding of the teeth)
18. Frequent need to urinate
19. Sweating
20. Hyperkinesia (moving all the time, even if there's no reason to)
21. Nightmares
22. Increased smoking
23. Stuttering or speech issues
24. High-pitched, nervous laughter
25. Missed menstrual cycles

Weber emphasized that these are not simply personal health issues; they are organizational issues because each one affects leadership, decision-making, instructional supervision and district climate.

### ■ Strategies for coping

Weber offered WASB Breakfast attendees practical, research-informed solutions that school boards and district leaders can model and integrate into their cultures. These strategies are not soft “wellness activities,” but leadership tools designed to maximize clarity, influence and effectiveness.

The strategies to cope with and reduce stress are:

- Step into someone else's shoes — empathize and serve others to change your perspective
- Use unconventional times to accomplish things
- Keep a journal
- Set up an exercise routine
- Escape from your zoo by getting out and enjoying yourself
- Emphasize today's work — don't worry what's down the road
- Discover what you do best and do it more
- Read or listen to motivational materials
- Yoga or meditation
- Prioritize projects
- Confront and keep a short list of coworker or family conflicts



- Organize
- Engage in a hobby
- Relax in a warm bath
- Go for a walk
- Read a book
- Listen to soothing music
- Aromatherapy
- Reduce social media exposure and news consumption

These practices help leaders reset their minds, regulate their nervous systems and create healthier work environments.

### ■ Moving forward together

Weber's overarching point: The well-being of a school district is directly tied to the well-being of the people who lead it. School boards play a pivotal role in either compounding or counterbalancing stress. Boards inadvertently increase stress when they:

- Impose unrealistic timelines
- Set unclear expectations
- Shift priorities reactively
- Fail to recognize signs of overload in their leadership teams

Conversely, boards can stabilize their systems by modeling clarity, calm decisionmaking, healthy coping strategies, and a commitment to reasonable, sustainable expectations.

District culture is shaped as much by the tone of governance as by administrative action. Stress will always exist in education, but unnecessary suffering doesn't have to. In a profession centered on caring for others, Weber reminded leaders that the most radical and responsible act may be caring for themselves. ■

*RJ Larson is the WASB's media design and marketing specialist. He can be reached at [rjl Larson@wasb.org](mailto:rjl Larson@wasb.org).*

# How Perspective and Attitude Change Leadership



CONVENTION KEYNOTE  
AARON SADOFF

by RJ Larson

Aaron Sadoff closed the 2026 State Education Convention on Jan. 23 with a dynamic, humorous and reflective keynote that explored how people navigate adversity, perspective, relationships and purpose. By weaving together stories from education, psychology, personal setbacks and unlikely sources of wisdom, the former Wisconsin superintendent and current president of Marian University encouraged those gathered in Milwaukee to pause,

reflect and reclaim agency over their mindset and actions.

Sadoff began by illustrating the Buddhist concept of the “two arrows.” The first arrow is unavoidable pain. The second arrow is the suffering people create through their reaction to pain.

“Bad things will happen all the time,” said the Gulf War veteran and former North Fond du Lac School District superintendent. “This is not about getting rid of pain. But while

pain is guaranteed, suffering is self-produced. We amplify hardship by ruminating, catastrophizing, isolating or replaying negative stories in our mind.”

To illustrate this, he contrasted what people can and cannot control, using examples ranging from tragic life events to how many social media “likes” one receives. Acceptance, he argued, doesn’t mean ignoring reality; it means acknowledging life as it is without adding additional harm.

# “The best predictor of future behavior isn’t your past, IT’S YOUR CURRENT ACTIONS RIGHT NOW.”



Sadoff believes that people’s beliefs determine their emotional outcomes and behaviors, noting that “We can’t control the consequence, we can’t control the activating event, but we can control that belief.” Therefore, the 2019 Wisconsin Superintendent of the Year suggests that the belief systems people carry shape the results they produce — in leadership, in relationships and in interpreting obstacles.

He illustrated the power of perspective by having an audience member read a poem forward and then backward, showing how the exact same words could communicate optimism or despair depending on direction. “Perspective... everything is like this,” he said. “Same situation, different perception.”

Illustrating the impact of perspective and reaction, Sadoff described a heated moment in which a middle-school student told him he would “visit his grave and pee on it” when he died. Instead of reacting with anger, Sadoff responded with empathy and reframed the statement by telling the student “You care enough about me that you’re going to visit my grave when I die.”

His response came from “assuming positive intent.” This doesn’t mean pretending harmful behavior is acceptable, but rather approaching others with the belief that people often do the best they can with the tools they have. Reacting from a place of steadiness instead of fear or defensiveness helps de-escalate conflict and builds trust.

Sadoff later contrasted this with a separate situation in which an angry individual left him a threatening voicemail. Rather than escalating the conflict, he worked with authorities appropriately and asked the person

to write an apology letter reflecting accountability and next steps. The remorseful, honest letter reinforced Sadoff’s belief that compassion paired with boundaries often leads to better outcomes than punishment alone.

His approach to connection is anchored by three leadership principles:

1. Be present in the moment.
2. Be curious about others.
3. See people — not just their roles.

“When I say ‘I see you,’ it means you exist, you’re real, what you do matters,” he explained, noting that leaders help or hurt with every interaction.

And interaction matters, as people survive and thrive through coordination and shared effort. Whether confronting legislative challenges, community disagreements or statewide policy debates, Sadoff emphasized the importance of finding shared values rather than arguing over differences.

“What we need to do is not talk about what you’re doing, but what you value,” he said. “Once we know what we value, we can work together.”

Sadoff left the audience with a lesson from a friend who spent decades in prison but transformed his life into one of service and mentorship: “The best predictor of future behavior isn’t your past, it’s your current actions right now.”

No matter what someone has been through, Sadoff insisted, people can choose new actions today that reshape tomorrow. Leaders can bring

light into dark places, and communities can move forward when individuals commit to presence, intention and compassion. ■

*RJ Larson is the WASB’s media design and marketing specialist. He can be reached at [rjl Larson@wasb.org](mailto:rjl Larson@wasb.org).*



## Save the Date!

**2027 WISCONSIN STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION**

**JANUARY 20-22, 2027**  
BAIRD CENTER, MILWAUKEE



# Governor's Address

*Editor's note: Below are Tony Evers's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 23, 2026. The following is edited for space constraints.*

It's an honor to be here for the State Education Convention. For 44 consecutive years, I've been to this event.

I got my start in the classroom. It's been an honor to serve this state that raised me for the last 50 years, including as governor. Every day in my five decades of public service, I have carried with me the lessons I learned as an educator. One thing I know for sure, there's a lot I'd like to accomplish over the next 11 months. And I know you can help.

But let's take a minute to look back on all the things that we've done together since we met last. While every year is a Year of the Kid for me, I officially declared 2025 the Year of the Kid. The first thing we did was launch a new Office of Violence Prevention to keep our kids, families and communities safe. \$10 million will soon be going out to the hands of people working to help stop violence in our communities, including our school districts.

We also delivered on a bipartisan pro-kid budget that invested for kids of every age, with \$1.5 billion in spendable revenue for schools and the largest investment in our UW System in 20 years. For K-12, we corralled the largest increase into the special education reimbursement rate in the state's history, bringing it to the highest rate in 30 years. It also included \$30 million to continue providing comprehensive school-based mental health services statewide and over \$54 million for high-cost special education aid.

Another big win was the work we did together in childcare. Our pro-kid budget secured \$360 million to support that critical industry and help lower costs for families. One-third of this investment provided direct payments to providers helping to care for more than 177,000 children. We also created our first-ever fully state-funded childcare program, called Get Kids Ready, to help providers get 4-year-olds ready for school.

Our budget was a win for Wisconsin kids and families, communities and our state's future. But there's no denying the final budget looked drastically different than the one I proposed. While we made important strides, the final budget was far from where we wanted to be, which is why last week I sent a letter to the legislature laying out my 2026 agenda, highlighting key priorities that I would like us to accomplish before the end of the legislative session.

But to tell the full story, we have to start with property taxes. Wisconsinites were going to referendum in increasing numbers for years, long before I was governor. Why? Because a near decade of consistently failing to meaningfully invest in our kids and K-12 schools has consequences, including forcing Wisconsinites to raise their property taxes to keep their doors open.

Together, we fought hard to start reversing that trend, and we've made historic investments. But it is still

billions less than what schools needed and what I requested. And now schools are going to referenda in record numbers. I'm urging the legislature to right that wrong and pass my plan to provide over \$1 billion in property tax relief to working families across the state. That \$1.3 billion includes preventing property tax increases for the average Wisconsin homeowner, investing in Wisconsin's K-12 schools and directing property tax credits to taxpayers through the School Levy tax program.

Additionally, I want the legislature to address the fact that despite having bipartisan agreement and commitment to increase the special education reimbursement to 42%, I fully support your call to the state to meet our state's obligation. We should make it sufficient so that we don't have to go through this again. This has to be fixed before the legislature goes home this year.

I'm optimistic we'll be able to address several critical priorities that went unaddressed in the budget and have the legislature ultimately send it to my desk. Wanting to do more and better for our kids is why I ran for governor in the first place. I will never stop fighting for kids in our schools. But as always, I can't do that alone. We've got our work cut out for us, but I know that with a group like this fighting for the future we want to see for our kids and state, we can get this done. ■

# State Superintendent's Address

*Editor's note: Below are Dr. Jill Underly's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 21, 2026. The following is edited for space constraints.*

As I reflected on this year's convention theme — Collaborate, Innovate, Elevate — I was struck by how perfectly and succinctly it captures the complex work that we do in education every single day. And it is especially fitting that the theme begins with collaborate, because innovation and elevation simply do not happen without it.

This year, DPI continues moving forward with our strategic plan; a plan that was built through deep collaboration and informed by the voices and lived experiences of Wisconsinites across our state.

But collaboration doesn't end with the plan's publication. Our strategic plan is not a document that sits on a shelf. It's a guide for our daily decisions. Its success depends on continued collaboration and engagement. And we look forward to doing the work alongside you.

Our strategic plan is centered on four priorities.

First, innovative education. Our classrooms must prepare students for their future and not our past. And that preparation starts very early. Early literacy is one of the most powerful predictors of long-term student success. And when students can read confidently by third grade, they're far more likely to thrive academically. That's why strengthening early literacy through our work with Act 20 is central to improving student achievement statewide.

And when I ask students what they like about school, I so often hear about the hands-on learning experiences or career and technical education pathways. I hear about band and I hear about art and I hear about recess and all the times that they get to

interact with their friends and teachers. And those responses are powerful reminders that we must continue expanding personalized, engaged learning and those opportunities that present students and prepare them for the future.

Our second is educator recruitment and retention. I know that we are still, in many school districts across the state, struggling with this. But how many of you can still remember the name of a teacher who had a lasting impact on your life?

I know I can. And by the show of hands across this room, teachers make such an impact, and they influence us for the rest of our lives. Educators really are at the heart of student success. At the DPI, we're working to attract and retain diverse, talented educators so that every learner has the support that they need, while also ensuring our dedicated educators receive the resources and respect that they deserve.

Third, learner and educator mental health. Students learn best and educators teach best when mental health is prioritized. It really is that simple.

I recall visiting Mount Horeb High School and talking to students right after we all started coming out of the pandemic. I asked them, "What do you worry about the most in your school?" The number of students who are worried about their teachers — they see those teachers day in and day out giving their all. The kids see it, they recognize it. I was just incredibly touched by that. We must respond to the mental health crisis facing our schools with both urgency and compassion.

Finally, modernizing and improving the DPI. Because we lis-



tened to stakeholders across the state who count on us to meet their needs, we are updating our systems, our technologies and our processes. This work allows us to be more service-oriented, more responsive and better equipped to meet the evolving needs of education in Wisconsin.

Your partnership is essential to all of this. You are the ones doing the work on the ground every day. You understand the unique strengths and challenges of your schools and your communities. We couldn't do this work without you, and the DPI remains committed to providing the support that you need to succeed.

The past year has brought challenges, and the year ahead may bring more. Yet even amid uncertainty, schools open their doors every day, educators show up, school board members show up, and we will continue to support you because education is simply too important not to.

As we look ahead, the work before us can feel daunting. But as a former social studies teacher, I often

*continued on next page*

## ... State Superintendent's Address *CONTINUED*

return to a powerful reminder of why this work matters.

As you know, this year marks the 250th anniversary of our nation, and it's impossible to reflect on that milestone without recognizing a fundamental truth. Education is the foundation of our democracy.

In 1787, the same year the US Constitution was written, Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance to govern the Northwest Territory. Among its many provisions, it did something revolutionary. It proclaimed education would not be a privilege reserved for the wealthy,

but a right belonging to the people.

Each Township was required to reserve land specifically for a public school. These places were not even states yet, and yet public education was not an afterthought. It was a design principle. And I feel like that really speaks to the ethos of what it means to be here in the Midwest. You think about us showing up, us standing up, us raising our hands. Public education does that.

A democracy only survives when its people are educated to sustain it. The Northwest Ordinance provided a blueprint for public education, and

it declared that schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

Nearly 250 years later, that responsibility continues, and you are playing a critical role in leading that. You are carrying forward a legacy that predates the states themselves. And the weight of that work and its importance to our future cannot be overstated.

So, thank you. Thank you for your leadership, your dedication and everything that you do for Wisconsin students. It's incredibly important work. ■

# COSSBA's Address

*Editor's note: Below are Dr. Kathy McFarland's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 21, 2026. The following is edited for space constraints.*



I have 35 years of public education experience. I was a teacher and a swim coach. I was a middle school principal and a high school principal. I used to be the executive director of the Ohio School Board Association, and now I am honored to sit in this position as executive director of COSSBA.

COSSBA serves 27 state members, which constitutes 7,500 school boards. But here's what I want you to focus on: 27 million students across the United States benefit from the work that our board members are doing.

We are a non-partisan organization that supports state associations. How many of you watched the Super Bowl? If you noticed all the

coaches and all the support staff on the sidelines who made sure those players got what they needed, that their equipment was right, that they had water, that they knew what they were doing. That's what COSSBA does. We support our state associations so they can support the work that you are doing.

We have a big event coming up, our Super Bowl. It's in March and I am personally inviting you to join us because great leaders are always getting better at what they do. So, join us in Louisville, KY., March 13-15 for the COSSBA National Conference, with pre-conferences March 12.

We have a unified broad alliance, and what that arm of our association does is focus on student

barriers. If you do not have 100% of your students graduating from your school, something stood in the way of that child. There was a barrier. And that's what we focus on. That first day, that's what we're going to talk about, addressing some of those student barriers, A-Z.

Please join us. We have information at [www.cossba.org](http://www.cossba.org). Please go to our website and follow us to find out more information about our upcoming events.

I understand that the theme is Collaborate, Innovate, Elevate. When adults get better, students benefit. You get out there and you collaborate, you innovate and you elevate and get better for our kids. ■



# Delegates Pass 10 Resolutions

Resolutions focusing on scheduling referendums, Universal School Meal programs and more approved during Delegate Assembly.

by Anne Davis

The WASB Policy and Resolutions Committee presented 12 resolutions as submitted by member boards at the 2026 Delegate Assembly on Jan. 21 in Milwaukee; 10 resolutions were approved, and two were not approved.

Before delegates considered the resolutions, they voted against an amendment to the WASB bylaws. The amendment, submitted by the Kettle Moraine School Board, proposed creating a second tier of WASB membership: “limited active members.”

Limited active members would have retained the right to run for election to the WASB Board of Directors, vote for WASB regional directors, vote on WASB bylaws and

amendments, and serve on WASB committees other than the Policy and Resolution Committee. They would have also had the right to attend the State Education Convention, regional meetings and other WASB-sponsored events. However, they wouldn’t have been allowed to submit proposed resolutions or vote on proposed resolutions at the Delegate Assembly. If approved, the limited active members would have received a rebate on their WASB dues.

Those supporting the amendment said that several boards have withdrawn from the WASB because the WASB’s advocacy positions did not align with their local values. They argued that the amendment would have created another option and

modernized the structure of the WASB. Those opposing the amendment said that, despite disagreements over specific advocacy positions, WASB members should stand united as supporters of public education.

## Wisconsin Parental Choice Program

After the bylaws amendment failed, a resolution opposing the removal of caps from the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program was presented to delegates (find the exact wording for this and the rest of the passed resolutions in the Capitol Watch column on page 36).

Those supporting the resolution said that the Parental Choice Program took money away from



public school districts, and that caps should stay in place to reduce the financial impact on districts and prevent an increased tax impact on taxpayers. Those opposing the resolution believed that enlarging the program would increase competition and force public districts to improve academic performance.

The resolution was put to a vote and passed as presented.

### ■ **School District and School Report Card**

Another resolution covered revisions to the School District and School Report Card process. An amendment to the resolution removing fiscal efficiency as a consideration in the process was presented, put to a vote and approved. A failed second amendment sought to remove language stating that student achievement and growth should be valued equally in the report card process, and that schools with a high degree of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual credit courses, career and technical education, and extracurricular activities should be considered in the process.

The resolution, as amended to remove the language on fiscal efficiency, was put to a vote and approved.

### ■ **Funds Distribution**

A resolution amending the current resolution on Funds Distribution was presented to the delegates. The resolution would change language in the existing resolution to indicate that the state education agency be assigned to supervise and allocate disbursement of all state and federal funding, and that all federal funding would be allocated directly to school districts and cooperative service agencies. The resolution was approved.

### ■ **Scheduling Referendums**

A resolution amending the current resolution on Scheduling Referendums sought to remove limits on scheduling referendums, including

timing and frequency. An amendment adding spring and fall elections to the language of the current resolution was presented.

Those supporting the amendment said mandating referendums to be held during spring and fall elections would reduce the number of special elections and ensure higher voter turnout. Believing that the amendment was the same as current law, those opposing the amendment said districts should have control over the dates of referendums. After the amendment failed, the resolution was approved as originally presented.

### ■ **Categorical Aid**

One resolution sought to establish a New Categorical Aid Category to fund and support school-based substance use disorder prevention and treatment-related services. Those opposed said school districts should not be involved in medical evaluations and treatments, believing that's not part of districts' purpose of educating students. They also said that such a mandate could be underfunded by the legislature and impose a financial burden on districts.

Those supporting the resolution said that access to these services is limited in rural areas, and schools could thus fill the gap by providing services to students in a different way. They believed the resolution would support students, noting that substance abuse is at epidemic levels. The resolution was put to a vote and approved.

### ■ **Vocational Transition for Students With Disabilities**

A resolution on Vocational Transition for Students with Disabilities read that the WASB supports the use of federal, state and local resources to work with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to support transition programs for students with disabilities.

An amendment was presented to restore the resolution's language to the original language used in the

resolution presented by the Neenah School District. Those supporting the amendment said the original language more accurately described the district's intent. The amendment was put to a vote and failed. The resolution, as originally presented to the Delegate Assembly, was approved.

### ■ **Universal School Meals**

Another resolution supported state legislation to establish and fund a Universal School Meal program to cover the cost of all student meals not covered by federal programs. Those opposed to the resolution said establishing a universal meal program would be costly and compete with other school priorities.

Those supporting the resolution said that students who meet the qualifications for free and reduced meals are not always able to fill out the necessary paperwork. Supporters also noted that students need to eat in order to learn, and that the resolution would ensure nutritious meals and erase stigmas for students receiving free and reduced meals. The resolution was put to a vote and passed.

### ■ **Public Education Endowment Fund**

One resolution supported the creation of a Public Education Endowment Fund to be invested on behalf of state residents to fully and equitably fund public education. Those opposing the resolution questioned how the funds would be distributed and asked where the money would come from, considering that public education was already underfunded. They were also concerned that legislators would use the money for other purposes and could use the existence of the fund as a reason to further reduce school funding. The resolution did not pass.

# Of the 12 resolutions submitted, **10 RESOLUTIONS WERE APPROVED.**

## ■ **Early Childhood Education Funding and Public-Private Partnerships**

Another resolution sought to amend the current resolution on Early Childhood Education Funding and Public-Private Partnerships. The resolution opposed a state funding mechanism to provide private childcare providers with a per-pupil payment for 4K instruction, and supported funding for all 4K programs go through public school districts.

An amendment to remove language supporting funding for all 4K programs to go through public districts was proposed. Those opposing the amendment said that it would give local schools control over 4K funding by funneling it through the districts. The amendment was put to a vote and did not pass. The resolution was passed as originally presented.

## ■ **Decoupling**

The delegates addressed two resolutions with directly opposing goals on the same topic – decoupling, or separating funding for parental choice and independent charter schools from the public school equalization aid formula.

The first resolution asked that the WASB support decoupling. Those opposing the resolution said that the WASB was already on record opposing public funding of private schools and that decoupling would create two separate funding streams for schools that the state would be unable to support. They also said that decoupling would make the source of funding for choice and charter schools more opaque and prevent taxpayers from knowing how their taxes were spent. The resolution was not approved.

The second resolution would have the WASB oppose decoupling. Those opposed to the resolution said that it conflicted with other WASB resolu-

tions. They also said that a future resolution supporting decoupling would be more acceptable, as the WASB would already be on record as opposing the process. The resolution was put to a vote and approved.

## ■ **WIAA Policymaking**

A resolution encouraging schools to participate in WIAA Policymaking was presented to delegates. After no discussion, the resolution was approved.

## ■ **Children With Disabilities**

An emergency resolution was then presented to delegates, asking that a section be added to the WASB bylaws on funding for children with disabilities. The section said that WASB supported legislation to provide additional funding necessary to meet the estimated special education categorical and reimbursement aid. While presented after the deadline to submit resolutions, the resolution was accepted by the Policy

and Resolutions Committee during the convention's Pre-Delegate Assembly Discussion.

Those supporting the resolution noted that the state legislature's budget includes partial reimbursement for special education funding and that the resolution would send a consistent message that partial reimbursement is not acceptable and affects the finances of all public school districts. Those opposing said a similar resolution already has been approved. The resolution was approved.

## ■ **Fine Arts Education**

While not accepted by the Policy and Resolutions Committee, a Neenah School District resolution on Fine Arts Education was presented by the district to the Delegate Assembly for possible consideration. The assembly voted not to consider the resolution. ■

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



 **RENNING  
LEWIS & LACY**

## Dedicated to Wisconsin's Success.

**Wisconsin public school districts face significant challenges and opportunities.** The attorneys at Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c., provide dedicated legal support to help you meet those challenges and capitalize on opportunities. Our firm has a statewide presence, with multiple offices strategically located to serve clients across Wisconsin.

law-RLL.com  
Green Bay: (920) 283-0710

Hudson: (715) 961-4820  
Oshkosh: (920) 718-7914

Madison: (844) 626-0901  
Milwaukee: (414) 800-8210



# How to Build Community Trust

by Anne Davis

When Dr. Tarrynce Robinson became superintendent of the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District in June 2023, the district faced significant challenges. Student academic performance was not where district leaders wanted it to be. Teacher retention was a concern, with 50% of teachers in their first year due to a pay schedule that lagged behind surrounding districts. The district's revenue limit was \$553 less than neighboring districts. And there were significant capital needs.

A facility study in 2020 had identified \$275 million in facility needs across the district. Fifteen of the district's schools were more than 80 years old, including two that were 100-plus. An April 2017 non-recurring operational referendum for \$12.5 million failed amid questions of possible mismanagement of district funds. A \$149 million capital referendum in 2022, which proposed closing the district's two high schools due to capital issues, also failed. At

the end of the 2022-23 school year, the district closed three school buildings due to consolidation.

"We had a trust issue," Assistant Superintendent Aaron Norris said of the underlying problem, presenting alongside Robinson and Director of Communications Carolyn Hahn during a Jan. 22 breakout session at the State Education Convention in Milwaukee. "It takes a long time for people to get over things."

Robinson made rebuilding community trust a priority when he came on board. He began the engagement process by holding 15 listening sessions — one in each school.

"We had to control our own narrative," he said.

Internally, staff began planning for a \$5.8 million operating referendum to increase staff salaries and a \$10 million capital referendum to address facility needs. They decreased the Fund 80 levy to lessen the impact of taxpayers.

Because 75% of taxpayers do not currently have students in the dis-

trict, officials recognized the need to reach voters not directly involved with the schools, many of whom still carried memories of past failures and fiscal irresponsibility.

"We had to get to the uninformed, unengaged voters," Hahn said of the path to creating "an authentic, genuine connection."

In addition to learning and listening sessions, the district scheduled regular coffee meetings with the superintendent. The hope was that attendees would share the information with family and friends. A booth sharing details of the referendum was put up at all community events. But officials felt they had to go a step further and knock on doors to connect one on one with residents. A group of staff and community members eventually reached 10,000 homes, or one in three residents.

To support these efforts, the district hired additional communications staff. They updated the website with referendum information and created one-page flyers for each school focusing on



the work that would be done if the referendum passed. Officials made a point of building a referendum plan that included projects at every school.

Engaging staff was critical, and referendum information was shared at staff meetings so they could answer questions from the community.

“They should be the people out front selling it,” Norris said of staff members.

One of the most effective engagement tools were Facebook and Instagram videos, including a series highlighting staff members talking about what they liked about their jobs and the district. When questions came up at engagement sessions, videos were created to answer them. They became the district’s most viewed videos ever. For \$50 or \$60 apiece, the ads served as social media advertisements that brought many visits to the district website.

“This is how you can get traction in places you never have before,” Norris said.

West Allis-West Milwaukee’s engagement process ran from July 2023 through the November 2024 referendum.

“We had to spend a lot of time and get it right,” Robinson said of the prolonged effort, adding that district officials refused to engage in political discussions and just kept focusing on the benefits to students.

The work paid off and the referendum passed by 60%. The engagement work has continued well into the 2025-26 school year, as the district reports on the progress of referendum projects. Robinson attributes the success of the referendum to the extensive community outreach, noting it was “about being accessible and creating genuine opportunities.”

### ■ Rooted in referendum results

Building trust was also the theme of another Jan. 22 breakout session hosted by three district officials who shared tips for building successful referendum campaigns based on their experiences in five different districts. They shared four key focus areas: research; action and planning;

communications and community building; and evaluation.

Luke Francois, superintendent of the Waterford Union High School District, said community surveys can be useful tools for shaping the size of a referendum proposal. While serving as superintendent in the Sevastopol School District, he hired a firm to conduct a community survey. Based on the results, the district cut back the size of its proposal and went out to engage the community.

“You’ve got to listen to the community,” Francois said, warning that districts that ignore survey results run the risk of failure.

Phone surveys can also be useful and sometimes yield more detailed

## After a referendum, analyze what worked, what didn’t, maintain ongoing communication with the community and show gratitude for their support.

information than community surveys with pre-set questions. Over the phone, respondents may open up and comment on other areas.

Francois believes that elections are decided not by vocal opponents or supporters but by a “silent majority” who don’t typically show up for school events.

Communication between residents and the districts “really needs to be a two-way dialogue,” added Joelle Doye, director of communications for the Mineral Point School District.

In terms of action and planning, Doye and Francois said districts must start community engagement well before a referendum election. Informing staff is also key so they can share information with parents and other community members.

Francois discussed using a door knocking campaign to make personal contact with residents, especially those

who don’t come to school events. Using voter lists can help pinpoint residents who are most likely to vote.

In addition to seeking out key communicators in the community, the presenters said it’s crucial to meet people as they are. Kyle Luedtke, superintendent of the Frederic School District, told a story about meeting people at a local bar while knowing that some of them were not supportive of the district.

“Go where you are not wanted,” he said. “Pick up votes where you can.”

Francois added that “people default to a ‘no’ vote when they are unsure or confused,” suggesting that clear, consistent communication is critical throughout the community engagement process.

In terms of types of communication, Doye believes print is expensive but critical. It stands out in a digital age and reaches those who aren’t online. It’s also key to discovering how people want to receive information, which can be used to target results.

Additional tips offered to attendees included using voter lists to create text chains to share targeted messages; handwriting addresses on referendum information; and simplifying the overall message to just a few priorities that are repeated often.

After a referendum, analyze what worked, what didn’t, maintain ongoing communication with the community and show gratitude for their support. Francois used a designated area of the district website to post updates on referendum projects.

In the end, Doye said it’s important to realize that “We’re in a different world with referendums. There’s a lot more offense we have to do, and it has to be strategic.” ■

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



# New Developments in School Law



An in-depth look at key legal changes and pivotal court cases shaping district responsibilities.

by RJ Larson

The legal landscape for public schools continues to shift. With the vast number of new laws signed by Gov. Tony Evers this past year, as well as the volume of state and national court cases surrounding the topic of public education, it can be overwhelming for school board members.

To help education leaders better understand the legal topics they should be aware of, WASB Associate Executive Director and Staff Counsel Bob Butler and Staff Counsel Kara Conley presented their “New Developments in School Law” breakout

session on Jan. 22 at the State Education Convention in Milwaukee.

Below are shortened summaries of key topics covered during the session, including overviews of Wisconsin acts, state case law, U.S. Supreme Court cases and Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals cases.

## WISCONSIN ACTS

### ■ Wisconsin Act 42

Wisconsin Act 42 sets a new statewide baseline for in-class device use, requiring school boards to adopt policies by July 1, 2026, that pro-

hibit student use of wireless communication devices during instructional time. The law defines “wireless communication device” broadly — cellphones, tablets, laptops and gaming devices — which means districts must consider not only phones in pockets but also learning-adjacent devices that can blur into distraction.

While the statute does not further define “instructional time,” the mandate is clear: districts must craft policies that address everyday classroom realities while preserving educational flexibility where appropriate.



## **WHILE LEGAL CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, staying informed about emerging legal issues is essential for districts to remain compliant and proactive.**

The law also requires specific exceptions. District policies must allow device use in emergencies or perceived threats, for managing student health care, for uses included in a student's IEP or Section 504 plan, and for teacher-authorized educational purposes during instructional time.

Those parameters give educators and families clarity on when devices remain appropriate, without undermining the policy's core goal of curbing disruptions. Districts may include consequences — such as confiscation for the remainder of the day — provided they apply procedures consistently. Importantly, a board can still adopt a policy that is more restrictive than the statute requires, reflecting local priorities and community expectations.

“You're going to have to spend time on how to manage the people's health care, as to what would be appropriate for a certain student to have that electronic communication device. Even though the law says these are the general guardrails, you're going to have to make some of those policy calls,” said Butler. “There are some programmatic decisions that you must make and take into consideration. You're going to have to draw the line between instructional time versus how we're going to apply that to extracurriculars, health, emergencies or other activities in the school.”

Districts must distribute the device policy annually to every pupil and submit it to the DPI by Oct. 1, 2026. If a district later updates its policy, it must notify DPI by Oct. 1 and file the revised version reflecting changes made in the preceding school year.

Those reporting requirements underscore the Legislature's intent to create consistent, transparent expectations for families statewide while leaving districts room to tailor details.

### **Wisconsin Act 57**

Act 57 focuses on parental notification in sensitive personnel matters. First, it requires individualized notice to parents or guardians when a district receives a sufficiently credible report alleging sexual misconduct by a staff member — including contractors — or other conduct creating a risk of student sexual victimization. Second, it imposes an annual, districtwide notice informing all parents and guardians of their rights to access school employee disciplinary records under Wisconsin's Public Records Law. Together, those mandates elevate transparency while acknowledging both the gravity of allegations and the public's interest in how districts handle discipline and safety.

“You have to have a reasonable cause first,” said Conley. “This law doesn't allow schools to conduct a full investigation. If you're able to acquire some more advanced information by talking with a student who brought it forward or the employee who brought them forward, if you indicate that more likely than not, this may have occurred in that sense, then it would have reasonable cause.”

### **STATE CASE LAWS**

#### **LeMieux v. Evers**

The Wisconsin Supreme Court's decision in *LeMieux v. Evers* affirmed Gov. Evers' use of the

partial veto to expand a two-year revenue-limit increase to 402 fiscal years by deleting digits and words in the 2023-25 budget bill. For administrators and board members planning long-term finances, the ruling signals judicial tolerance — within constitutional bounds — for the governor's long-standing partial-veto powers in budget drafting. The decision does not resolve policy debates over duration or prudence; it clarifies the constitutional line, leaving fiscal and political questions to the elected branches.

#### **Wied v. Wheeler**

In *Wied v. Wheeler*, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals found an open meetings violation when board members used private emails to indicate their preferred candidate for a board vacancy during a virtual meeting. The court concluded that emailing the board president to register preferences amounted to discussion outside open session, running afoul of Wis. Stat. § 19.83(1). For school boards increasingly reliant on digital tools, the opinion is a practical reminder: convenience cannot eclipse transparency. Even administrative signaling — if it reveals preferences or advances deliberation — belongs in public view.

#### **Midwest Environmental Advocates v. Prehn**

The Wisconsin Court of Appeals held that when a member of a governmental authority controls requested public records exclusively on personal devices, that member is

a necessary party to the case. In *Midwest Environmental Advocates v. Prehn*, the court rejected the notion that an authority can unilaterally seize records from a member's home or personal devices; only by joining the member can a court compel production. For school boards, the takeaway is operational: public-records compliance hinges on training, retention practices and clear directives to board members about separating public business from personal accounts.

## U.S. SUPREME COURT CASES

### ■ *Wisconsin Bell v. Heath*

In *Wisconsin Bell v. Heath*, the Supreme Court held that E-Rate reimbursement requests can qualify as “claims” under the False Claims Act, remanding for further proceedings. For districts and vendors, the ruling raises the stakes around federal program billing, documentation and the “lowest corresponding price” requirement. While the decision does not resolve the underlying fraud allegations, it confirms that E-Rate submissions may fall within the FCA's ambit — heightening litigation and compliance risk for entities touching telecommunications services for schools. District counsel and purchasing teams should anticipate tighter vendor due diligence and renewed attention to rate benchmarking.

### ■ *Mahmoud v. Taylor*

The Court granted a preliminary injunction to parents challenging a district's LGBTQ+-inclusive story-books policy, finding that the combination of content, lack of notice and absence of opt-outs likely burdened religious exercise. The order requires the district to notify parents in advance whenever such books — or similar materials — will be used and to allow excusals pending appellate review. Although preliminary, the ruling is an immediate compliance

## STAY UP TO DATE

The WASB legal team is always available to support districts with questions, and the legal page on [WASB.org](http://WASB.org) offers a wide range of valuable resources for board members and administrators.

Don't forget to tune into the monthly WASB Legal and Legislative Video Update, held on the third Wednesday of each month, for the latest developments in school law.

directive for the district and a signal to others: curricular transparency, parental notification and accommodation can be decisive factors in litigation involving religion and instruction.

Members asked whether this ruling could also be applied to controversial topics such as Black History, but Butler explained that it isn't the case. It's up to the district to make those calls.

“This particular case was about the parents who brought the claim that the curriculum was impairing their ability to exercise their religion. They weren't notified that this curriculum could be counter to their child's religious beliefs,” explained Butler. “They had to get the notice and have the opportunity to opt out. It was about parents having the ability and the freedom to exercise their personal religion, neither to have viewpoints that were counter to their religion enforced upon them without knowing about it, or vice versa.

“Your local district very well may have a more generic controversial issues policy that, in certain areas, you decide we're going to notify parents that this topic is taking place, whatever that happens to be. Then the parent could decide to opt out, or allow them an alternative that is offered on that topic.”

## SEVENTH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS CASES

### ■ *Doe v. Mukwonago Area School District*

The litigation over restroom and locker-room access continues to evolve. In June 2025, the Seventh Circuit vacated its earlier opinion and granted panel rehearing in *Doe v. Mukwonago*, indicating it would consider whether to revisit Whitaker and Martinsville in light of intervening Supreme Court precedent. Subsequently, the district court dissolved a preliminary injunction that had barred the district from enforcing a policy tying facility use to sex assigned at birth. With the injunction lifted, the Seventh Circuit dismissed the appeal for lack of jurisdiction. Practically, that leaves Whitaker and Martinsville as the controlling law for now, while signaling that the panel remains engaged with the shifting legal landscape. Districts should monitor updates closely and consult counsel before altering policies.

### ■ *Darling v. Maddaleni*

The Seventh Circuit upheld Milwaukee Public Schools' termination of a counselor who delivered a profanity-filled public speech denouncing gender ideology, later posted to YouTube. The court recognized that the counselor spoke on a matter of public concern in a traditional forum, but concluded her statements were incompatible with her role. For school districts, *Darling* reinforces that the Pickering balancing test remains context-specific: employee speech rights are not absolute, and districts can act when speech undermines job functions, student trust or the school's mission. Documentation of role-specific impacts — and evenhanded enforcement — is critical.

“Speech may be protected if it's a public concern, but it also has to be



speech that doesn't end up disrupting your operations," Butler said. "The first piece in this situation is that there was an employee who was a counselor who attended an event in Madison at the Capitol, where she expressed her personal viewpoints on the topic, which she referred to as gender ideology and transgenderism, where she emailed them in this profanity-laden speech, according to the court, which was recorded and posted on YouTube. The key thing from a district standpoint was when she was up there giving this presentation, she said she identified herself as working for the district. So right away, I got somebody who says where they work.

"The second piece is, she vowed, as the court said, that not a single student or school will ever transition on her watch. She says where she works, says what she does and then

she says she's not going to do something.

"The third one is not that as a counselor, she was responsible one way or the other for someone's decisions on gender identity, as she had to follow the board's policies on the laws of those particular areas. And she's basically saying, I'm not going to do this. So the district terminated her because they felt that the speech was incompatible with her role as a school counselor, and they had a number of parental complaints."

### ■ **Tempel v. School District of Waukesha**

A federal district court granted summary judgment to the district after a staff member's viral social-media post criticized a school performance decision involving the song "Rainbowland." Applying Pickering, the court held the

district's interest in workplace efficiency outweighed the employee's speech interests; the volume of public controversy and disruption carried significant weight. The case is on appeal, but the current ruling offers a practical blueprint: districts that can show concrete operational disruption, consistent policy enforcement and measured response stand on firmer legal ground in employee-speech cases.

### **CONCLUSION**

While legal change is inevitable, staying informed about emerging legal issues is essential for districts to remain compliant and proactive. As school leaders navigate an ever-evolving legal landscape, continuous learning is critical. ■

*RJ Larson is the WASB's media design and marketing specialist. He can be reached at [rjl Larson@wasb.org](mailto:rjl Larson@wasb.org).*

 **DELTA DENTAL**® DeltaVision®

## **YOUR HARDWORKING TEAM DESERVES EASY-TO-USE BENEFITS.**

Show employees how much they matter to your company by offering them dental and vision insurance. Our customer service helps make it easy for people to use their coverage — and our stable rates ensure you can continue to offer competitive benefits year-after-year.

**FOR THE REASONS YOU SMILE, GET DELTA DENTAL.**

Scan the code or visit [deltadentalwi.com](http://deltadentalwi.com) to learn more.



DeltaVision is underwritten by Wyssta Insurance Company.



# Teacher RETENTION

How compensation, climate and culture can impact teacher turnover rates.

by Rich Rovito

Teacher retention is a significant, ongoing challenge in Wisconsin, with nearly 13% of public-school teachers leaving their positions during the 2024-25 school year and only about 56% of first-year teachers remaining in public schools by their seventh year.

Many factors are driving teacher turnover, including compensation, stress, classroom environments, lack of supportive leadership and concern over student behavior and safety.

As of mid-January, there were 900 teacher vacancies in Wisconsin, which makes keeping high-quality staff engaged, motivated and committed more crucial than ever.

“We clearly have a pipeline issue in our state,” said Sandy Stefczak, 2025-26 president of the Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators and human capital

director for CESA 1.

Stefczak and Julie Grotophorst, director of human resources for the Greendale School District, led the “Energizing Engagement: Strategies to Inspire and Retain School Staff” breakout session on Jan. 22 at the Wisconsin State Education Convention in Milwaukee. The duo explored how to build a positive work culture by learning how to recognize and respond to staff needs, cultivate meaningful connections and implement systems that sustain long-term engagement.

The ultimate goal, according to Stefczak and Grotophorst, is creating an environment where all staff feel valued and engaged.

“The support that we’re giving to those new educators is important to help them stay in the profession and stay engaged,” Grotophorst said.

“As many as 50% are leaving prior to completing their fifth year of teaching. That’s substantial. Being able to retain those staff members to help them become professional educators as they continue through their career is very important. Teachers are essential to our students’ success.”

High turnover results in a workforce that is less qualified and unfamiliar with district curriculum and instructional practices. It also requires added resources to train them.

“Good teachers are hard to find, and when you’ve invested in someone and provided them the training that they need to be successful in your district, it’s important to hang on to them,” Grotophorst said. “Turnover is also costly when you think about all of

**“GOOD TEACHERS ARE HARD TO FIND,  
and when you've invested in someone and provided  
them the training that they need to be successful in  
your district, it's important to hang on to them.”**

— Julie Grotophorst, Greendale School District director of human resources

the different components that are considered in the cost of hiring and training and the time that it takes to get someone up to speed.”

In addition, administrators are often taken off other tasks to engage with the hiring process.

Districts often focus on developing strategies for recruiting employees, but Grotophorst believes that retention strategies are just as, if not more, significant.

Culture and climate in a district are key aspects of staff retention.

“(Staff) often cites that they’re leaving a district after not seeing an opportunity for professional growth,” Grotophorst said.

“Greendale is a smaller district, and we might not have ladders or career advancement promotion opportunities available for teachers that other districts do. But we’re creating opportunities for them to continue to receive professional development and hone their craft while providing opportunities for teacher leadership and how they can share their skills with other teachers, serving as instructional coaches and mentors.”

Then, of course, there’s staff compensation, which is a crucial factor in whether staff decides to stay in a district.

“Compensation is a component, but it is not the most important component,” Grotophorst said.

“If you are paying near, at or above market rate, people probably aren't leaving because of money. They might leave the profession because of money, but if you’re being competitive with other area districts, it's unlikely that they will leave specifically for compensation.”

In addition to professional

growth opportunities, teachers must also be given a voice and choice in the selection and teaching of classroom curriculum.

Fostering a productive culture is also vitally impactful.

“Principal leadership and influence are extremely important in setting that culture,” Grotophorst said. “Oftentimes, staff don't leave their job, they leave their manager. That's true in schools when they don't feel supported by their principal or when they don't feel that the administration is supportive of teachers and providing the resources that they need to do their job.”

Retention strategies are essential for all district staff, from occupational therapists to custodians, not just teachers.

“You should know what your culture is, hold people to those expectations and have those critical conversations with people that are acting contrary to what your cultural beliefs are,” Grotophorst said. “Do they come to work and feel that they are secure in their job and feel like they are making a fair wage for the work that they're doing? Do they have a best friend at work? When they're having a rough day, do they have somebody to talk to about that? Somebody with whom they are connected to and makes them want to stay in the district, stay in the school because they appreciate and collaborate with their coworkers.”

Grotophorst stresses that work-life “harmony” is essential, explaining that “We used to call it work-life balance, and I've heard it referred to as work-life integration. We're really trying to figure out how staff can be successful in all aspects

of their lives.”

Mattering at work comes from recognition and having dignity and meaning in the work.

### ■ Staff-led mentorship

Effective mentoring programs can also play a role in teacher and staff satisfaction and retention, which are major predictors of student success in any district.

By implementing a multi-year mentorship program, the Fontana J8 School District internally developed a staff-led program to ensure the mission, vision and direction are common knowledge to everyone employed in the district.

Previous attempts at mentorship initiatives in the district had been “patchwork and piecemeal,” said long-time Fontana middle school social studies teacher Kara Bolly, presenting alongside Fontana Administrator Steve Torrez during their “Staff-Led Mentorship for Retention and Growth” breakout session on Jan. 21.

“There was no cohesive idea of what mentorship looked like,” Bolly said.

That’s changed under the direction of Torrez, with Bolly serving as mentor coordinator within the backdrop of a formalized mentoring program.

“At first, it was kind of hard to get some of our veteran staff to become mentors, just because of the way that they were brought on board and the way that things happened in the past,” Bolly said. “The first big step was determining our goals, mission and vision, and how we support brand new teachers and veteran teachers who are new to our district. That's a big part of



“We all know that for new teachers, in many cases, you don't even realize you're drowning until the water's up to your eyeballs.

**The way the mentoring program is set up ... there's an outlet to get help right away.”**

— Kara Bolly, Fontana middle school social studies teacher

our mentoring program, along with the nitty gritty of how to teach in a new district.”

The mentoring program extends beyond teachers to involve all staff in the district, including paraprofessionals and daycare employees.

The mentoring program also facilitates more peer-to-peer observation.

“In a district like ours, it can be really easy to go into your silo and stay in your silo,” Torrez said. “But the mentoring program is designed to allow not just mentors to go into classrooms and give non-evaluative feedback on teaching and where we can grow, but it also allows time for the mentees to go into other classrooms.”

The mentorship program is designed to support new staff, as

well as those with several years of teaching under their belt.

“Even if you've been teaching for 10 years, if you're new to the district, you're still going to have things come up that you want help on, you want support on and you want to keep getting better at,” Bolly said. “It really supports teachers in their own personal growth.”

The mentor team also meets multiple times each year to discuss what's working and where adjustments need to be made. With the formalized mentorship program in place, teachers have shown the propensity to ask for help more readily than in the past.

“We all know that for new teachers, in many cases, you don't even realize you're drowning until the water's up to your eyeballs,” Bolly said. “The way the mentoring

program is set up, especially in that first year with the two in-person meetings per month, there's an outlet to get help right away. We also have multiple avenues for getting help. It lets us deal with problems when they're small, before they snowball into something that feels catastrophic, especially to new teachers.”

### ■ Teacher compensation models

Among the many factors that go into successful teacher and staff retention efforts, compensation remains a key issue.

During the 2024-25 school year, the Merton Community School District created a new teacher compensation model through a process of deep study, data reviews and collaboration with a seven-person teacher compensation team.

“I believe that no matter how

# Their potential is your purpose.

You give every student the chance to shine. Together, let's create business strategies that support their success. Visit [wipfli.com/education](https://wipfli.com/education).

Perspective changes everything.

**WIPFLI**

much money you have or how much money you don't, it is about a process," said Merton Community School District Superintendent Ron Russ, who led a Jan. 21 breakout session entitled "New Teacher Compensation Model: From Collaboration, Information and Process to Implementation."

The session explored the collaborative process in which the team learned about the history of teacher compensation, a basic understanding of school finance, district spending and comparison reviews of other districts in order to create a new teacher compensation model that was driven by teachers within the parameters set by the district.

The district has 118 employees, 67 of whom are teachers, and an annual budget of \$10.4 million.

"Ask your staff and they are going to tell you, 'I want to get paid more, or I feel like I'm underpaid,' right? We needed to address that. It was a glaring need," Russ said. "We needed diverse stakeholders, so we created a diverse team.

"We want people to stay, and we lose a lot of teachers in education those first couple of years. Rewarding loyalty was important, because we have a mix of new teachers and a lot of veteran teachers who feel like they've been very loyal and want some reward for that loyalty."

A variety of different compensation models were studied. Merton received assistance from the Kettle Moraine School District, which had put a new teacher compensation system in place for the 2024-25 school year.

"That helped our team to say that from what we're looking at, we can be very competitive," said Justin Dusso, a physical education and health teacher who also serves as a teachers' union representative and a member of the teacher compensation team."

"We built a lot of ownership in it," added Becky Oppermann, who attended school in the district and is in her 32nd year as a teacher there. "When Dr. Russ asked who from the team wanted to come and present the information to the school board, we were like, 'Well, we created this.



We all want to be a part of it.' Not everybody talked, but we were all there to support each other. It truly was a collaborative effort."

In the end, salary adjustments in the Merton School District ended up ranging from \$500 to \$13,000.

"If you got that \$500 pay increase, it means that you already were market competitive. But for the one who got \$13,000, their mouth hit the floor and they felt like they were really being appreciated," Russ said, adding that Merton's fortunate that it's a small district with a really tight-knit staff. "Instead of a person that didn't get as much being jealous of someone who got more, everyone was truly happy that we made it right for everybody. That made it easier." ■

*Rich Rovito is a contributing writer to Wisconsin School News.*

## YOUR PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOTS ARE READY!

THANK YOU FOR STOPPING BY OUR BOOTH!

Add your digital downloads to your cart & use the code below to get them for FREE!

CODE: WASB26



CAN'T FIND YOUR GALLERY LINK?

Give us a call or shoot us an email. We're happy to help!

Email: [service@cahillphotostudio.com](mailto:service@cahillphotostudio.com)

Phone: 715.268.9363

Toll Free: 866.229.0135

*Cahill*  
STUDIOS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

# President's Reflections

*Editor's note: Below are Andrew Maertz's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 22, 2026. The following is edited for space constraints.*

At the end of this year's convention, I will conclude my service as the WASB President. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for the honor and privilege of serving as your 2025 WASB President. I'm grateful for all the support of my Reedsville School District, the WASB staff and the Board of Directors.

As I stand here today as the 2025-26 president of the WASB, I am filled with gratitude and pride. This year has been one of challenge, opportunity and meaningful progress. Together, we have continued to champion strong, locally governed school districts that reflect the values, needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

Through our advocacy, professional development and statewide collaboration, the WASB has remained a trusted voice for school boards across Wisconsin.

We strengthened relationships with legislators and state leaders, ensuring that the perspective of locally elected school board members was heard clearly and consistently. We supported boards as they navigated complex issues, from fiscal responsibility and student achievement to workforce challenges and community engagement. And perhaps most importantly, we showed once again that when school boards work together, our collective voice is powerful.

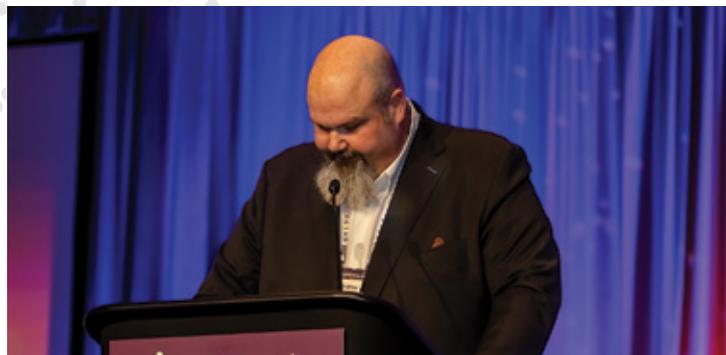
None of this happens in isolation. I want to thank the WASB Board of Directors, our dedicated staff and each school board member across the state. Your commitment of time, energy and leadership — often behind the scenes and always in service to students — makes this association strong. It has been an honor to serve alongside all of you.

Leadership, however, is never

about one person or one year. It is about continuity, trust and a willingness to step forward when called. That is why I'm so pleased and so confident as we welcome our incoming president, Sandie Anderson.

Sandie brings a deep understanding of school governance, a steady and thoughtful leadership style, and a genuine passion for public education. She listens, she collaborates and she leads with integrity. I know she will guide this association with clarity, purpose and a strong focus on what matters most, ensuring every student in Wisconsin has access to a high-quality public education.

Sandie, thank you so much for your willingness to serve. You have my full confidence and support as you step into this role. As I pass the gavel, I do so knowing that the WASB is in excellent hands and that our work on behalf of students, families and communities will continue with strength and vision. ■



# President's Welcome

*Editor's note: Below are Sandie Anderson's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 22, 2026. The following is edited for space constraints.*

I am Sandie Anderson from the School District of Wild Rose, and I am incredibly humbled and deeply honored to accept the position of president of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards.

I like to start meetings or presentations by asking attendees to "tell me something good." Unfortunately,

I can't hear from all of you individually today, so I decided to set the tone in picture form.

I would like to draw your attention to the images appearing on the screens. I see these pictures as the "Faces of Public Education" — the past that shaped us, the present we serve and the future we are building

together. It doesn't matter what district you serve — rural, suburban or urban — these faces remind us all of our "why." Why we do what we do for Wisconsin's children and public education.

While you're here the next two days, I hope you think of these faces — and all the faces you know in

## ... President's Welcome *CONTINUED*

your own lives — and remember the true impact of education.

Before we look ahead, I must acknowledge the foundation that allows me to serve. I am a graduate of the Cudahy Public School System and of UW-Eau Claire with a business management degree.

I continue to be a lifelong learner, believing if we stop learning, we stop leading.

To my family: thank you for the incredible flexibility and support that has allowed me to serve on the Wild Rose School Board, the CESA 5 Board of Control and as the Region 10 Director and now President of the WASB. All of this would not be possible without the support of the Wild Rose community, who have stood behind me since 1999. I sincerely thank you.

If you had told me in 1998 that I would be standing here today, I wouldn't have believed you. That year, several community members asked me to run for the school board. They saw something in me that I didn't recognize in myself.

I guess you could call me an accidental candidate or accidental advocate. I never intended to run for a school board position. I wasn't looking for a title or a seat at the table. I had no personal agenda, no personal goal, no personal mission or no statement to make. I accepted the challenge because I wanted to give back to my community and to help make a difference in the education and lives of our children. That challenge turned into a passion.

I am very fortunate to work alongside outstanding colleagues in Wild Rose and throughout the state. We all know there is no "I" in school board member. Success requires a collaborative spirit working together with administration, networking with local and state colleagues and building connections

with other education leaders. We benefit immensely when we come together to build and advance opportunities for our students.

While the landscape of public education has changed since 1999, my mission and vision haven't



**"I accepted the challenge [of running for school board] because I wanted to give back to my community and to help make a difference in the education and lives of our children.**

**THAT CHALLENGE TURNED INTO A PASSION."**

wavered. We've navigated changing demographics, evolving technology and legislative overhauls. While the methods of education change, the mission must remain steadfast.

A fellow board member once described public schools in a way that resonated deeply with me. She said, "We throw open our doors and with excitement welcome ALL students, no matter what opportunities or challenges they bring to us." We work to give EVERY student the best education and foundation we can. This is the heart of our mission. Our vision is to ensure every child in Wisconsin has access to a high-quality education that prepares them for a world we can't yet fully imagine.

My professional life in restaurant management and banking — and certainly my time on the board — has molded my leadership style to be positive, collaborative and, above all, kind, direct and respectful. I

believe in keeping challenges on top of the table, not under it, and delivering messages to the "right mailbox." Open, direct and transparent communication is of the utmost importance.

Problem solving requires facing challenges together — honestly and directly — to develop the best solutions we can. As a lifelong learner, I continue to attend a variety of classes, seminars and conferences because "Your body can't go where your mind has never been."

Professional development keeps us moving forward on a positive, up-to-date path. From the beginning of my board service, the WASB has been my compass to my growth and success. The WASB provides the thread that connects my mind to new places to go. It helps me to navigate the ever-changing world of education so I can better serve our students, community and state.

In closing, I want to thank each of you for your time, commitment and service to the children of Wisconsin and public education. Thank you for attending the 2026 State Education Convention. We have work to do. We face challenges in funding, mental health and teacher retention, just to mention a few.

But, looking out at this room, I see a group of people who are here because they want to make a difference for the better. A group who will "collaborate, innovate and elevate" for the benefit of Wisconsin's children. I am ready to listen, to learn alongside you and to lead with the same spirit of service that brought me to the board table from the start.

I hope to connect with many of you throughout the year so you can "tell me something good." Let us continue to throw open those doors to all children, keep our challenges clearly on top of the table and work together for the faces of education. ■

# AWARDS & RECOGNITION

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

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



## ■ WASB Board of Directors

**Left to right:** Sandie Anderson, Wild Rose (Region 10); Bob Green, Middleton-Cross Plains (Region 12); Linda Flottum, Turtle Lake (Region 1); Randy Erickson, Prentice (Region 2); Sue Today, Sevastopol (Region 3); Alan Tuchtenhagen, River Falls (Region 4), James Bouché, Wausau (Region 5), Barbara Herzog, Oshkosh (Region 7 outgoing), Wendi Stitzer, Boscobel (Region 9).  
At podium: Andrew Maertz, Reedsville (Region 8).

*Not pictured: Larry Cyrus, Cochrane-Fountain City (Region 6); Lauri Asbury, Neenah (Region 7); Kathleen Wied-Vincent, Greendale (Region 11); Rosanne Hahn, Burlington (Region 13); Christopher Fons, Milwaukee (Region 14); Larry Dux, Pewaukee (Region 15)*



## ■ Teachers of the Year

State Superintendent Jill Underly (right) honors teachers of the year (left to right) Mark Acherman, Darlington Community School District; Joel Coyne, Sun Prairie Area School District; Megan Dixon, School District of Greenfield; Toni Fink, Milwaukee Public Schools; and Lisa Van Hefty, Mishicot School District.



## School Board Honorees

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

- James Bays, Adams-Friendship Area
- Jeff Buntrock, Lake Geneva-Genoa City
- Jim Cesar, Tri-County Area
- Steven Hoppman, Southwestern Wisconsin
- Cary Joholski, Westby Area
- Mark Kunde, Winneconne Community
- Gary Larsen, Peshtigo
- Becky Lezvow, Pardeeville Area
- Terry Lemkuil, Oostburg
- Heather Ludzack, Drummond Area
- Laura Magee, Wittenberg-Birnamwood
- Kevin Murray, Janesville
- Linda Peterson, Ithaca
- Barb Reisner, Chetek-Weyerhaeuser Area
- Sheila Ruchti, Fennimore Community
- Pamela Sierzchulski, Greenfield
- Gary Schumacher, Freedom Area
- Eileen Sikora, Cornell
- Tracy Smithback-Travis, Cambridge
- David Visser, Elcho
- Gary Woolever, Reedsburg
- Mike Zimmerman, Lac du Flambeau #1

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

Lyle Briggs, Cornell | Dave Callewaert, Yorkville J2 | Gary Feltz, Slinger | Robert VanDenElzen, Hortonville Area  
Donald Walter, Norway J7 | John Westphal, Mayville | Pam Woodard, Whitefish Bay

The following board member was recognized for serving **50 YEARS** on the local school board:

Marilyn Franklin, Nicolet Union



## Anderson Assumes WASB Presidency for 2026

**Sandie Anderson (right) of the Wild Rose School Board** has been selected by the WASB Board of Directors as the president of the association for 2026. Andrew Maertz, the 2025 WASB president, passed the gavel to Anderson during the Jan. 22 general session at the 2026 Wisconsin State Education Convention in Milwaukee. The board also selected Bob Green of the Middleton-Cross Plains School Board to be the 1st vice president and Larry Dux of the Pewaukee School District to be the 2nd vice president. All three will serve a one-year term.

# AWARDS & RECOGNITION



## Principals of the Year

State Superintendent Jill Underly (left) honors principals of the year (left to right) Samuel Karns, current Whitewater Unified School District superintendent who was honored as the 2025 Wisconsin Elementary Principal of the Year while at the School District of Beloit; Luke Spielman, Mukwonago Area School District (Middle School Principal of the Year); Dr. Brian Cox, Verona Area School District (High School Principal of the Year); Liz Streubel, Mequon-Thiensville School District (Elementary Associate Principal of the Year); Ben Tashner, School District of Holmen (Middle School Associate Principal of the Year); and Amanda Jamerson, Shorewood School District (High School Associate Principal of the Year).



## Superintendent of the Year

Verona Area School District Superintendent Dr. Tremayne Clardy was recognized as the Wisconsin Superintendent of the Year during the State Education Convention in Milwaukee.



## School Business Manager of the Year

Grafton School District Director of Business Services Topher Adams, the 2026 Wisconsin School Business Manager of the Year, was recognized Jan. 21 at the State Education Convention.



## WCASS Early Career Special Services Administrator of the Year

Michele Armentrout,  
Waterloo School District



## WASPA Human Resources Director of the Year

Pam Casey,  
School District of Elmbrook



## WCASS Outstanding Special Services Administrator of the Year

Matthew Kaemmerer,  
Oshkosh Area School District

# COLLABORATE INNOVATE ELEVATE

## SCENES FROM THE 2026 STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION

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



## Ten New Resolutions to Guide WASB Advocacy



On Jan. 21, the opening day of the State Education Convention in Milwaukee, school boards and CESAs across Wisconsin voted on proposed resolutions at the WASB Delegate Assembly. Passed resolutions become official WASB policy positions and guide our advocacy team's response to legislation in Madison and Washington.

The WASB has hundreds of Delegate Assembly-approved resolutions. Each year, the Government Relations team develops a Legislative Agenda to prioritize its work, shaped by member input, political realities and stakeholder consultation. The WASB Board of Directors approves this agenda each November.

The Legislative Agenda follows a two-year cycle: odd-numbered years focus on budget and funding issues, while even-numbered years emphasize policy matters. This aligns with the state budget cycle and legislative calendar. When delegates approve new resolutions, they're added for consideration but don't automatically become top priorities.

This year, delegates voted on 12 resolutions and passed 10. An emergency resolution on special education funding was also approved.

For more information, visit the Delegate Assembly page on our

website or see the article on page 17 of this issue of School News. The language of the approved resolutions is provided below:

### ■ **Opposing the Removal of Caps From the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program**

The WASB supports maintaining an enrollment cap of 10% for the districts and an income cap of 220% of the federal poverty level on participation in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program.

### ■ **Revisions to the School District and School Report Card Process**

The WASB calls on the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and Legislature to collaborate and amend the School District and School Report Card process and relevant state statutes to reflect the following considerations:

- a. Student achievement and growth should be valued equally.
- b. Eliminate the practice of weighting student proficiency based on free and reduced lunch population sizes.
- c. Take into account schools with a high degree of Advanced

Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Credit, Career & Technical Education, and extracurricular offerings.

- d. Any changes to the report card scoring and/or relevant statutes should be considered with input from school leaders from all CESA's in the state.

### ■ **Amendment to Resolution 5.22**

**AMEND "Funds Distribution":** The WASB recommends that the state education agency be assigned the jurisdiction, *to supervise the distribution of supervision and all funds intended for educational programs serving youths of elementary and high school age in the public schools any school system receiving public funds in Wisconsin. Additionally, WASB supports state educational agency supervision and distribution of all federal education funds if federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education is changed to be federal block grants or other funding sent directly to states from federal agencies.*

**REPEAL Resolution 2.62 Flow-Through:** The WASB supports all federal grants flowing directly to school districts and cooperative educational service agencies.

Each year, the Government Relations team develops a Legislative Agenda to prioritize its work, shaped by member input, political realities and stakeholder consultation.

The WASB Board of Directors approves this agenda each November.

### ■ Amendment to Resolution 1.26

**AMEND “Authority to Schedule Referenda”:** The WASB opposes limits on scheduling referenda. Further, the WASB opposes any limitation on the duration, scope, *frequency*, or effect of school referenda.

### ■ Substance Use Disorder and Treatment Aid

The WASB supports legislation to establish a new categorical aid to fund and support school-based substance use disorder prevention and treatment related services. This aid should be comprehensive in order to fully fund necessary resources and staffing that districts may need. Special provisions should be included for small schools to address issues with economies of scale. Use of these funds should be identified and prioritized at the local level. Such uses may include but are not limited to contracting with service providers, employment of specialists or other professionals, training for staff, and any other additional resources as needed.

### ■ Vocational Transition for Students with Disabilities

**AMEND Resolution 2.31(f) Funding for Children with Disabilities:** The WASB supports the use of federal, state, and local resources in a collabo-

*orative manner with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to support transition programs for students with disabilities to achieve better employment and postsecondary opportunities for these students.*

### ■ Universal State Covered Meals

The WASB supports state legislation to establish and fund a universal school meal program to cover the cost of all student meals not covered by federal programs.

### ■ Amendment to Resolution 3.241 “Early Childhood Education Funding & Public-Private Partnerships”

The following language is being added after the current resolution language.

*All publicly funded 3K and 4K schools, including schools receiving voucher funding or funding through public agencies other than DPI, must have the exact same accountability, reporting, and transparency standards/and requirements.*

*The WASB opposes a state funding mechanism to provide private childcare providers with a per-pupil payment for 4K instruction. All 4K programs should be funded through school districts, with local flexibility to contract with private childcare*

*providers to provide 4K instruction as determined by the school board.*

### ■ Opposing “Decoupling” of Public and Private School Funding

The WASB opposes legislation separating funding for parental choice and independent charter schools from the public school equalization aid formula and instead supports all publicly funded schools being funded by a combination of state and local tax dollars.

### ■ Encouraging Schools to Participate in WIAA Policymaking

**REPEAL Existing 3.96 and RECREATE as follows:** The WASB encourages its members’ schools to participate and engage in the WIAA policy process when necessary and appropriate.

### ■ Emergency Resolution: Addressing Underfunded Special Education Categorical Aid Reimbursement Rates

The WASB supports legislation to provide the additional funding that is necessary to meet the estimated special education categorical aid reimbursement rate when an original sum-certain appropriation has been determined to not meet the biennial budget’s reimbursement rate. ■

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE

By the time this issue reaches your mailbox, it is expected that the bulk of the legislative session will be over. Assembly Speaker Robin Vos has publicly stated that he plans to have his chamber’s floor sessions concluded by Feb. 19. The Senate will most likely be in one time in March before concluding for the year. Of course, there are means by which they could return for floor sessions, but these situations are rare.

Plenty of bills and other legislative issues are being worked on as of this writing (Feb. 13). For more information, we invite you to follow along on the WASB Legislative Update Blog or stay tuned for next month’s column. □



## Licensure and Placement of Substitute Teachers

School boards should be aware of the proper use of substitute teachers because substitute teachers play an important role in minimizing disruption to students when their regular teacher is absent. Board members should understand the differences between short-term substitutes and long-term substitutes and between substitute teachers in regular education and in special education. Especially because substitute teachers are difficult to recruit, board members should be aware of the legal requirements for the use of substitute teachers and best practices for their use.

This Legal Comment will address both needs. First, it will describe substitute teacher license requirements. Second, it will suggest best practices, with a focus on the increased importance of hiring proper substitutes in the special education context.

### License Types

Individuals may work as a substitute teacher under several license types. A short-term substitute teacher license may be granted to anyone with an associate degree or higher who has completed a DPI-approved substitute

teacher training program.<sup>1</sup> These training programs may be completed in as little as eight hours and provide a very high level overview on a variety of topics including general school policies and procedures; age-appropriate teaching strategies; classroom management techniques; health and safety issues; following lesson plans; and working with children with disabilities, including confidentiality issues. Alternatively, a college junior or senior in an educator preparation program who has completed at least 15 hours of classroom observation may obtain a short-term substitute teacher license.

An individual who has formerly held or is eligible to hold a teacher or administrator license may obtain a long-term substitute teacher license.<sup>2</sup> Finally, any individual with a current teacher or administrator license may work as a short-term or long-term substitute teacher.<sup>3</sup>

### Restrictions Based On License Type

Substitute teachers holding a short-term substitute license may teach no more than 45 consecutive days in the same teaching assignment. A short-term substitute teacher may teach in any subject and in any grade level, with exceptions applicable to special

education, discussed below.

To work for more than 45 consecutive days in the same assignment, a substitute teacher must hold a long-term substitute or regular teacher license and may only be employed in the subject and grade level in which the individual is licensed. As a result, when hiring long-term substitute teachers, it is important to ensure that the substitute teacher is licensed in the subject and grade that they will be teaching.

### Best Practices For Substitute Teacher Placements

For teacher absences known or expected to be more than 45 consecutive days, such as parental leave, the substitute teacher should hold a long-term substitute license or a non-substitute teacher license in the subject or grade. Districts should exercise caution before placing a short-term substitute teacher in the same class again after the teacher has exceeded the 45 consecutive days. In a decision involving a special education complaint, DPI concluded that technical compliance in violation of the spirit of the short-term substitute teacher 45-day restriction was impermissible.<sup>4</sup> In

Especially because substitute teachers are difficult to recruit, board members should be aware of the legal requirements for the use of substitute teachers and best practices for their use.

On or before a substitute teacher’s first day in the classroom, the district should provide a basic orientation to the district, including policies and procedures, maps of the district buildings and classrooms, and contact information for school staff.

---

other words, if a short-term substitute teacher has taught in the same position for 45 consecutive days, the district shouldn’t just move the teacher to another assignment for a day and then put the teacher right back in their original position.

On or before a substitute teacher’s first day in the classroom, the district should provide a basic orientation to the district, including policies and procedures, maps of the district buildings and classrooms, and contact information for school staff. The district should also provide lesson plans and other needed materials, such as students’ schedules. Even though districts might not have much lead time when bringing in a new substitute teacher, basic employment orientation is also recommended. Prior to the substitute’s first assignment, districts should review with the substitute, or at least provide in writing, the same general employment information the district would provide to any other new employee, such as the employment handbook, the student handbook, information about mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect, and emergency procedures for things like lockdowns, severe weather protocols, and fire evacuation. In addition, Districts should make sure that substitute teachers have completed the mandatory physical and tuberculosis screening.<sup>5</sup> This examination and screening is a legally required condition of employment for all school employees, including substitutes.

### ■ License Required To Work With Special Education Students

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that an individual providing special education hold at least a bachelor’s degree and a Wisconsin license to teach special education. Special education licensure requirements may not be waived, even on an emergency or temporary basis. Thus, all substitute teachers providing special education should have a special education license. Use of an improperly licensed substitute teacher may cause a parent to request a due process hearing or state complaint investigation, requiring additional district resources.

However, a short-term substitute teacher may supervise a special education student or classroom even if they don’t hold a special education license to provide special education required by an individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan. Similarly, the fact that a paraprofessional might be present in the classroom does not satisfy the license requirement — no matter how experienced and talented the paraprofessional is. The best approach would be to have substitute special education teachers and service providers available. That isn’t possible for all districts.

If a substitute without a special education license must cover for a special education teacher, the district should designate a licensed special education teacher who is familiar

with the students to assume IEP responsibilities and to coordinate with the substitute teacher. This will likely reduce the risk of the district failing to provide special education services. Remedies for failure to provide these services might include providing additional or “compensatory” education or services, which are tailored to meet the needs of the individual student and to address the specific areas that were impacted by the failure.

In 2024, DPI found that a Wisconsin district did not properly implement a student’s IEP when a teacher with a short-term substitute license taught the student for six months. DPI held that “Although the district did provide support to this teacher, this is not a permissible use of a short-term substitute. If a substitute is anticipated to be needed for a long-term assignment, the employee must have a long-term substitute license.”<sup>6</sup> As a result of the improper licensure, the district was required to provide compensatory services for all students with IEPs on the short-term substitute teacher’s caseload.

### ■ Additional Considerations Regarding Special Education

All substitute teachers should review any IEP, Section 504 and behavior intervention plan for students the substitute will be supporting. This requires districts to provide substitutes with access to this information — along with a reminder about state and federal laws regarding the

privacy of student records. The district should also make sure that all substitute teachers know who to contact with any questions, including if the substitute does not understand the IEP or behavioral plan or needs training to comply with those plans. The district should also make sure the substitute teacher has a basic understanding of the students' disabilities. If the IEP requires the use of certain techniques (such as a behavioral intervention plan) with a specific student or the use of assistive technology, the district should provide the substitute teacher with the training necessary to perform the technique and use the technology. Even if not an IEP requirement, if the student's teacher has found that certain techniques help the student's behavior or that

certain actions trigger behavioral issues, that information should be shared with the substitute teacher.

### Conclusion

School boards and administrators should be aware of the many legal requirements pertaining to the use of substitute teachers. School districts may jeopardize their state aid payments by using unlicensed or improperly licensed substitute teachers. In addition, the school district clerk may not order payment of salary of any teacher, including a substitute teacher, unless that teacher has provided proof that the teacher holds the appropriate license. Districts should plan for teacher absences, including unexpected absences, and should be aware of the

repercussions that may accompany failure to employ properly licensed and trained substitute teachers. ■

*This Legal Comment was written by Heather Curnutt & Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For related articles, see Wisconsin School News: "Dispute Resolution Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act" (Oct. 2025); "Notices of Reasonable Assurance and Summer Unemployment Benefits" (Apr. 2024); and "Compensatory Education Services for Students with Disabilities" (May 2020).*

1. Wis. Admin. Code § PI 34.032(2)(a).
2. Wis. Admin. Code § PI 34.033(2).
3. Wis. Admin. Code § PI 34.109.
4. IDEA Complaint Decision 24-031 | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
5. Wis. Stat. § 118.25.
6. IDEA Complaint Decision 24-031 | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

*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.*

# DISCOVERY REDEFINES DEVELOPMENT

**Discovery** is how development takes shape. Through play, children learn about themselves, build relationships and uncover new possibilities in the spaces around them. Curiosity leads the way — supporting confidence, independence and child-directed growth that feels natural.

Experience Play That Moves You®  
at [bciburke.com/play](https://bciburke.com/play).

**Burke**  
PLAY THAT MOVES YOU



© BCI Burke Company 2026 | 800-266-1250



# Educational Services and Products

## 2026 WASB SERVICE ASSOCIATES

**HIGHLIGHTED BUSINESSES** are members of the WASB Endorsed Insurance Agency Program.  
Learn more at [WASB.org/wasb-insurance-plan](https://wasb.org/wasb-insurance-plan).

### Architecture, Engineering and Construction

#### ► Bray Architects

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

Architecture, interior design, planning, referendum support.

#### ► C.D. Smith, Construction, Inc.

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

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

#### ► CG Schmidt

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

Construction management, general contracting, design-build.

#### ► Eppstein Uhen Architects

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

Architectural design, engineering and service leader known for inspired design.

#### ► Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, Inc.

800-236-2370  
jandres@hoffman.net

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

#### ► Findorff

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

Proud to support schools across Wisconsin by providing long-range planning services beginning with facility assessments and capital maintenance plans. Since 2013, we have completed \$2 billion in small-to-large renovations, additions and new construction projects through our award-winning pre-referendum communications strategies and project management leadership.

#### ► JP Cullen

608-754-6601  
sean.cullen@jpcullen.com  
jpcullen.com

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

#### ► Miron Construction Co., Inc.

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

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

#### ► Performance Services

847-466-7720, Brian Ondyak  
bondyak@performanceservices.com  
performanceservices.com

Delivers high-performing construction projects with controlled cost, increased project speed, and high-quality outcomes. Complete pre-referendum services, facility master planning, architectural design, engineering, construction, and project management.

#### ► Plunkett Raysich Architects LLP

414-359-3060  
skramer@prarch.com, prarch.com

Architectural and interior design services.

#### ► Scherrer Construction Company, Inc.

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

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

#### ► The Boldt Company

920-225-6216  
theboldtcompany.com

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

#### ► VJS Construction Services

262-542-9000  
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  
holly@skyward.com, skyward.com

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

### Financing, Banking, Consulting

#### ► Baird Public Finance

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

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

#### ► PTMA Financial Solutions

414-225-0099, ekass@pmanetwork.com  
ptma.com

PTMA Financial Solutions, formerly PMA Financial Network, LLC, 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.

#### ► M3 Insurance Solutions, Inc

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

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

#### ► National Insurance Services of Wisconsin, Inc.

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

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

#### ► R&F 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\_daud@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 Bulkema Olson & Vliet LLC

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

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

#### ► Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c.

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

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

#### ► von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

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

For more than 50 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**



# **SUMMER LEARNING SYMPOSIUM**



**SAVE THE DATE JULY 10-11**

**Holiday Inn Stevens Point – Convention Center**

Visit [WASB.org](http://WASB.org) for complete information and to register. | 608-257-2622 | [info@WASB.org](mailto:info@WASB.org)