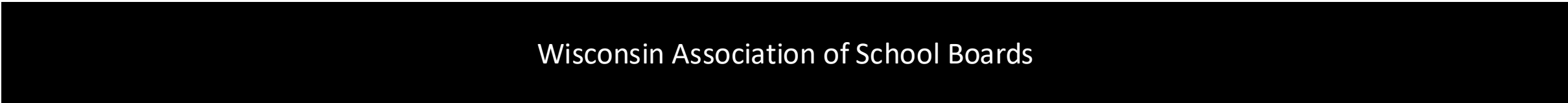




New Board Member Gatherings

April 2026

Wisconsin Association of School Boards



Director's Welcome



- Call to Order and Housekeeping
- Introductions
 - Director
 - WASB Staff
 - Attendees

Reach out with your questions and comments to:

WASB.org | info@wasb.org | 833-320-5333 toll-free

Let's begin and discuss...

1. The role of the school board
2. Characteristics of effective school boards
3. Helpful tips



The Board's Role

- Make strategic decisions.
- Provide general oversight for administration and district.
- Hire and evaluate the district administrator.
- Review and update board policies.
- Adopt a budget and allocate resources consistent with board priorities and district goals.
- Be advocates for the district within the community and beyond – local, state and federal levels of government.

Effective Boards

- Commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction; boards define clear goals towards that vision.
- Lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, exhibiting strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- Demonstrate strong data literacy; the board actively reviews and monitors data, even when results are unfavorable, and uses that information to drive continuous improvement.
- Are driven by accountability, dedicating less time to operational matters and more time to developing policies that advance student achievement.

Effective Boards

- Align and sustain resources to meet district goals.
- Commit to building shared knowledge, values and to continuous improvement as a whole.
- Foster strong, collaborative relationships with staff and the community, and establish effective communication structures that keep all stakeholders informed and engaged in setting and achieving district goals.

Helpful Tips

- Always keep the best interests of children as your priority.
- Review the board operations section of your district's policy manual.
- Know your board policies and statutory provisions that cover board member's code of conduct.
- Review previous board meeting minutes to become familiar with what is and has been before the board.

Helpful Tips

- Meet with your superintendent to obtain clear understanding of the district's budget – ask questions.
- Assume your new position with an open mind.
- Expect to occasionally be in the minority on board decisions and graciously accept the majority decision.
- Realize you don't know everything; capitalize on every opportunity to learn.

Helpful Tips

- Expect some board decisions to be unpopular with your constituents or even the community at large.
 - Make sure you have taken the appropriate steps to inform those stakeholders as to why those decisions were made.
- You have only one vote. You can only be successful if you convince others to vote with you.
- Do not surprise your superintendent, administrators or fellow board members at a public meeting with unexpected comments or requests.
- Be flexible and willing to compromise to meet the board's collective goals.

Helpful Tips

- Be a good listener. Superintendents, administrators, teachers, students and community members can help you learn more about your job.
- Stay connected with your schools, teachers and students.
- Your role is to establish policy and set goals. It is up to the superintendent to manage the district and get it to where the board says it needs to go.

Helpful Tips

- Learn your district's chain of command. Refer all complaints to the proper person.
- Understand and abide by Wisconsin's Public Records and Open Meetings Laws.

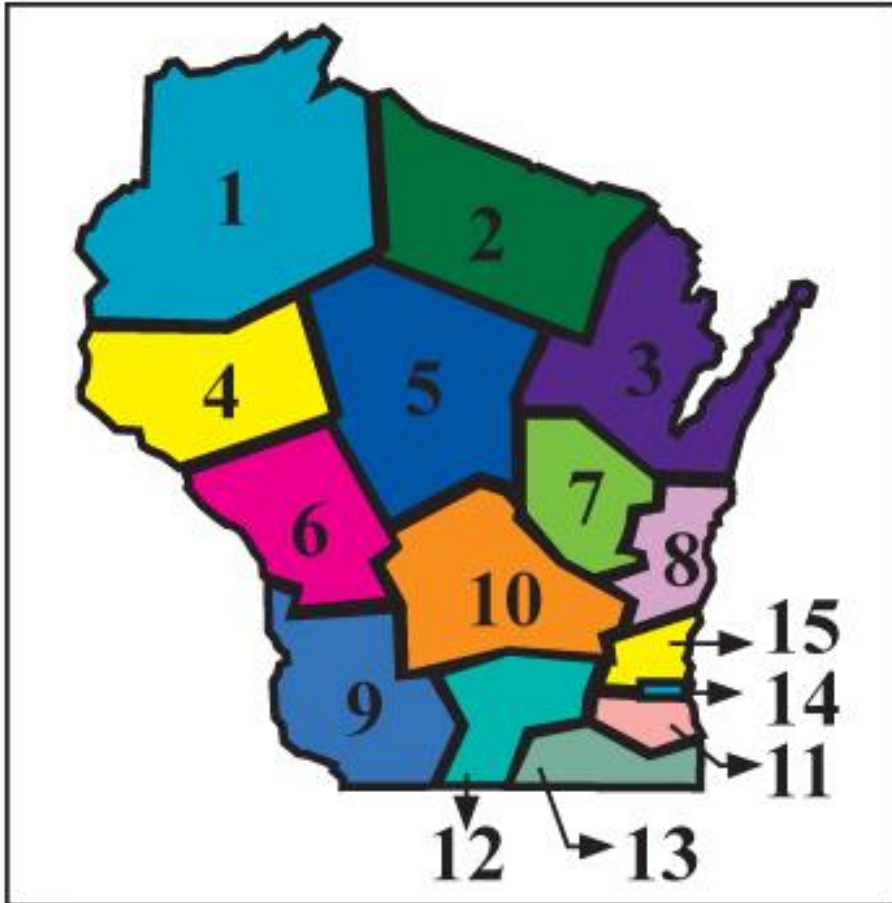
**Have fun and enjoy your role
of helping kids succeed!**

Who Is the WASB?



- The WASB was founded in 1921, when school board members met in the Capitol in Madison to create the Wisconsin Association of High Schools and Graded School Boards.
- A member-driven organization, serving more than 400 Wisconsin schools and CESAs, that supports, promotes and advances the interests of public education in Wisconsin.

WASB Governance - Board of Directors



- Each member board has one vote to elect a regional representative to the WASB Board of Directors.
- The executive director is responsible for carrying out the policies of the Board of Directors and coordinating the association's programs and services.

WASB Mission & Vision Statements

Mission—We will support, promote, and advocate for high levels of student achievement by providing public schools, public school boards, and their students and staff with resources, services, and professional development.

Vision—We envision a future where every student thrives, every voice is heard, and every Wisconsin community is enriched by a world-class public educational system.

WASB Guiding Principles

- We believe in the power of public education as the cornerstone of democracy.
- We are committed to ensuring that **EVERY** student has access to a full and fair range of educational opportunities and a high-quality public education.
- We strive for excellence in board governance.
- We believe in the power of locally elected public school boards to share education policies that reflect the value and needs of their communities.
- We stand firm in our commitment to champion public education.
- We value collaboration and other stakeholder organizations.

WASB Delegate Assembly

- **Advocacy positions taken by the WASB are determined by our member school boards.**
- Individual member boards submit resolutions to the WASB Policy and Resolutions Committee.
- Each member board has one vote on the policy positions determined at the annual WASB Delegate Assembly, held in conjunction with the State Education Convention in January.



Why Choose the WASB?

- Your state association
- Timely information
- Legislative advocacy
- Professional networking
- Essential services
- Quality resources
- Relevant programs



WASB Areas of Service



- Advocacy & Government Relations
- Legal Services
- Governance Consulting
- Policy Services
- Superintendent Search Services and Evaluation
- Communications – regular updates and information for members

You've Won the Election – What Happens Next?

Oath of Office

- **MUST be sworn in on or before the fourth Monday in April**

If a newly elected board member neglects to take the oath by such date, a vacancy will be created on the school board. The vacancy on the board will have to be filled by an appointment by the remaining members. Such an appointee will hold office until the successor is elected.

- **Board Reorganizational Meeting – must be held on or within 30 days of the fourth Monday in April**

Open Meetings Law – Core Concepts

- **School boards are subject to the state’s open meetings law.**
 - “Governmental Body”
 - Governmental bodies include school boards, **but also** subunits created by a school board (e.g., committees, task forces, etc.)
 - Boards must meet and conduct their business in properly noticed public meetings. The board “speaks” only when it takes action through the proper board meeting process, or when the board designates and directs one of its members to speak on behalf of the board.

Open Meetings Law – Continued

Closed Meetings

- There are specific statutory exemptions that allow school boards to meet in closed session. (See [section 19.85](#) Wis. Stat.)
 - One of the primary purposes of holding closed session meetings is to allow for the confidential presentation and discussion of sensitive information.
 - In addition to violating the expectations and trust of fellow board members, and, in many cases, violating board policy, there can be direct legal consequences associated with divulging closed session information to non-board members, including family members, friends or others.

**** The use of secret ballots is prohibited except during the election of board officers.***

Open Meetings Law – Continued

Walking Quorum - PROHIBITED

- A “walking quorum” is a series of gatherings among separate groups of members of a governmental body, each less than quorum size, who agree, tacitly or explicitly, to act uniformly in sufficient number to reach a quorum.
 - In-person, telephone/text, email (be aware of “reply all” & “forward”)

Negative Quorum

- Because one-half of the members of the board, or even fewer members if a super-majority vote is required, can be sufficient to block a proposal and control the body’s course of action, the open meetings law can apply to more than just meetings of a governmental body in which a quorum is present.

Public Records Law

- School boards and all school board members are subject to the Public Records law.
 - Each board member has a legal obligation to maintain records related to his/her elected office and to respond to requests to inspect or copy those records – **this includes emails.**
 - Board members should have separate, distinct email accounts for conducting school district business.
 - Review your district's policies and procedures; discuss with your superintendent if you have further questions.

Meeting Preparation & Public Input

- **Be prepared and on time for each meeting.**
 - Review materials and ask questions in advance.
 - This preparation will help you be fully engaged in the conversation at the board meeting.
 - **Key policies to know:**
 - How items are placed on the agenda.
 - Understand how public input is recognized and received.
- * These are all questions you can ask as part of your orientation process.***

Responding to Citizens & the Media

- **You represent the community at large.**
 - While some may expect you to represent their special interests, you were elected to represent the community at large.
 - It is important to remember that you are just one member of the board...only the board **as a whole** has authority to take action and make decisions (by a majority vote at a duly noticed meeting).

Be **CAREFUL** of making promises or speaking on behalf of the board unless you have been authorized by the board to do so.

Responding to Citizens & the Media

- **Know the district's complaint procedure(s)**
 - Follow chain of command; determine who is the spokesperson(s).
 - If you choose to operate outside of the board's established procedures, you may be doing so as an individual.
 - Final decisions are made by the board; therefore, it is important to remain impartial and allow the appropriate administrators to investigate complaints.

Ethics & Conflicts of Interest

- Board members are prohibited by law from using their position to obtain financial gain, or anything of substantial value, for the personal benefit or for the benefits of an immediate family member(s) of which they are affiliated.
 - If you have a spouse or immediate family member working for the district and are unsure of whether you need to abstain from a particular discussion/vote, contact your personal legal counsel or the WI Ethics Commission for advice.
- **“Substantial Value”** means anything more than an inconsequential item of token value.

Ethics & Conflicts of Interest

- Board members can volunteer for the district but only in a limited capacity, in specific positions.
- State law allows a board member to serve as a volunteer coach or supervisor of an extracurricular activity, or as a volunteer school bus driver if the school board member:
 - 1) Does not receive compensation for such services.
 - 2) Agrees to abstain from voting on any issue that substantially and directly concerns the activity.
 - 3) Completes a criminal background check.

**** Specific to bus driving, must meet all other statutory requirements.***

Ethics & Conflicts of Interest

- A board member may **not** be a substitute teacher in the district they serve as a school board member or be in any other paid employee position.

The WASB is not aware of any court decisions or authoritative advisory opinions (e.g. from the Wisconsin Attorney General or the Wisconsin Ethics Commission) that have identified an exception to part-time employment, short-term employment or substitute employment.

Policymaking

- **Through policy, the board sets goals and provides directives for the administrator to follow while working towards these goals with staff.**
 - Continuous process.
 - Review regularly for compliance with state and federal laws, along with other regulatory guidance; ensure that policies remain current.
 - Should reflect school and community values to effectively serve their intended purpose.
 - Are policies consistent with one another, your employee handbook and other areas of cross reference?

Policymaking

- **Board policies are the district’s “laws,” and legal issues may result if policies and practices are not aligned.**
 - Policies should provide clear guidance while allowing administrators the flexibility to handle situations appropriately.
 - Please **READ** policies before adopting them.
 - Particularly if a policy(s) is written in a generic manner, ensure that the policy(s) meets the district’s goals and is aligned with the district’s practices and values.

So, Now What? – Get Your Bearings and Find Some Direction

- **Orientation – Review your folder and visit WASB.org.**
 - Some districts will have an established process and/or materials.
 - Others may be more informal.
 - Utilize the WASB’s *What Every New Board Member Needs to Know Guide*.
- **Access the WASB Online Learning Platform**
 - Introductory Modules – Understanding the board’s legal and governing roles.
 - Advanced Modules – Learn about the forthcoming reorganizational meeting, roles and duties of board officers, the judicial role of boards and more.
- **Consider viewing WASB Finance 101**
 - The nine-part series provides an overview of Wisconsin school finance.

Publications & Subscriptions



- Wisconsin School News magazine
- Legislative Update Blog
- eConnection newsletter
- Legal & Policy Services newsletter
- WASB Policy Resource Guide
- Other publications and bulletins

Events

- Summer Learning Symposium
- Fall Regional Meetings
- State Education Convention
- School Law Conference
- Day at the Capitol
- Legal & Legislative Video Updates
- Workshops & Webinars



Questions



Thank You for Your Service

@ 2026

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