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DPI Report: 32% of Trainees Don't Become Wisconsin Teachers

Out of 5,256 possible new teachers in 2023-24, Wisconsin only added 3,568, according to Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's 2024 Educator Preparation Program and Workforce Analysis Report.

The April report uses data from the 2023-24 school year, when there were 63,946 teachers in Wisconsin, down slightly from 64,354 in 2022-23. The report found that 1,688 people (32.1%) who completed Wisconsin educator preparation

programs weren't hired as teachers in the state.

"Given the ongoing labor situation, exacerbated by the retention issues covered elsewhere in this report, the state may want to consider policy initiatives that would assist in keeping more of these completers employed as educators in Wisconsin," the report reads.

Additionally, the report found that 52.6% of teachers were still working in Wisconsin classrooms by their eighth year in the profession,

including 31.0% in the same district and 23.3% in the same school.

Among the report's other findings was that the total compensation package of people entering their 15th year of teaching in 2024 was 22% less than it was in 2010 when adjusting for inflation. For teachers entering their 30th year, it was 13% less. □

STAT OF THE MONTH

52.6%

Percentage of people who entered the teaching profession that are still working in Wisconsin schools eight years into the job.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; Wisconsin Public Radio

SPRING ELECTION RESULTS

Wisconsin Voters Approve Majority of School Referendums

More than 60% of referendum questions passed in the April 7 spring election in Wisconsin, according to data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Of the 75 questions on the ballot, 46 passed while 29 failed. The 61.3% approval rate statewide is comparable with recent spring elections, including 2025 (56.4%), 2024 (59.2%), 2023 (54.9%), 2022 (80.2%) and 2021 (60.6%).

Nine of the 12 capital (issue debt) referendums passed (75%). The remaining 63 questions were operational, including 32 of the 57 non-recurring operational referendums passing (56.1%), as well as five of the six recurring operational questions (83.3%).

The total number of referendum questions marked a decline from recent spring elections. April 2025 saw 89 referenda questions in 81 school districts and April 2024 saw 93 questions in 86 districts.

Subscribe to the WASB Legislative Update Blog for more insights on the spring election. □

Visit dpi.wi.gov/sfs/reporting/safr/referenda-info for the latest on the April 7 election.

Hustisford Schools Face Dissolution After Failed Referendum

Facing a \$1.6 million deficit, Hustisford School District is taking steps to dissolve after the April 7 election, when voters rejected a non-recurring operational referendum of \$1,875,000 per year for the next two years.

TMJ4 reports that, without the funding, the 236-student district in Dodge County will be empty by the 2026-27 school year, according to interim superintendent Todd Bugnacki.

"Our goal is to partner with a local district, if possible, and to figure out a way in which we can tuition our kids into that district for the year so we can keep families together and keep friends together, keep neighbors together," Bugnacki said, according to TMJ4.

The district is working with attorneys and local and state officials to find a path forward. □

For more on Hustisford and the consolidation and dissolution conversations happening in several Wisconsin communities, read "A Pathway for Our Kids" in the April issue of Wisconsin School News.



Welcome to Your Association

I want to take this opportunity to welcome all the new school board members who were elected in April, as well as board members who have recently been appointed to fill vacancies.

I hope you will find a home with the WASB where you can learn, grow, network and get your school board-related questions answered. We are YOUR association. The WASB is here to serve you and help your board service start on the right foot.

By now, you should have received your login credentials that will allow you to access WASB.org. This is important, as many of the valuable, free resources are only via login. If you haven't received your login information yet, please contact info@wasb.org.

Thank you to everyone who attended the WASB New School Board Member Gatherings hosted by our WASB regional directors in April. If you could not attend your region's gathering, contact Director of Communications Brock Fritz at bfritz@wasb.org for the recorded virtual version.

At the gatherings in Regions 7 and 15, it was my pleasure to welcome several new school board members. I look forward to meeting many more of you in the months ahead. Be assured there are many more WASB-sponsored training and learning opportunities to come.

Through mid-May, for example, WASB consultants and staff counsel are hosting a five-part webinar on the roles and responsibilities of school board members. These complimentary webinars will be broadcast live on Tuesdays and Thursdays at noon and recorded for

on-demand viewing.

On July 10-11, the WASB will host its 2026 Summer Learning Symposium at the Holiday Inn Stevens Point – Convention Center. Breakout sessions will cover topics such as community engagement, artificial intelligence, school finance, school safety and more. The full agenda is posted on the Summer Learning Symposium web page. Registration opens May 11.

The 2026 Business Honor Roll nomination period will run from May 4 through Aug. 7. The WASB invites member school boards to submit the names of up to five local businesses, including newspapers or other media, that have been helpful to your school district over the past year. Please tell us what your business partners have done for your schools, and we will help you promote your partnerships.

Turning to the ballot, the April 7 spring election saw 73 school districts put 75 referendum questions before voters, tying for the fifth-most April referendums in state history.

Operating referendums dominated the ballot, a sign that our state's school funding system is failing too many districts who are caught in the web of seemingly never-ending referendum requests. Of the 75 questions, 57 (76%) were non-recurring operational referendums, meaning the additional funding requested expires after a set number of years. That's by far the most non-recurring operational referendums in any April in state history.

Voters approved 32 of the 57 non-recurring operational referendums (56.1%). Many results were decided by razor-thin margins. Voters

in the Butternut School District approved an operating referendum by just one vote. In Shell Lake, the winning margin was two votes.

Several districts where referendums did not pass, including some where referendums also had not passed in previous attempts, face difficult decisions. At least one district is contemplating dissolution. Some districts may try again in November. Several are looking at deep cuts to programs and staff and cutting costs by freezing staff salaries and postponing technology upgrades.

The state currently holds a projected \$2.5 billion budget surplus. As I write this, ongoing negotiations continue that could channel a significant portion of that surplus toward public schools through increased special education categorical aid and possibly through other means.

I urge school leaders to continue engaging with legislators and urging action. With districts facing staffing and programming decisions for the upcoming school year, a significant boost to investment in special education — a key part of those negotiations — would increase the reimbursement rate, immediately providing much-needed budget stability.

Other proposals to provide property tax relief, whether through additional general aid or additional school levy tax credits, would also help relieve school property taxes, even if they don't boost school budgets.

Once again, welcome, new school board members. We hope you enjoy this issue of School News and look forward to serving you in the years ahead. Please reach out at any time — your comments and suggestions are always welcome. ■



Hands-on Learning

FOR THE PLANET



By Heather Phelps

When it comes to learning about the world, nothing beats hands-on experience. When it comes to learning how to save the world, that's only more true. That can be a challenge, however, with tight budgets, limited planning time and long lists of standards that need to be met. The Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education aims to make that challenge easier for teachers.

The WCEE's free kit lending program is intended to make hands-on learning available to students around the state. The WCEE has curated a collection of more

than 50 unique kits, with topics as diverse as wildlife tracks, solar-powered circuits and tree identification.

Each kit has hands-on resources for students to learn from, and the majority are paired with pre-written lessons — or even entire lesson series — designed to use the kit materials and matched to Wisconsin state standards. Everything is packed in an easy-to-transport tote, and nearly all of the kits can be shipped directly to schools at no cost to the district.

In sharing their experience using a kit, a teacher from Central Middle School in Hartford described their eighth-grade students as having

“Lots of ‘AHA!’ moments and joy of being able to do ‘real-life’ science outside, ‘like real scientists.’”

The WCEE's most recent kits include three — the Waste Investigations Kit, Water Investigations Kit and Healthy Indoor Spaces Kit — designed in collaboration with Green and Healthy Schools Wisconsin to support classrooms and schools interested in earning Green and Healthy Schools Badges. Whether running a trash audit, measuring rainfall or testing air quality, students can take an active role in collecting data and drawing conclusions.



Each kit has hands-on resources for students to learn from, and the majority are paired with pre-written lessons — or even entire lesson series — designed to use the kit materials and matched to Wisconsin state standards.

Fifth-grade students at Maple Grove Charter School in the School District of Athens wanted to use what they learned from auditing their school’s appliances with watt meters to educate the rest of the school. Students created posters for each appliance in the school, putting them up in the lunch room so other students and teachers would think about behavioral changes they could make to reduce their energy usage. These changes indicate a growing sense of responsibility among students and staff, creating a shift toward a more energy-conscious school environment. The team’s next step is adding smart power strips to the most wasteful appliances.

Team Sigma is a team of students from Mauston High School who compete in the annual KidWind challenge to build and test a wind turbine. In the spring of 2024, they competed using a pre-built turbine, then applied for mini-grant funding to improve upon that design with their own, built-from-scratch turbine. The students were thinking beyond the competition.

“Our goal is to prove that we are worth spending money on,” the students wrote in their grant application, referencing the district’s February 2025 referendum. “Renewable energy



and those pursuing an interest and career in it are aspects of education that must be fought for and funded.”

Not only was their 2025 turbine more mechanically sound than the previous year’s, it was powerful enough to earn them first place in the high school wind division and the opportunity to compete in KidWind Worlds.

Reflecting on the experience, the team wrote, “We showed that our creativity can contribute to a more sustainable future.” With several of the team members choosing to major in environmental science or become electrical or mechanical engineers to work on wind and solar projects, these students plan to contribute to a sustainable future for years to come.

McFarland High School students were also interested in using renewable energy at their school. While a mini-grant is too small to make a meaningful contribution toward a full-size solar array, the students determined it would be enough to purchase a single panel, along with the charge controller, battery and inverter necessary to use the panel to charge student Chromebooks.

The students’ goal was to inspire their peers to be “intrigued and curious about sustainability.” They surveyed their classmates and found that 90% planned to use the charger, with 33% intending to rely on it. The team negotiated space for the

Students can then take their learning to the next level by putting it into action. To support those efforts, KEEP, Wisconsin’s K-12 Energy Education Program, offers \$300 to \$700 mini-grants for student teams needing funding for an energy-related project to reduce their school’s carbon footprint. Crucially, these grants are for students, not their teachers. This builds students’ skills at planning a project, making the case for it, budgeting and ultimately implementing their plan. The completed projects are an inspiration to anyone wondering how to make their school more sustainable.



panel, which will also be used to teach future classes about solar energy, in his classroom's south-facing window.

"The sense of hope and empowerment the project sparked is perhaps the most rewarding outcome," the team wrote, noting that they are planning a presentation on solar power to the district's elementary schools. "We've shown that sustainability isn't abstract — it's practical, visible and within reach."

The latest round of mini-grants, awarded in fall 2025 with teams working on implementing their projects through the spring of 2026, has

creatively expanded the possibilities of what a mini-grant project can be:

1. **Evansville High School** is purchasing a thermal camera to determine which doors and windows in the school are most in need of weatherstripping and door sweeps, so that they can install them and reduce the loss of conditioned air from the school.

2. **Mount Horeb High School** students are working on an anti-idling campaign to reduce the carbon emissions and health risks from lengthy idling as cars wait to

drop off and pick up students. A robust data-gathering plan will help them determine how effective their efforts are.

3. **Amherst Middle School** is repurposing a Pedal Power bicycle into a charger. Originally designed to turn the energy from pedaling into electrical energy to light up lightbulbs, demonstrating the difference in energy consumption between incandescent and compact fluorescent bulbs, the bicycle and generator will now be used to charge a battery, which will in turn charge students' Chromebooks. When a student comes to school with their

“We’ve shown that sustainability isn’t abstract — **it’s practical, visible and within reach.**”



Chromebook near-empty, they’ll have the option of pedaling to recharge it.

The projects are an opportunity for a group of students to dive into topics they might not have otherwise encountered. Many groups that apply for mini-grants are members of an environmental club or class. At Randolph High School, however, members of the Educators Rising Club applied for a grant to install smart power strips for school computers, making sure they’ll be fully shut down when not in use.

Team members started with a basic understanding that power usage produces greenhouse gases, but through applying for the grant came to understand the intermediate steps of how that process actually works — namely, much of our electricity is produced from power plants, which here in Wisconsin are often powered by the burning of fossil fuels. That understanding will help them explain to the rest of the school the benefits of reducing electricity consumption.

Whether through kits or mini-

grants, the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education strives to enhance hands-on learning that will engage students and provide meaningful learning experiences. All schools and teachers are encouraged to reach out if they are interested in

borrowing a kit or supporting their students in applying for a Green Team Mini-Grant. ■

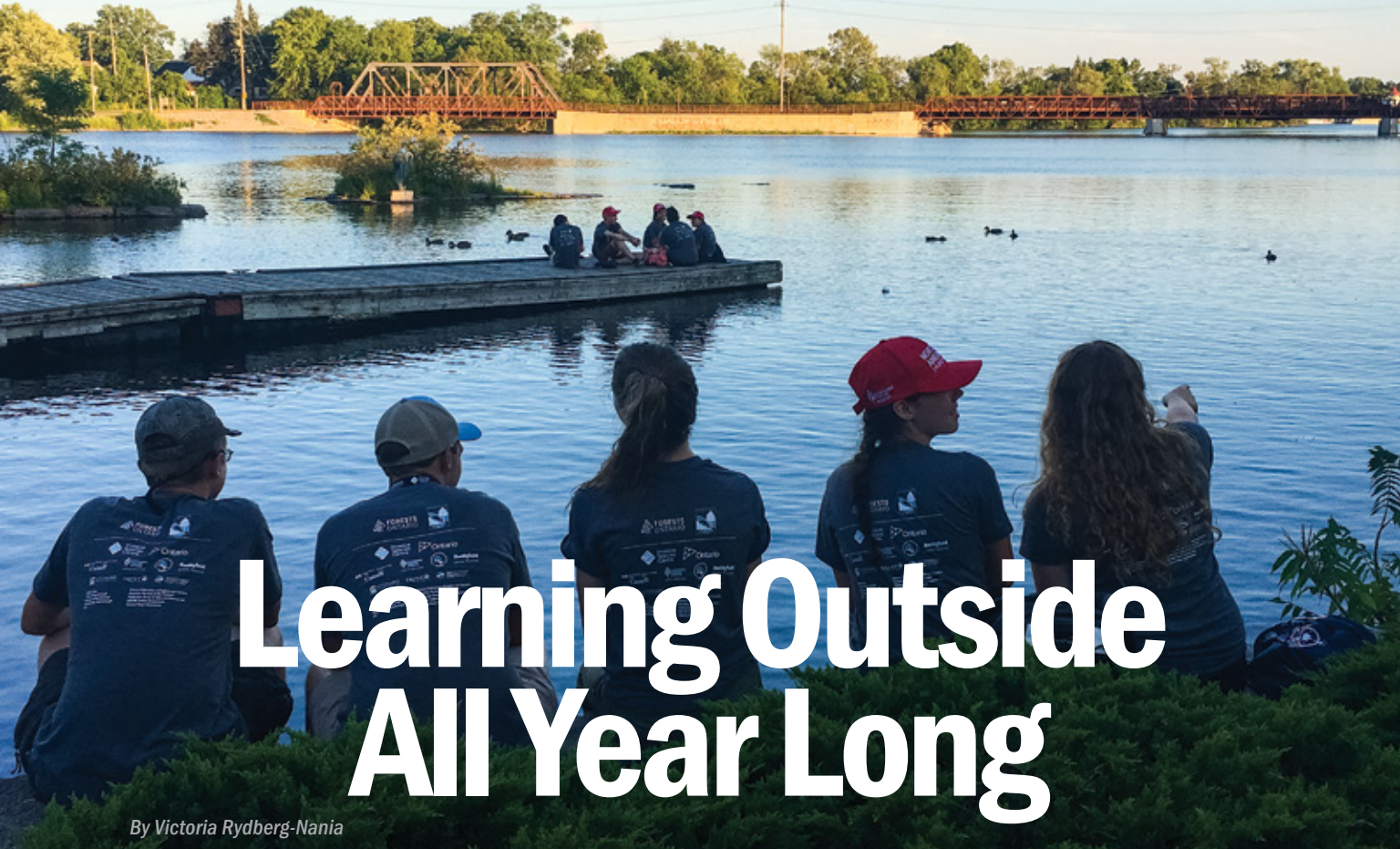
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Learning Outside All Year Long

By Victoria Rydberg-Nania

With longer spring days upon us, state testing complete and the end of the school year in sight, students and teachers alike are excited to head outside. It is a great time of year for outdoor and environmental education, featuring Earth Day and Arbor Day celebrations. Too often, however, learning outside is limited to physical education, science classes or the occasional field trip. But as schools across Wisconsin are proving, these outdoor, experiential hands-on learning opportunities can happen all year long, in any subject area.

“Any content that can be taught in an indoor classroom can be adapted to be taught outdoors,” says School District of Superior School Forest Coordinator Lori Danz, who was a 2023 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year and served as the state’s

representative for the National Teacher of the Year program. “As I tell the staff I work with, outdoor education isn’t defined by what you teach, it is defined by where you teach. At the Superior School Forest, we welcome all grade levels and teachers of all content areas.”

Learning outside not only supports academic

learning, it also provides mental and physical health benefits for students and staff alike. According to Louise Delagran in the University of Minnesota’s

“Taking Charge of Your Wellbeing,” “Being

in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings. Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, it contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hor-

To find research about the benefits of nature, visit the Children and Nature website at research.childrenandnature.org for the world’s largest collection of peer-reviewed literature about nature’s benefits for children.

mones.” Additionally, the Children and Nature Network has resources to show how nature offers pathways for healing from adverse childhood experiences, also referred to as ACES.

Splashing into spring

As the snow melts, water abounds and provides rich, sometimes unexpected, learning opportunities. In a village of just 700 residents at the headwaters of the St. Croix River, students watched as devastating flash floods destroyed a community rain garden and washed out sections of roadway. The Eagles Academy students in the Solon Springs School District asked a powerful question: “How can we revitalize the rain garden?”

Working alongside Douglas County Land & Water Conservation, Solon Springs Forward and local partners, the district expanded and restored the community rain garden. They removed pavement to reduce runoff, planted native species, improved erosion control and redesigned water flow to protect Park

August 4
Get Out There
event

Creek and Lake St. Croix, waters that eventually connect to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

“Our rain garden doesn’t just protect our town,” one student shared. “It protects places we may never even see.”

Throughout the project, students integrated math, science, literacy and civic engagement. They presented to the community, wrote newsletter articles and are developing educational signage to increase awareness. They’ve continued invasive species removal, native plant restoration and long-term sustainability planning, ensuring the project remains a living classroom and community asset.

Taking learning outside in the spring can also be as simple as moving independent or choice reading time outdoors for students to stretch out in the sunshine and soak up vitamin D as they enjoy a book, or helping young learners follow the path of water after a rainstorm.

Or, as Danz suggests, “Teaching elementary students how to spell? Set up a Smell and Spell Trail. Teaching math? Create a Math Olympics Trail.” The possibilities are endless.

Summer school inspiration

In northern Wisconsin, when Birchwood School District students enroll in summer school, they don’t trade away sunny days at the community center or playing ball in the park for fluorescent lights and rows of desks. Instead, they climb into the school vans and take their learning on the road to discover all that the Northwoods has to offer.

The district’s “Get Out There” summer school program provides an opportunity for upper elementary and middle-grade students to explore the wondrous natural resources of their area. Educators weave in mathematics, literacy, science, social studies, art and physical education into the theme of each day trip.

In the southern part of the state, students at Leap Elementary in

Watertown Unified School District found learning and inspiration through a summer book club. According to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, which provided a Go Outside Fund grant for the six-week program, students and families were “rewilding their yards and creating local ecosystems through reading “Nature’s Best Hope (Young Readers’ Edition),” by Doug Tallamy. Participants discussed and engaged in hands-on activities to learn about native plants, pollinators, and sustainable practices to help foster healthier, more biodiverse environments in their own communities.”

School-based summer recreation programs are also great opportunities for outdoor education. In 2025, again thanks to a Go Outside Fund grant, the Ice Age Trail Alliance partnered with Milwaukee Recreation, a division of Milwaukee Public Schools, to host a summer camp for 25 elementary-age students. The camp was designed for young outdoor enthusiasts looking to expand their hiking and recreation skills, hiking up to four miles a day along the Ice Age Trail.

Summertime offers ready opportunities to integrate environmental education—from gardening on the school grounds to exploring the woods, waters and grasslands that cover our state. But outdoor and environmental education doesn’t have to be limited to summer school.

Starting the school year outside

Each fall in the Kettle Moraine School District in southeastern Wisconsin, 4K students begin their educational careers learning outdoors at Magee Elementary, developing numeracy and literacy skills in the forest on their school grounds. Inspired by their youngest learners, this year the entire Magee staff is

working to take learning outside for all students, from 4K through fifth grade. Knowing that learning outside can’t be “one more thing” for teachers, staff are finding ways to use their school yard to provide

students with hands-on experiences that provide context to support the skills in their new science-based reading curriculum.

“Every day, our Forest 4K program is outside,” Magee Principal Justin Neis says. “Along with that classroom, we typically see an additional one to two classrooms outside daily.”

Students at Merrimac Community School in the Sauk Prairie School District take “First Day Hikes” each month. In “sit spots,” students engage in data collection through nature journaling and document seasonal changes as they reflect on prior entries. These experiences support academic learning and develop a sense of place.

Teacher Jenna McCann hopes “that these experiences create a conservation mindset and love of their natural place.”

These outdoor learning experiences vary within and across districts. Another Sauk Prairie school, Tower Rock Elementary, designates each Tuesday for outdoor learning, regardless of weather. This model happens in several other schools, including Northern Waters Environmental School in Hayward, High Marq Environmental Charter School in Montello, and Rio Elementary in Rio. At Fox River Academy in Appleton, students head outside one day each week with a naturalist, while Trempeleau Elementary students have “Forest Fridays.” Wittenberg-Birnamwood Elementary School and Highland Community Middle School get students into the woods one day each month.

Outdoor and environmental education can also be integrated into

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin Go Outside Fund provides grants to educators twice a year to support taking learning outside. Visit Wisconservation.org and click on “grant programs” to learn more.

everyday learning. Students go outside every day at Koshkonong Trails in Cambridge and Sugar Maple School in the Northern Ozaukee School District. In the School District of Athens, Maple Grove Charter School students often head out through their agriscience labs. High school students at Escuela Verde in Milwaukee take a daily outdoor walk.

These approaches are applicable in both rural and urban settings. In Milwaukee Public Schools, Climate Education Coach Kim Talarico is helping educators across the city get outdoors.

“Connecting students to outdoor spaces is a way to foster a love of nature,” according to Talarico. “In order to protect and respect nature, animals and the environment, we have to help facilitate that curiosity and wonder in our students. The natural world is such an amazing place—as we show our students how they are connected to this space and use our schoolyards as living classrooms, the world is theirs to discover and become tomorrow’s stewards of our planet.”

Milwaukee Public Schools will be implementing a five-year district Sustainability Action Plan. Priority 8 is Schoolyards and Facilities as

Living Classrooms. This priority states that the district will “utilize schoolyards, school buildings, and the surrounding community spaces as extensions of the classroom.”

Thriving in the winter

These outdoor, interdisciplinary approaches to learning are happening across the school year — even during frigid Wisconsin winters.

Back up in Superior, Danz recalls taking a group of second and fourth graders snowshoeing through a forest that they were the first to break trail on, with limbs of trees covered in a thick layer of snow. It was a physically demanding hike for those compact legs, and definitely met their physical activity requirements for the week.

“There were red cheeks, and a lot of heavy breathing, yet, not one child complained about how much work it was, or that they didn’t want to participate,” Danz says. “Their questions about the tracks they saw, the wonder of seeing a pile of pine cone scales and the accompanying ‘cone cobs’ left by the hungry squirrel who used that site as their dining room, truly proves there is wonder in the land, no time more

than in the winter months. As teachers, I feel there is no better time of the year to accomplish one of our greatest responsibilities: to provide educational experiences that allow our students to feel wonder and excitement about learning.”

Imagine how different reading Jack London’s “To Build a Fire” is while walking a trail through the woods when temperatures are 10 degrees Fahrenheit. How much more meaning does the text have as students struggle to light a match with frozen fingers?

“The details included in student formative work following lessons taught in nature are often more descriptive than similar lessons taught in a traditional classroom,” according to Danz, who helps facilitate the more than 2,000 student visits to the forest each year.

Getting started

Implementing outdoor and environmental education doesn’t have to start big, it just needs to start. It can be as simple as opening the door, asking the students, “What do you notice?” and following their questions, or making an observation together and saying, “I wonder...”

For educators who want a bit more guidance, the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education offers an on-demand learning module called “Step Outside into Learning.” Green & Healthy Schools Wisconsin offers resources for outdoor and environmental education and connections to educators across the state who are willing and ready to help take learning outside.

In my role as the environmental education consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, teachers and administrators are always welcome to reach out by phone or email to get support for this important work. No matter the path you choose, remember to open the door and head outside ... all year long. ■

Victoria Rydberg-Nania is an environmental education and service learning consultant with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. She can be reached at victoria.rydberg-nania@dpi.wi.gov.



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Growing the Game

By RJ Larson

How Burlington's Scott Staude Is Helping Shape Europe's Baseball Future

If you follow high school baseball in Wisconsin, Scott Staude's name has surely popped up before.

Staude started his teaching career in the Burlington Area School District in 1999 and has spent the past 26 years as head coach of the high school baseball team. During his tenure, the three-time Racine County Coach of the Year has accumulated more than 350 wins, six conference championships, nine sectional appearances and six trips to the state tournament. Most notably, he led Burlington to its first state championship and was named the Wisconsin Baseball Coaches Association Coach of the Year in 2016.

Staude has coached generations of Burlington ballplayers, and most recently began sharing his knowledge in Europe. In 2021, he became involved with International Sports Group, which predominantly sends American coaches to different countries to promote and grow the game of baseball.

Joined by UW-Whitewater head coach John Vodenlich, Staude has hosted clinics for youth baseball coaches in Stockholm, Sweden; Berlin, Germany; Nassau, Bahamas; and most recently, Prague, Czech Republic this past November. About 150 coaches



Left to right: Burlington baseball coach Scott Staude, Toronto Blue Jays minor league coach Petr Stribrcky and UW-Whitewater head coach John Vodenlich help lead a coaching clinic in Prague. Stribrcky, a native of the Czech Republic, was the country's third base coach during the 2026 World Baseball Classic in March.

were in attendance to learn drills, exercise routines and other tactics that can help them develop their players.

"Baseball is not the predominant sport in these countries like in America," Staude explains. "When we went to Sweden, there were a lot of coaches who really enjoy baseball but didn't play a ton as a kid. Now they have kids who are starting to play, and they want to coach them. They're trying to learn drills and how things work, and this program is a great opportunity to continue to grow the game internationally."

The three-day Czech Republic camp was held at a boarding school, beginning at 8 a.m. each day and lasting until 8 or 9 p.m. They

divided their time between a gym and a classroom, going over basic drills for coaches to learn and implement with their teams.

"What we're looking to show them is drills and creative ways to teach the game when the weather isn't good or if you don't have the facilities. With the restrictions on weather in Wisconsin, we have to be creative in how we teach baseball in the offseason," Staude says. "We taught them drills that could be used in a small gym. For example, we did bunting drills in a corner of the gym, where coaches bunted to show them ways to teach how to bunt. We did a lot of pitching drills in the classroom and the hallways, using a towel instead of a baseball to work on mechanics."

Although they brought some equipment with them, Staude explained that one of the biggest challenges facing European baseball coaches is limited access to equipment. While you can find gloves, bats and large quantities of baseballs at many stores in the U.S., this is not the case in many parts of the world. Additionally, luxuries like batting cages, turf infields and indoor practice facilities are usually non-existent where Staude travels. However, he says that the passion and desire to continue to learn were no

issue with the coaches he worked with.

“I was blown away by the numbers we had in the Czech Republic,” he says. “I had no idea it was going to be 150 people, which is the largest clinic we’ve ever done. The participation and the questions that they asked us, along with seeing how much they wanted to get better, were awesome to see.”

The coaches’ questions were also a learning opportunity for Staudé. When talking about ways to conduct certain drills, the campers provided feedback and discussed different approaches.

“As a coach, you’re always learning and picking up things. We learned a lot from their questions,” Staudé says, recalling a coach asking why they couldn’t run a defensive drill a certain way. “It made me think and realize I never thought about doing it like that. So, this program also makes us think a little bit and change the way we grow as a coach.”

Staudé found that although baseball isn’t one of the more popular sports in European countries, the coaches still have a vast amount of knowledge about the game. One of the best resources for European coaches has been the internet. By taking advantage of videos posted on YouTube or baseball websites, coaches can hear directly from even the biggest baseball stars in the world.

“Nowadays, if you want to learn about drills for swing mechanics or throwing different types of pitches, you just have to pull out your phone and you can learn instantly,” Staudé says. “Their depth of knowledge is getting broader because of being able to search those drills and strategies online.”

European baseball tends to focus on a traditional approach to hitting, according to Staudé. While the MLB emphasizes hitting home runs and power hitting, European teams are sticking with small-ball tactics.

“In the U.S., kids are exposed to the home run a lot, and they want to try to hit home runs. In Europe, I

would say it’s a little bit more old school,” says Staudé. “There’s not as much power hitting and there’s more focus on contact. They teach the game a little more simply, with



“I was blown away by the numbers we had in the Czech Republic. I had no idea it was going to be 150 people, which is the largest clinic we’ve ever done.”

bunting, stealing bases and getting guys on base to score runs.”

One area of U.S. culture that’s starting to make its way to Europe is one-sport athletes. Many parents asked Staudé if focusing solely on baseball is the best way to develop their children into stars, but he emphasized the importance of “kids being kids.”

“We think that kids who play multiple sports are actually better baseball players because they know how to compete and they’re being coached about different things,” says Staudé. “I think the philosophy to go about it is that we should play as many sports as possible, especially in Europe. Even though we think baseball is a great sport, it’s not their number one there. It’s still important for them to expose their kids to soccer and hockey in areas like the Czech Republic.”

One of Staudé’s favorite parts about the coaching clinics is experiencing other cultures while teaching the game he loves.

“Prague was amazing,” he says. “It’s a must-see destination when you go to Europe. It’s very old school, with cobblestone streets and a variety of restaurants and pubs, plus castles and

a ton of history. I really cherish the opportunity to go to Europe to talk about baseball, but also learn about their culture and enjoy some of their great food.”

Although we may not hear a lot about European baseball in the U.S., the game is quickly growing in that part of the world. The 2026 World Baseball Classic is a prime example, with five European teams, including the Czech Republic, competing in the two-week tournament in March.

One of the major storylines of the WBC was Italy advancing to the semifinals. Although a majority of Italy’s team was made up of U.S.-born players, Staudé says there’s still an impact that seeing your country play at that high stage has on young kids.

“The WBC was must-see TV! It was so exciting to watch. Even the casual baseball fan was moved by the different countries’ emotions and pride,” says Staudé. “Italy

beating the U.S. in pool play and making the semifinals was a huge boost for baseball in Europe. Many are American born players, but most still have ties directly to Italy. Exposure like the WBC will continue to popularize baseball in Europe.”

Ultimately, that points back to ISG’s overall goal to “educate coaches to better teach their players — growing their skills, their character, and keeping them in the game longer.” To Staudé, that means promoting the game throughout the world so kids have the opportunity to play it.

“I want to make the baseball world a better place,” he says. “We’re trying to teach youth coaches baseball, but really, it’s about how you work with young people. How do you teach them to love something and work hard? Hopefully, the coaches got those messages just as much as any kind of pitching or hitting drill that we were sharing. Anytime you can grow the game of baseball, it’s a cool thing and I hope to continue it in the future.” ■

RJ Larson is the WASB’s media design and marketing specialist. He can be reached at rjl Larson@wasb.org.



FROM HOSPITAL BOARD TO SCHOOL BOARD:

My Journey to Onboarding

By George Steffen

In 1990, during my fourth year as superintendent of a rural school district in northcentral Illinois, I accepted an unexpected invitation to serve as a trustee on the board of a nearby hospital. The 80-bed acute and psychiatric care facility was located in the county seat, and although I had no background in health care governance, I agreed to serve.

My introduction to hospital board service was abrupt. The packet for my first meeting included committee minutes, tissue studies, mortality reports and technical documents filled with unfamiliar terminology. It became clear within minutes that I

was unprepared for the work ahead. Fortunately, the hospital director and board president recognized this and provided the guidance I needed. Their early mentorship — explaining the hospital’s operations, the board’s responsibilities and the context behind the reports — made my first year manageable.

That experience stayed with me. While preparing materials for my own board of education, I found myself wondering whether new school board members felt that sense of confusion and uncertainty. Our board had been stable for years, but two members were relatively new. Conversations with them confirmed

my concern. I resolved that no new board member should ever feel unprepared, and that commitment became the foundation of our district’s first orientation program — long before the term “onboarding” became common.



George Steffen

Developing a structured orientation

The initial orientation process was simple: newly elected board members met with the board president and me for a welcoming con-



The First 90 Days

A Practical Onboarding Checklist for New School Board Members

A structured onboarding process helps new board members transition from community advocate to effective governance leader. The first three months of service are especially important for building understanding, relationships and confidence.

▶ BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING

- Receive orientation from the board president and superintendent.
- Review key district documents: mission, vision, strategic plan and board policies.
- Obtain access to district email, board portal and meeting materials.
- Become familiar with meeting procedures and expectations for board members.
- Attend a briefing on open meetings law, ethics and confidentiality requirements.

▶ FIRST 30 DAYS

- Attend all scheduled board meetings and committee meetings.
- Review recent board minutes and past board decisions to understand context.
- Meet with district administrators to learn about major operational areas such as finance, curriculum and student services.
- Become familiar with the district's budget, enrollment trends and key performance indicators.
- Participate in training opportunities offered by the WASB.

▶ DAYS 30-60

- Visit schools and district facilities to gain a better understanding of programs and operations.
- Observe classrooms or district initiatives when appropriate.
- Begin developing relationships with fellow board members and district leadership.
- Review the board's strategic goals and current district priorities.

▶ DAYS 60-90

- Participate confidently in board discussions and decision-making.
- Continue reviewing board policies and governance resources.
- Attend workshops or governance training offered by WASB.
- Reflect with the board president or superintendent on any remaining questions about board and district operations.

▶ A STRONG START MATTERS

The first 90 days set the tone for a board member's entire term. With thoughtful onboarding, new members gain the knowledge, relationships and confidence needed to contribute meaningfully to effective school governance.

versation. Over time, the agenda expanded to include:

- The roles and responsibilities of board members.
- Board goals, norms and expectations.
- Meeting procedures and decisionmaking processes.
- Agenda development and committee assignments.
- Protocols for requesting information and records.
- Communication expectations with staff and the community.

As the scope grew, one meeting was no longer sufficient. And, in the preinternet era, board members were handed a thick binder of policies they were expected to bring to every meeting. Over the years, the materials expanded to include the strategic plan, budget, meeting packets, agendas, notices and minutes. The eventual shift to electronic access was a welcome relief.

Refinement and expansion in Wisconsin

After retiring from Illinois and moving to a Wisconsin district, I continued to refine the onboarding process. With a larger central office staff, I scheduled additional meetings with the director of business and the curriculum director. These meetings were intentionally held on different days to avoid overwhelming new members — an insight drawn directly from my hospital board experience.

Each session began with an explanation of the monthly reports included in board packets, followed by contextual background and time for questions. Over time, I came to appreciate an additional benefit: onboarding helped new board members build relationships with administrators and understand the work of the district through the people responsible for it.

As turnover increased and long-serving board members became less common, the need for a systematic



Questions Every New School Board Member Should Ask

Serving on a school board requires understanding both board responsibilities and the unique context of the district. Asking thoughtful questions early helps new board members gain perspective and become effective contributors.

To help guide your early conversations, consider asking:

1. What is the board's role in governance, and how does it differ from the superintendent's role in management?
2. What are the district's current strategic priorities and long-term goals?
3. What major challenges and opportunities does the district face in the next three to five years?
4. How is the district funded, and what are the key factors affecting the annual budget?
5. What reports or indicators should board members focus on to understand student success and district performance?
6. What expectations does the board have regarding communication with staff, parents and community members?
7. What are the norms or practices that guide board discussions and decision-making?
8. What professional development opportunities are available for board members through the WASB?
9. How can board members stay informed about district programs and operations without becoming involved in day-to-day management?
10. What advice would experienced board members offer to someone beginning their first term?

Thoughtful questions such as these help new board members move beyond simply attending meetings toward fully understanding their role and responsibilities in guiding the district's future.

onboarding process became even more apparent. We began to see individuals elected to boards of education who had never attended a school board meeting — just as I had never attended a hospital board meeting before joining one.

Beginning onboarding before election day

Eventually, onboarding expanded to include the preelection period. All board candidates received information from the deputy clerk about election laws and petition requirements, as well as district information from me. Candidates were encouraged to attend board meetings. When one candidate asked a question, I ensured that all candidates received the same information, reinforcing fairness and transparency.

After elections, I wanted new members to feel confident from their first meeting. We updated the district website to include their names and photos, and our technology staff created district email accounts and configured district-issued iPads before their first meeting. These small steps signaled that new members were valued and expected to participate fully from day one.

If I were designing an onboarding program today, I would include hands-on sessions with district technology staff to demonstrate district systems, virtual meeting platforms and WASB member access. I would also schedule time with payroll staff to explain compensation procedures. And I would never allow a new board member to sit behind a cardboard name tent while incumbents had brass nameplates. Professionalism begins with the details.

The role of WASB and the need for local context

Because my boards and board presidents were active in the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, I consistently directed new members to the New School Board Member Handbook and the New School Board



Member Gatherings. The WASB attorneys provided clear, accessible explanations of legal matters — such as walking quorums — that were far more effective than anything I could have delivered alone.

Yet even with these resources, every district needs its own onboarding program. Statewide guidance cannot replace the local context, culture and expectations that shape how a board functions.

Why onboarding matters

Across 29 years as a superintendent in three districts and 11 years as a

WASB consultant, I have worked with hundreds of board members. The most effective among them share several traits:

- They collaborate with colleagues and the superintendent.
- They disagree without being disagreeable.
- They stay informed and arrive prepared.
- They advocate for the district and its students.
- They understand their roles and responsibilities.

- They listen respectfully to staff, the public and one another.

Few arrive with all these attributes, but many grow into them. The question is whether that growth happens by design or by accident.

School board service is important and increasingly complex. Being new is challenging. A thoughtful onboarding process creates the conditions for success. It provides clarity, builds relationships and establishes expectations. Most importantly, it strengthens the board's ability to govern effectively.

Public education faces significant challenges. We need board members who are ready on day one — prepared, confident and equipped to serve. Onboarding remains the most effective way to ensure that our newest colleagues are ready for the work ahead. ■

George Steffen is a WASB search and governance consultant. He can be reached at gsteffen@wasb.org.



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A SECOND CHANCE AT SUCCESS

Education and Opportunity at the Wisconsin Challenge Academy

The Wisconsin Challenge Academy is a statewide program that supports Wisconsin youth ages 16–18 who are at risk of not graduating high school on time. Located on Fort McCoy, the Academy provides a structured, consistent and accountable environment that helps students build a strong foundation for future success.

Focused on meaningful change, the Academy helps students strengthen academic performance, build confidence and develop essential life and character skills. For many young people, it becomes a pivotal turning point — offering stability, guidance and an opportunity to re-engage with their education and goals.

The Academy's mission is to empower Cadets to become responsible, successful citizens by cultivating



“The partnership between the Wisconsin Challenge Academy and the Appleton Area School District proves that when school districts and community programs unite, students gain structure, support and a renewed sense of purpose that transforms their future.”

— Justin Heitl

strong character and practical skills. Through a supportive yet highly structured environment, students grow academically, socially and personally while learning to take ownership of their choices, education and future.

The Wisconsin Challenge Academy consists of two phases designed to support both immediate academic progress and long-term success.

Phase One is a 5½-month residential program where Cadets live on-site at Fort McCoy and follow a structured daily schedule that includes academic instruction, character development, physical training, leadership development, mentoring and community service. This immersive environment allows students to focus fully on their education while building discipline, resilience and healthy habits.

Phase Two is a 12-month post-residential phase that provides ongoing guidance as Cadets work toward employment, military service or further education. This follow-up support helps students remain connected, accountable and on track as they transition back into their schools, families and communities.

The Academy's curriculum is built around **eight core components**, each addressing an essential area of student growth:

- Academic Excellence
- Physical Fitness
- Leadership and Followership
- Responsible Citizenship
- Job Skills
- Service to Community
- Health and Hygiene
- Life Coping Skills

Together, these components help Cadets develop the accountability, teamwork, goal-setting and perseverance needed for strong academic performance and positive life outcomes.

During the program, Cadets remain enrolled in their home school districts and receive a comprehensive education aligned with Wisconsin standards. Instruction includes mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, health, civic literacy, employability skills and career awareness — ensuring a well-rounded academic experience that prepares students for both graduation and future career paths.



Graduates who successfully complete the Academy may earn:

- A High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED), with the possibility of receiving a traditional high school diploma depending on district policy.
- 5–8½ high school credits.
- A minimum of 7 college credits, with opportunities to earn up to 16 college credits.

For educators and school professionals, the Wisconsin Challenge Academy serves as a valuable partner for students who benefit from an alternative pathway to graduation. By combining academics with structure, mentorship and life-skills development, the Academy helps students reengage with their education and move toward a successful future.

“It’s the most challenging yet life changing thing you’ll ever experience.”

— Graduate James, Bravo 2, Class 55

Educators are invited to attend an **Open House and Academy Briefing on May 20**, which includes time in the schoolhouse, a guided tour and opportunities to speak directly with Cadets about their experiences. If this date does not fit your schedule, the Academy can arrange a visit on an alternative day.

Cadets will share their stories and lead tours, offering an authentic perspective on how the program has helped them change course and work toward long-term success.

Registration is required: visit challengeacademy.org/tour/.

For many young people, the Wisconsin Challenge Academy is more than a program — it is a place where potential is rediscovered and futures are rebuilt. □



Learn more about our programs

challengeacademy.org



Leading With Purpose

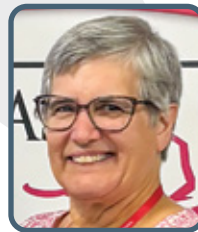
HOW SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP SHAPES LIVES

By RJ Larson

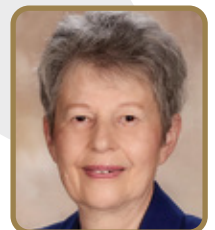
Following the spring elections, a new group of school board members has begun serving districts and communities across Wisconsin. While each board member's journey is unique, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards is committed to ensuring that one shared experience unites them all: feeling supported—by our organization and by fellow board members throughout Wisconsin's 421 school districts.

Many of the new board members are immersed in learning the rules, responsibilities and regulations that come with the role. Amid this influx of information, it can be easy to lose sight of the original motivation for joining the board. Our goal is for every member's board service to be meaningful and memorable.

To reflect on this important aspect of leadership, the WASB spoke with three veteran school board members — Margaret Sprague of Fennimore, Shannon Grabko of D.C. Everest and WASB Region 3 Director Sue Today of Sevastopol — about how board service has positively shaped their lives and how they continue to learn and grow in their roles.



Margaret Sprague
FENNIMORE



Sue Today
SEVASTOPOL



Shannon Grabko
D.C. EVEREST

“Building trust and relationships starts with being known and **accessible to the community you serve.**”

— Shannon Grabko

► **How has board service positively impacted your life?**

Margaret Sprague: Serving as a school board member has allowed me to stay connected to what is happening in our school district and to witness all the amazing things the students and staff accomplish.

Shannon Grabko: Serving on the board has deepened my appreciation for the people who make the D.C. Everest School District such a strong community. It has broadened my perspective on the many considerations that go into supporting students and staff. It has challenged me to listen carefully and think thoughtfully about each decision. It's been incredibly meaningful to contribute, in a small way, to a district that so many people care deeply about.

Sue Today: I feel that I'm making a significant contribution to society because it's essential that we have a well-educated citizenry. Education is the only way that we can change the world and prepare our young people for a life that will be far different from what all of us have known.

► **What is the most productive way to build a strong working relationship with other board members and the superintendent?**

MS: Be respectful of the opinions of other board members and the superintendent. Remain open to their ideas and discuss solutions calmly.

SG: Building a strong working relationship starts with trust, open communication and respect for each person's role. One of the things I value most about serving DCE is the collaborative culture we have around the board table. There is a genuine willingness to listen, ask thoughtful questions and consider different viewpoints. That kind of environment allows the board and superintendent to work together productively while staying focused on what matters most — supporting students and the long-term success of the district.

ST: The best way to build a strong working relationship with others is to ensure that everyone feels a sense of belonging. This is accomplished by ongoing relationship building.

► **What strategies help maintain open, healthy communication between the board and the community?**

MS: Remember that individually, board members have no power. Issues must be addressed as a group. We want to discuss matters as a board so we can convey a united message to students, staff, parents and the community.

SG: It starts with listening. One of the things that makes us such a special district is the strong connection between our schools and the families and community members who support them. As a parent of four students, I value clear communication and the opportunity for families to feel heard — those are the same things I would expect from a board member if I weren't serving in this role. We have the ability to offer strong opportunities for students while still maintaining meaningful relationships with families and community members. Continuing to nurture that connection is incredibly important.

ST: Board members need to be knowledgeable about the world of education. They need to be open and honest, admit when mistakes are made and build relationships with the community on an ongoing basis.

► **What role should board members play at school events or in parent/community gatherings?**

MS: School board members should remain positive about the school when asked questions about what is happening in the district. Many times, you will need to refer community members to the school principal or district office if they need answers to difficult questions.

SG: School events and community gatherings are a valuable way for board members to stay connected to the people we serve. While our primary role is governance, being present allows families and community members to put a face to the board and understand who is making decisions for their schools. In my experience, people genuinely appreciate seeing us in person, celebrating students and having the chance to ask questions or share their thoughts. For me, attending events as a parent naturally provides these opportunities, but it's equally important for all board members to be visible and approachable. Building trust and relationships starts with being known and accessible to the community you serve.

ST: Board members should be supportive of school events and parent/community gatherings, but they should not manage them. That is the job of school staff and community members.

► **What's something about being an effective board member that you wish someone had told you about when you first started?**

SG: The value of pausing to really take in all the information before forming an opinion. You might think you know how you're going to approach a situation, but as you gather more perspectives, your thinking often



“I have found the best way to stay informed has been to be
active in professional organizations ...”

— Sue Todey

evolves. This is especially true when listening to parents, community members or staff concerns — there’s almost always more than one side to a story and background to consider. Taking the time to understand all viewpoints is essential if you want to govern thoughtfully and fairly.

ST: Being a board member is not an easy job. It requires time, patience and sometimes the ability to handle situations that can be emotionally challenging.

► **What habits or routines help you stay informed about the number of changes in public education without becoming overwhelmed?**

MS: I am fortunate that our district administrator reaches out to board members by email or text message when there is a big issue coming up for discussion at the state level that will impact our district. We can then discuss it at the board meeting.

SG: I follow reliable sources like WASB emails and their Legislative Update Blog. I also follow our local legislators on social media to track education-related bills. When my schedule allows, I also attend WASB conferences and the Wisconsin State Education Convention, where breakout sessions provide in-depth information on pressing issues and emerging trends. These help me stay on top of the matters that affect governance, allowing me to make thoughtful and informed decisions for our district.

ST: I have found the best way to stay informed has been to be active in professional organizations, such as the WASB, Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance and CESA. These organizations offer so many resources for board members.

► **What mindset should new board members adopt in their first year to be effective and avoid burnout?**

MS: New board members should do a lot of listening and shouldn’t be afraid to ask questions when they don’t understand why the district does the things it does.

SG: Approaching the first year with a mindset of curiosity and patience is essential. You aren’t going to know everything at once. No question is a stupid question. There’s a lot to learn—from policies and budgets to the unique culture and needs of the district— and it can feel overwhelming at times, especially when it comes to school finance. Focusing on listening, asking thoughtful questions and observing how decisions are made helps build understanding. It’s also important to stay connected to the community and colleagues, lean on the experience of others and remember why you chose to serve: supporting students and strengthening the district. Approaching the work with a spirit of learning, collaboration and balance sets a strong foundation for effective service.

ST: New board members should learn as much as they can about the operation of their own district through the onboarding process, as well as board governance through the WASB New School Board Member Gatherings. They should connect with other board members who can serve as mentors. ■

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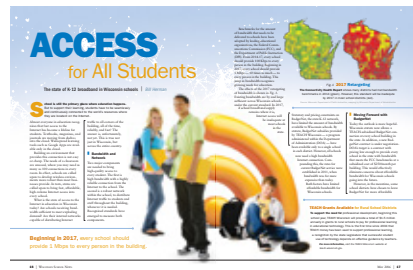
TEN-YEAR LOOK BACK

“ Using a multi-year budgeting tool is not only viewed favorably by the bond credit rating agencies, it also allows districts to run scenarios to better understand budgeting options. ”

— Baird Public Finance Managing Director Michel Clark on what strategies school districts can use/are using to maintain healthy finances.



◀ The May 2016 issue of Wisconsin School News spotlights how the Bloomer School District partnered with its local library to support early learning and set students up for success. The issue also features practical advice for new school board members from experienced board members, administrators and business managers. It also explores the growing importance of reliable internet access in schools and provides guidance on appealing employer premium subsidy notices.



LOOK AHEAD TO 2027

Wisconsin State Education Convention

JANUARY 20-22, 2027

BAIRD CENTER, MILWAUKEE



LINDA FLOTTUM

TURTLE LAKE SCHOOL BOARD AND WASB REGION 1 DIRECTOR

Flottum has served on the Turtle Lake School Board since 1994. During her tenure, she has served as treasurer, president and clerk while being an active member of Policy, Employee Compensation and Collaborative/Community Advisory committees. For several years, she was the Turtle Lake School Board's CESA 11 representative. She has been deeply involved with the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, serving as the Turtle Lake WASB Delegate to the Assembly, completing three years on the WASB Policy & Resolutions Committee and earning Level 5 recognition in the WASB Member Recognition Program. She and her husband, Tom, have three children and seven grandchildren.

Recently announcing her resignation from the school board, effective this September, Flottum sat down with WASB to share her insights on passing referendums, staying connected with fellow board members across a large rural area, welcoming her district's new superintendent and the most impactful moment of her board service.

WSN: Tell us about yourself.

Linda Flottum: I was born and raised in Bruce, Wis., on a farm along with my four brothers and two sisters. After graduating from Bruce High School, I moved to Rice Lake, where I worked as a legal secretary and worked my way through college at UW-Eau Claire – Barron County. Later on, I worked for the Barron County Sheriff's Department and was hired as their first 911 coordinator, building the 911 system there. I worked at the sheriff's department for a number of years and was also trained as a dispatcher and jailer.

I am married to my wonderful husband of over 46 years. He worked as an ER nurse for Mayo Health Systems out of Barron and Menomonie, and is now retired. We have three sons, Aaron, Timothy and Nathan. They are all grown and married, and they have given us seven beautiful grandchildren. They live far away, so we have a reason to travel to southern Wisconsin, Florida and Texas.



What brought you to the Turtle Lake area? What has kept you there for so long?

LF: I've lived in Turtle Lake since 1988. My husband is originally from Turtle Lake. We started off together in Rice Lake, and we decided that, as our children were born, we'd like a smaller school because both of us were from a small school. Rice Lake seemed bigger for us, and we just

thought maybe it would be a better fit for our children. My husband's parents had passed away, so the family home was up for sale, and we decided we would buy that and sell our house in Rice Lake.

All three sons went through the Turtle Lake School District, and each one went into the military. We decided this is going to be the home base, so that they always know that there's a place to come back to. We've been here for a while, and we have so many good friends. Being on the school board, I just have a vested interest in making sure that the school continues.

You've seen Turtle Lake pass a number of referendums during your tenure as a board member. What have been the biggest things you've learned to help aid in getting referendums passed?

LF: The hardest part is that people who have moved into the district, especially from out of state, don't understand how the funding goes for the school districts here. So we have to try and explain to them how it works and how important it is. What you have to get across to them

I try hard to go around and make any type of meetings that we have.

We have joint meetings so that we can communicate to people across the region.

I always make the State Education Convention, and I reach out to people that I know are in my region hoping that they will come so I can introduce myself.

is that, yes, you do have a vested interest. The school is the hub of this community because all small communities basically use the school as their community center.

We have a lot of activities that go on because of the school. We've learned to try and communicate as best we can that, the better the school is, the better the community will be.

As the WASB Director for Region 1 in northwest Wisconsin, how do you stay connected with different board members in a region that covers such a large geographic and rural area?

LF: The WASB and CESA 11 have probably been my most prominent partners in reaching out and meeting everyone in my region. I try hard to go around and make any type of meetings that we have. We have joint meetings so that we can communicate to people across the region. I always make the State Education Convention, and I reach out to people that I know are in my region hoping that they will come so I can introduce myself.

I believe the WASB Fall Regional Meetings are the most important, along with the New School Board Member Gatherings. It gives me a chance to meet with other school board members to let them know that we all basically run into the same problems, no matter whether we're big or small. Most of the schools in my district are small, but I do have a few large ones because they've combined. I take my time trying to let them know that I'm here. Anytime I'm at a meeting, I make sure I leave out my cards and say, please give me a call if you have any questions. I certainly don't know

all the answers, but I do know people down at the WASB who will be able to help and give answers.

Your district recently hired a new superintendent. What makes an excellent superintendent candidate?

LF: Our new superintendent is Shelly Bauer. She will be starting on July 1, but she has already stopped by our last school board meeting to just sit in, listen and take part. I think she will be a great asset for us. We are sad to see our present superintendent, Kent Kindschy, retire, but he deserves it. We made sure that we had meetings with the community, clubs, other people in the area, support staff and students because we wanted their opinion. It's been over 15 years since we had to do a superintendent search. We wanted to know what they were looking for and what they would like to see in our school.

We wanted to make sure that we had a superintendent who is good at finances because that was our number one concern. Other members wanted to make sure that it was a superintendent who could communicate well with the students, staff and the community. We were really lucky to find someone who seems to be able to do both. That's not always an easy job.

Despite such a long travel distance, you make it a priority to attend the State Education Convention. Why is that event so important to you?

LF: I've only missed one since I've been on the board, and that was because I had a son who was having a military graduation. There's just something about going to a

convention where they offer breakout sessions that actually help teach you things you need to know as a school board member. There are a lot more facets to it than a lot of people realize. Even though you may know parts really well, it's always good to refresh.

I also like to go because you meet all these other board members from across the state. Even though I'm up north, I'll run into somebody down in Madison and go, "You have that problem too?" Even though you're hundreds of miles apart, some of us are small and some are large, we all still have issues that we need to work on to try to keep our public schools running well.

It's helpful to get new ideas. Additionally, by the time you get to January, sometimes you just need to have somebody tell you you're doing a good job. The refreshing atmosphere and the new energy that you get are well worth it.

During your time as a board member, when did you feel you had the biggest impact on students?

LF: There was a question of whether we wanted to co-op all the sports, just some of the sports or none. We had students and community members speak. After the meeting, I actually had students come up and go, "This is really important. You really have to make sure you do the right thing." That really choked me up. That's the reason you're a school board member. ■



Welcome, New Board Members!

Whether you're taking office yourself or you are welcoming new members onto your school board, the WASB is here to help. To begin learning about how to be an effective board member, visit the "New School Board Members" page at WASB.org/new-school-board-members. It includes a variety of resources, including the New School Board Member Handbook, and information to get you started.

WASB staff counsel have also recorded a new School Board Reorganizational Meeting webinar that can be viewed in the WASB.org Complimentary Events Video Library.

The WASB also wants to **congratulate Larry Cyrus (Region 6), Andrew Maertz (Region 8), Wendi Stitzer (Region 9), Sandie Anderson (Region 10), Kathleen Wied-Vincent (Region 11) and Rosanne Hahn (Region 13)**, who were each reelected to their local boards on April 7. Thank you for your service to public education in your communities and statewide. □



Follow the WASB on YouTube

Follow the Wisconsin Association of School Boards on YouTube @TheWASB to see the recap video of the 2026 State Education Convention. Milton High School's Red Hawk Media was on site at the Baird Center to capture everything and put together an engaging highlight reel of the dynamic event. Subscribe and stay up to date on the latest with the convention and other happenings in Wisconsin public education.

SAVE THE DATE

Summer Learning Symposium

July 10–11 | Stevens Point, WI

Summer brings sunshine, long days, and time to reconnect and plan for what's next. Make the most of it by joining your fellow public education leaders in Stevens Point to connect, exchange ideas and equip yourself with practical strategies for the 2026-27 school year. This two-day event features engaging, informative breakout sessions on school safety, finance, artificial intelligence, community engagement, student board representatives, rural resilience, the top policy topics impacting districts and more. **School District of Winter Superintendent Craig Olson will give a keynote** titled "If Not You, Then Who? Building School Community to Champion Every Student." Networking opportunities are available throughout the event, including at the board presidents' networking session and the Friday night dinner. **Registration opens May 11 at WASB.org.** Stay tuned this spring for the full agenda, including the guest dinner speaker.

Fall Regional Meetings

Join your peers at the 2026 WASB Fall Regional Meetings! These annual meetings will be held in every WASB region across the state this fall, providing members with an opportunity to connect with area board members, celebrate accomplishments and hear the latest updates from the association. While dates are subject to change and staff will provide regular updates, the expected dates for the various meetings are:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Region 1: Oct. 6 | Region 8: Oct. 20 |
| Region 2: Oct. 7 | Region 9: Oct. 14 |
| Region 3: Oct. 22 | Region 10: Oct. 13 |
| Region 4: Sept. 30 | Regions 11 & 15: Oct. 15 |
| Region 5: Sept. 29 | Region 12: Oct. 28 |
| Region 6: Oct. 1 | Region 13: Oct. 27 |
| Region 7: Oct. 21 | Region 14: TBD |

Online Virtual Meeting: TBD

Business Honor Roll Nominations

OPEN MAY 4

Starting May 4, the WASB will be accepting nominations for the 2026 Business Honor Roll. School boards can submit the names of up to five local businesses, including newspapers and other media, that have been helpful to their school district over the past year. Tell us who they are and what they have done for your schools, and we will help you promote your business partnerships. Nominated businesses will be posted on WASB.org, and several will be profiled in the December issue of Wisconsin School News. Districts will be provided a sample press release and personalized certificate to give their businesses. In 2025, 56 school districts combined to recognize more than 180 businesses.



Upcoming Webinars

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WEBINAR SERIES

WASB consultants and staff counsel will host a five-part webinar on the roles and responsibilities of school board members. The series will cover the “what and why” of governance, school board duties and powers, individual board member powers, board member speech, the Open Meetings Law, public records, complaint procedures and more.

The first live webinar was held on April 30. The remaining schedule includes:

- Tuesday, May 5 | 12 - 12:45 p.m.
- Thursday, May 7 | 12 - 12:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 12 | 12 - 12:30 p.m.
- Thursday, May 14 | 12 - 12:30 p.m.

This series is complimentary, and no registration is required. Watch your email for Zoom link details for this event. For those who can't attend live, this webinar will be recorded and available in the Online Learning Platform.

RECURRING WEBINAR

WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

MAY 20, JUNE 17, JULY 15 | 12 - 1 p.m.

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

This webinar is complimentary, and no registration is required. Visit WASB.org for more information. The Zoom link will be sent via email in the days leading up to each webinar.

2027 State Education Convention Call for Proposals

Participate in the 2027 Wisconsin State Education Convention! This year's theme, “Leading Today, Shaping

Tomorrow,” emphasizes that the decisions we make today shape the future of students and communities. The convention, scheduled for Jan. 20-22 at the Baird Center in Milwaukee, is your opportunity to highlight your

● ● ●
LEADING Today
SHAPING Tomorrow

innovative programs and talented students. The WASB is now accepting proposals for breakout sessions, School Fair, student performances, student

art exhibit and the student video team. Breakout session proposals are due by June 19, 2026.

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

That's a Wrap: The Legislative Session Has Ended (Part 2)

Continued from the April Capitol Watch...



Since our last column, Gov. Evers has taken additional action on K–12-related legislation. Last month, we covered nine K–12 bills signed into law (Acts 42-101). Below are the remaining new laws.

► **Act 160 (SB 391)** authorizes a school bus to be equipped with a device for recording audio or video, or both, of the interior of the school bus while the school bus is being used to transport pupils to and from school and school-sponsored activities. This authority applies if the applicable school board, charter school governing board, private school governing body or tribal school governing body adopts a policy authorizing audiovisual recording, notifies students and parents, and posts a sign inside the bus.

Under the act, the recordings are confidential, and law enforcement and school officials may only use the recordings for school discipline, investigations and criminal prosecutions.

► **Act 185 (SB 785)** requires the Department of Public Instruction to maintain on its website a licensing portal that allows the public to

search and access license information by name and license number. The portal must be free to use.

The portal must include the name of each licensee under investigation and the name of each individual whose license is revoked by the department. Additionally, the portal must include the outcome of each investigation, including if the investigation was terminated because the license holder voluntarily surrendered the license during the investigation.

► **Act 186 (AB 1004)** prohibits school boards, governing bodies of charter schools, and governing bodies of private schools participating in a parental choice program (“education employers”) from signing severance, resignation, or termination agreements or other agreements and contracts that include certain terms and conditions. Specifically, education employers cannot enter into agreements or take actions that do any of the following:

- Suppress or destroy information relating to an investigation of alleged immoral conduct by a current or former employee.

- Affect the ability of the education employer or its employees to report suspected immoral conduct.

- Require the education employer to expunge information about allegations or findings of immoral conduct from documents it maintains, unless the allegations are found to be false or not substantiated after investigation.

► **Act 186** provides civil immunity to an education employer who provides information about the conduct of a current or former employee in response to a request from a prospective employer.

► **Act 189 (AB 530)** prohibits the operation of a drone over a property owned by a school or on which a school is located, except in the following situations:

- With the express authorization of the school board, governing body or governing board with jurisdiction over the school (“school authority”) or their designee.

Last month, we covered nine K–12 bills signed into law (Acts 42-101).

This column features the remaining new laws.

- At the direction of the chief of a public protective services agency with jurisdiction over the territory on which the school property is located, for certain purposes specified in the bill.

Under the bill, a “school” means any public, private or tribal school; and a “public protective services agency” means a law enforcement agency, a tribal law enforcement agency, or a fire protection or emergency medical services agency. As with the prohibition for a correctional institution, any person who violates the prohibition for a school under the bill is subject to a forfeiture of up to \$5,000.

The prohibition will only be in effect when a school is open to pupils for instruction or the property is being used for an event approved by the school authority. The act also requires the school authority to respond within five business days of receiving a request to operate a drone, as specified in the bill.

► **Act 202 (AB 918)** requires a school board that provides a human growth and development instructional program to include instruction on adoption in the instructional program.

► **Act 204 (SB 134)** Under current law, the standard open enrollment program application procedure requires a pupil’s parent to apply to a nonresident school district during the spring semester immediately preceding the school year in which the pupil wishes to attend the nonresident school district. Current law also provides an alternative application procedure that allows a pupil’s parent to apply to a nonresident school district at any time during the school year, if

certain circumstances apply. One of those circumstances is that the place of residence of the pupil and the pupil’s parent or guardian has changed as the result of military orders. Under current law, an alternative application based on this circumstance must be received by no later than 30 days after the date on which the applicable military orders were issued. This bill extends this deadline to 90 days after the applicable military orders were issued and expressly states that military orders include orders from a reserve component of the U.S armed force and the national guard of any state.

► **Act 208 (SB 136)** provides that a school bus may be equipped with one back-up lamp mounted to each side of the vehicle and directed to project a white or amber light illuminating the rear wheels of the vehicle when backing up. Under current law, a motor vehicle may not be equipped with more than two back-up lamps, which must be directed to project white or amber light illuminating the roadway to the rear of the vehicle for a distance of up to 75 feet.

► **Act 209 (SB 392)** all approved driver education courses must include instruction relating to student crossing, school bus lights and when stops are required for a stopped school bus, including how requirements are affected by highway configuration.

► **Act 221 (SB 366)** makes two changes to the technical education equipment grant program administered by the Dept. of Workforce Development, namely, the allowable uses of grant funds and requirements for matching grant awards.

- Act 221 expands the purposes for which a school district may

spend grant funds to include the construction, renovation or improvement of school district facilities for the purpose of training students in construction-related and advanced manufacturing fields, in addition to the allowed uses under prior law.

- Under the act, matching funds must be equal to or greater than the grant amount, regardless of the source of the matching funds. Additionally, the act permits matching funds to be in the form of money or the monetary value of software, tools, equipment or other in-kind contributions.

► **Act 222 (AB 098)** provides that school boards and charter schools may not prohibit a pupil who is a member of, a descendent of a member of, or eligible to be enrolled in, a federally recognized, whether currently or in the past, American Indian tribe or band from wearing traditional tribal regalia at a graduation ceremony or school-sponsored event.

► **Act 223 (SB 921)** permits a student to earn the required for graduation (beginning in 2028) 0.5 credit of personal financial literacy by successfully completing a program offered by a financial institution through a branch located within a school, if the school board determines the program covers the required topics, or by successfully completing an Advanced Placement course in business with personal finance. ■

For more information on these and other proposals and happenings, please subscribe to the Legislative Update Blog at WASB.org. Next month’s column will cover bills that were vetoed or that failed to pass in the legislature.



Legal Issues Associated with Student Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Artificial intelligence tools, and particularly generative AI, have rapidly become woven into students' academic, social and personal lives. Whether used for assisting with homework, creating images or videos, or interacting with peers online, AI has transformed the educational environment in ways that school boards cannot ignore. While AI technologies create exciting opportunities for learning, they also introduce new risks. Some of those risks resemble longstanding challenges schools have always navigated, like bullying, plagiarism, and providing equal access to appropriate and effective instruction. Other risks represent entirely new forms of misconduct with serious legal implications.

This Legal Comment explores three key legal issues for school districts arising from students' use of AI: (1) the expanding landscape of AI-facilitated bullying and harassment, (2) the problem of AI-assisted plagiarism, and (3) the beneficial uses of AI to support student learning in fulfillment of districts' legal obligations.

■ AI-facilitated bullying and harassment

Bullying has evolved alongside technology, and AI is no exception. Text

messaging led to cyberbullying; smartphones led to harassment over social media; and now AI is enabling some new, deeply problematic forms of misconduct. Generative AI has made it dramatically easier for students to create deepfakes — artificially generated or manipulated images, audio or video clips that are highly realistic. School districts have already faced reports of students weaponizing AI tools to fabricate nude or sexualized images of other students or staff and then circulating those images online.

These incidents present several pressing legal issues that school districts must address. First, as with bullying more broadly, girls are victimized by deepfakes at higher rates than boys. This gender disparity raises Title IX concerns. Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex — including sexual harassment — in education programs or activities receiving federal funding. While the current Title IX regulations do not specifically define “sexual harassment” to include deepfake content,¹ school districts still have an obligation to treat deepfakes as capable of creating a discriminatory hostile educational environment when they (1) are based on sex, (2) are severe,

pervasive and objectively offensive, and (3) interfere with a student's equal access to education or school programs.² Non-consensual, sexually explicit deepfakes might meet or exceed that standard because they can damage a student's mental health, reputation and privacy so quickly and severely that the victimized student no longer feels safe or welcome at school.

When deepfakes depict sexual content involving a minor, additional criminal legal considerations arise. In 2024, Wisconsin lawmakers created Wis. Stat. § 948.12(4),³ which broadens the crime of possession of child pornography to include “depiction[s] of a purported child engaging in sexually explicit conduct.” This means that AI-generated or manipulated images appearing to show a minor engaged in sexual activity will be treated the same as authentic child pornography for prosecution purposes. Consequently, students who create, possess, distribute or even receive such deepfakes can face severe criminal penalties, regardless of whether an actual minor was involved in creating the underlying image.

A key legal question for districts is how far their regulatory and disciplinary authority extends when

First, as with bullying more broadly, girls are victimized by deepfakes at higher rates than boys. This gender disparity raises Title IX concerns.

AI is already reshaping the labor market and public discourse, so students will benefit from learning how to use AI tools, as well as how to question them.

AI-facilitated bullying and harassment occurs outside of school grounds or hours. As the U.S. Supreme Court explained in the recent *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.* case, districts can act against off-campus student conduct in cases of “serious or severe bullying or harassment targeting particular individuals” and “threats aimed at teachers or other students.”⁴

Deepfake harassment can meet this threshold. Even when the original act occurs on a personal device at home, deepfakes can spread rapidly through student social networks, leading to inter-student conflict and emotional distress, which does not stop when students come to school. Deepfake harassment can easily lead to classroom disruption. Thus, districts generally have the authority — and, given their obligations under Title IX and other anti-discrimination laws, the responsibility — to respond when off-campus AI related misconduct creates a hostile educational environment for individual students.

To proactively address the legal risks posed by AI-driven cyberbullying, districts should consider updating their existing frameworks for preventing and responding to bullying and harassment. District policies on bullying, harassment and acceptable technology use may benefit from expressly referencing AI generated or altered content and clarifying that the creation or distribution of sexualized deepfakes will be treated as seriously as that of authentic explicit images. Including clear definitions and examples in these policies can help students and families understand the scope of prohibited behavior and reduce harmful incidents.

■ AI and plagiarism

Beyond bullying and harassment, AI has also complicated schools’ norms and standards surrounding academic integrity. Generative AI has given students the ability to produce entire essays, lab reports and other assignments with a few basic prompts. These AI outputs can appear highly polished, making it difficult for educators to determine whether a student’s work actually reflects their own knowledge or skills. District academic integrity policies should be updated to reflect the realities of AI. Because proving AI misuse can be difficult even with AI-detection software, these policies need to establish protocols for assessing if a student misused AI. Districts should avoid relying solely on automated AI-detection tools, as they can be unreliable and are prone to false positives. In addition, districts should not rely solely on broad stereotypes about AI-generated outputs, like frequent use of the em dash (“—”). Standing alone, these broad stereotypes might not be sufficient to prove a student improperly used AI.

Districts can adapt their instructional and assessment practices to reduce opportunities for AI plagiarism. For instance, AI can easily execute an assignment asking students to summarize a novel or short story. But assignments requiring personal reflection, like an essay comparing a given Shakespeare play to a student’s lived experience, are less easily outsourced to AI. Teachers might also implement process-based assessments — ongoing projects requiring submissions of notes, annotated sources, outlines or drafts — to facilitate and document the creation of original work. Ultimately, trans-

parent communication, clear expectations and updated academic integrity policies help drive students’ and the district’s understanding of appropriate uses of AI for classwork.

■ Using AI to support student learning

Despite its burgeoning challenges, AI also offers benefits when integrated thoughtfully and responsibly into the educational environment. Some districts are beginning to explore how AI can help fulfill their legal obligations to support students with disabilities, multilingual or ESL learners, and students who benefit from alternative instruction.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires school districts to provide children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education through an individualized educational program that includes specially designed instruction and services to meet their learning needs. Districts also must take active steps to support students who are English language learners. AI tools can help districts meet these obligations by offering adaptable supports, such as automatic captioning or screen-reading for students with hearing or vision impairments, reading level adjustments for students with dyslexia or other learning disabilities, and real-time translation tools that improve access for English language learners. These technologies can enhance student independence and reduce instructional barriers to the curriculum.

AI is already reshaping the labor market and public discourse, so students will benefit from learning how to use AI tools, as well as how to question them. AI literacy — learning to evaluate AI’s limitations,

verify its claims and understand its ethical implications — is likely to become a significant component of preparing students for life after graduation. AI literacy can also help students understand the legal risks associated with the use of AI, such as the creation of deepfakes.

Districts interested in promoting AI literacy and responsible use should adopt vetted AI tools that meet privacy and data security requirements. Not all tools are appropriate for use in schools, particularly those that retain and/or train external algorithms on student data. District review processes should include privacy and vendor agreement assessments, as well as pilot programs allowing educators to test tools before they are introduced

to students. With appropriate guardrails in place, AI can supplement traditional instruction, potentially offering teachers more time for direct student engagement and higher-level instructional design.

■ Conclusion

AI is precipitating a profound shift in the educational landscape. It carries both serious risks and significant opportunities, neither of which should be ignored. Wisconsin school districts must mitigate the dangers of AI-facilitated bullying, harassment and plagiarism while leveraging AI to support legally compliant instruction and programming. The key is proactive AI governance. With thorough policies, thoughtful planning and clear expectations, districts can navigate the legal

complexities of AI while protecting, supporting and preparing their students for the future. ■

This Legal Comment was written by Emmerson A. Mirus and Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For a related article, see Wisconsin School News: “AI Use in School District Employment” (Apr. 2026).

1. The 2024 Title IX Regulations would have updated the definition of “sexual harassment” to include “the nonconsensual distribution of intimate images,” including authentic images and those altered or created by AI. However, those regulations were struck down as unconstitutional.
2. See *Davis. v. Monroe Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, 526 U.S. 629, 650 (1999).
3. See 2023 Wis. Act 314.
4. 594 U.S. 180, 188 (2021).

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.



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



SUPPORTING, PROMOTING AND ADVANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION



UPCOMING PROGRAMS



2026 FALL REGIONAL MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS

September - October

Dates and locations vary by region.



JULY 10-11, 2026

SUMMER LEARNING SYMPOSIUM

Holiday Inn Stevens Point - Convention Center

This two-day event features engaging, informative breakout sessions on school safety, finance, artificial intelligence, community engagement and more. School District of Winter Superintendent Craig Olson will give a keynote titled "If Not You, Then Who? Building School Community to Champion Every Student."

Registration opens May 11 at [WASB.org](https://www.wasb.org). Find the full agenda in the June/July issue of School News.

Visit [WASB.org](https://www.wasb.org) for complete information. | 608-257-2622 | info@wasb.org