

WISCONSIN SchoolNews

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

September 2026 | wasb.org



Ready for **WHAT'S NEXT**

How districts, counselors,
colleges and employers
are working together to
prepare students for
career and college
success.

one partner every step



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

**Better Buildings.
Better Learning.®**

PLAN

FUND

DESIGN

BUILD

COMMISSION

CONSERVE



NEXUS
SOLUTIONS®

WISCONSIN SchoolNews

September 2026 | Volume 81 Number 2

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

Dan Rossmiller
Executive Editor

Brock Fritz
Editor, WASB Director of Communications

RJ Larson
WASB Media Design
and Marketing Specialist

Nick Debner
Event Planner and Editorial Assistant

REGIONAL OFFICES

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

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

ADVERTISING

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

WASB OFFICERS

Dan Rossmiller
Executive Director

Sandie Anderson
Wild Rose, Region 10
President

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

Larry Dux
Pewaukee, Region 15
2nd Vice President

WASB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

Wisconsin School News (USPS 688-560)

is published 10 issues per year by the

Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.,
122 W. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703.

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

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

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



ENSURING STUDENTS ARE COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY THROUGH INVESTMENT IN DUAL CREDIT — page 14

4

Career Awareness Starts in Kindergarten

Stacy Eslick

Wisconsin's K-12 framework for
postsecondary readiness.

8

Strengthening Wisconsin's Postsecondary Readiness Pipeline

Renée M. Wachter

How partnerships among school
districts, UW universities and local
employers can support earlier
exposure to career pathways.

14

Ensuring Students Are College- and Career-Ready Through Investment in Dual Credit

Layla Merrifield

How more than 67,700 Wisconsin
students in 450 high schools
earned dual credit from a technical
college last year.

18

Building on Readiness

Taylor Hooker

How Wisconsin's private colleges
support student pathways beyond
high school.

20

New Legislation Related to Employee Sexual Misconduct

Alana Leffler and Ella Martin

What school districts need to know.

DEPARTMENTS & COLUMNS

2 News Briefs

3 Viewpoint — Here's to a Great School Year

22 Q&A — Laura McCoy, Green Bay Area Public School District Board Member

24 Association News — Fall Regional Meetings, Upcoming Webinars, State Education Convention Keynote, Fall Regional Meetings, Setting the Record Straight, WASB Insurance Plan Simulation Safety Training, WASB/WSAA School Law Conference, Day at the Capitol

27 Ten-Year Look Back

28 Capitol Watch — The Federal Government Plugs Away as Wisconsin Enters Crunch Time on Election Season

30 Legal Comment — Medication and Field Trips: Navigating School District Responsibilities

The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the WASB.

Pulaski Summer School Draws 2,600 Students

More than 2,600 students, or about 68% of Pulaski School District's enrollment, flocked to Pulaski Community Middle School this summer for a six-week program that focuses on exploring new interests, reducing screen time and nurturing creativity.

According to Wisconsin Watch, Pulaski summer school classes range from knitting and cooking to swimming and science experiments. Students who need academic support receive it, but the program's broader

goal is helping kids build a positive relationship with school.

Pulaski launched the program 22 years ago with a simple vision: make summer school somewhere kids actually want to be. It worked, with the most popular classes filled in minutes.

The program is free by state law, though supply fees of up to \$40 per two-week session may apply. Breakfast and lunch are covered through a federal grant, and transportation is provided. Roughly 130 teachers work alongside aides, community members,

and high school and college students to keep the operation running and provide the students with a positive experience.

"There's a lot of anxiety and different things as soon as they get close to those (school) doors because now they're asked to do a lot of things that are difficult for them to do," Pulaski Area Community Education Director Mark Heck said. "But when we can have them come in and have great success and really enjoy it, that's a win." □

STAT OF THE MONTH

5th

Where Wisconsin ranks among all 50 states and the District of Columbia in education when accounting for school quality and safety.

Source: WalletHub

REPORT

Wisconsin Public Schools Rank Fifth in U.S.

Wisconsin has the fifth-best public school system in America, according to studies by WalletHub and U.S. News & World Report.

WalletHub's study, which was released in July, compared the 50 states and the District of Columbia across 32 key metrics, including academic performance, funding, safety, class size, instructor credentials and more. Massachusetts topped the list, followed by Connecticut, New Jersey, New Hampshire and Wisconsin, which ranked fifth for quality and 18th for safety.

"Getting enough funding is essential for a productive school system, but simply having more money doesn't guarantee success," said WalletHub analyst Chip Lupo. "How funds are applied also plays a big role in how good a school system is, as does the quality of educators, other professionals and the curriculum. In addition, schools need to focus not just on test scores but also on making sure that stu-

dents feel safe, comfortable and cared for."

Wisconsin has the 17th-highest share of students who reported carrying a weapon on school property, and the 19th-highest rate of bullying incidents on school property. In addition, it has the highest eighth-grade math scores in the country as well as the second-highest SAT scores among its top-performing students. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that Wisconsin's high school graduation rate of 90.5% is nearly 5% over the national average.

U.S. News & World Report ranked Wisconsin as the 15th-best state overall across eight categories: crime and corrections, economy, education, fiscal stability, health care, infrastructure, natural environment and opportunity. Wisconsin's fifth-place education ranking, which included sixth place in preK-12 and ninth place in higher education, trailed Colorado, New Jersey, Florida and Wyoming. □

Homeschooling Up Nearly 6% in Wisconsin

There are 32,891 Wisconsin students being homeschooled, according to recent data from the Department of Public Instruction. That's nearly a 6% increase since 2025, according to Wisconsin Public Radio.

Over the same period, private school enrollment rose 0.1% and the number of students in Wisconsin's public schools is down 1.7%, or 14,087 kids.

According to WPR's review of the DPI data, the number of Wisconsin children being homeschooled grew from 966 children in the mid-1980s to between 18,000 and 21,600 from 2000 and 2020, and to more than 30,000 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wisconsin Policy Forum deputy research director Sara Shaw told WPR that public school enrollment declines are driven by a number of factors, including declining birthrates.

"Having more choices for a diminishing pool of students does end up kind of further fracturing the total student population and creating strain in the sectors that are getting hit hardest," Shaw said. □



Here's to a Great School Year

“I can't believe how fast summer has flown. It's already September.”

It seems I say that every year, but this year it seems truer than ever. So, so long summer. Here's to a happy Labor Day weekend!

I hope each of you enjoyed the season of warmth and long daylight hours, and I hope you are ready for a great start to the new school year. May the enthusiasm of this time of year remain with you throughout the year.

This is a time of year I always look forward to, and I am especially looking forward to seeing so many of you at your Fall Regional Meetings. Those meetings are a great way to renew old friendships and build new connections among school leaders.

The WASB staff and consultants work to make sure the Fall Regional Meetings are worth your while. Many of you told us you wanted shorter meetings, so we will be ending them earlier this year. However, some things will stay the same. We will still provide high-quality pre-meeting workshops and give you time to visit and grow your networks.

The business purposes of these meetings are to: 1) recognize school board members who have reached milestones in their commitment to becoming better and more effective school board members; 2) elect a school board member to serve as your regional director on the WASB Board of Directors; and 3) inform members about the WASB, its board development programs and advocacy. This year's report will also explore findings of the WASB membership survey.

As one example, the survey, which was conducted in late spring, found that first-time attendees' impressions of the value of the Wisconsin State

Education Convention are significantly lower than those of board members who have attended multiple conventions. We've learned that we need to improve the experience for first-time convention attendees, and we're in the process of developing new ways to help them connect ahead of the 2027 convention.

For those in regions with a director election, it is important that your board is represented at the Fall Regional Meeting. Each WASB member board gets one vote for regional director, and that vote must be cast in person by a member of the board at the Fall Regional Meeting.

Let me switch gears to state the obvious: This is a challenging time to be a school board member. Some of you frankly do not get the positive recognition you deserve for the work you do in your board member role. The WASB certainly appreciates the work you do, so we are already looking ahead and calling attention to Wisconsin School Board Week — October 4–10.

The WASB provides districts with Wisconsin School Board Week planning kits so they can spread awareness and understanding of the vital function elected boards of education play in our communities. The kit includes a sample press release, recognition activities and more.

We are pleased to announce an update to the WASB Online Learning Platform, a library of online videos covering all things school board-related. A reimagined five-part series hosted by WASB Search and Governance Consultant Randy Guttenberg explains and explores the WASB's governance model, “The Essential Elements of Governance.”

Access to this series, and with the nearly 50 other videos in the Online

Learning Platform, is included as part of your WASB membership benefits.

The WASB is delighted to have received Business Honor Roll submissions from more than 60 districts, highlighting more than 180 businesses. We will feature those businesses online this month, and we will do an in-depth feature about several of them in the December School News issue. To districts that submitted the names of businesses, thank you for honoring and celebrating your business partnerships. The WASB would love to see and recognize more partnerships in the future.

We are pleased to welcome attorney Sophie Lapien as a new WASB staff counsel and former Oregon School District Superintendent Leslie Bergstrom as a WASB search and governance consultant.

I encourage WASB member school boards to play an active role in helping shape the policies of the WASB. Resolutions to change, delete or add to those policies must be submitted by Tuesday, Sept. 15 to be considered by the WASB Policy & Resolutions Committee. This committee is comprised of school board members from each WASB region. Special thanks to the board members who have agreed to serve on this important committee.

Finally, ensuring the success of our students should be at the top of every school board's to-do list. This month's issue of School News highlights a variety of efforts to help ensure post-graduation success — with stories about how districts, counselors, colleges and employers are working together to prepare students for career and college success.

Thanks for reading. Enjoy this issue. Here's to a great 2026–27 school year. ■

Career Awareness Starts in KINDERGARTEN



Wisconsin's K–12 framework for postsecondary readiness.

By Stacy Eslick

When people think about career development in schools, they often picture high school students completing college applications, exploring apprenticeships or deciding what comes after graduation. Wisconsin has taken a much broader view.

Our state recognizes that preparing students for life after high school is not just a high school activity; it is a developmental process that begins in elementary school and intentionally builds throughout a student's educational journey. This comprehensive approach is reflected in Wisconsin law, academic standards and state-wide best practices that work together to help every student discover their strengths, explore possibilities, develop career-ready skills and confidently navigate life after high school.

For school boards, understanding this framework is important because career development is a core component of

preparing students for successful futures and ensuring Wisconsin's workforce, economy and communities continue to thrive.

■ Why start in kindergarten?

At first glance, career awareness in kindergarten may sound premature. After all, no one expects a 5-year-old to decide what they want to be when they grow up. Instead, career development begins with a much more important question: Who am I, what am I good at and what is possible for my future?

Research consistently shows that children begin forming ideas about work, their own abilities and future possibilities during the elementary years. Without intentional exposure, many students develop their understanding of careers primarily through family experiences, their immediate community or the media. An international study found that fewer than 1% of children learned about occupations through school visitors, while nearly half relied on television, movies or radio for career information. Those experiences can unintentionally narrow students' perceptions of what is possible.

Early career development expands those possibilities. It helps students discover their interests, recognize their strengths, challenge stereotypes and see connections between what they are learning today and opportunities they may pursue tomorrow. Career awareness is not about choosing a career in elementary school; it is about building self-awareness, confidence, curiosity and hope. When students begin to understand that their unique strengths have value and that there are many pathways to a meaningful future,

they are more likely to see purpose in learning and believe that opportunities exist for them.

As students mature, that foundation evolves into career exploration, goal setting, decision-making and postsecondary planning. Rather than beginning this work during a student's final years of high school, Wisconsin intentionally develops these competencies over 13 years, as students make thousands of decisions along the way that influence their future. Every grade level provides another opportunity to help students better understand themselves and the world of work.

■ Wisconsin's vision for career development

This developmental approach is reflected in Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 26.03, Education for Employment. The administrative rule requires every school board to adopt an Education for Employment plan that provides a comprehensive K–12 continuum of career awareness, exploration, planning and preparation.

The framework extends well beyond Academic and Career Planning. District plans include career awareness beginning in elementary school, career exploration in middle school, and career planning and preparation in high school. They also incorporate parent engagement, labor market information, business partnerships, work-based learning, Youth Apprenticeship, dual credit opportunities, industry-recognized credentials, career pathways and preparation for multiple postsecondary options, including technical colleges, universities, military service, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship and direct entry into the workforce.



Equally important is Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 8.01(2)(e), Guidance and Counseling Services, which establishes school counselors' role. The code requires every district to provide a comprehensive guidance and counseling program that is developmentally based and available to every pupil in every grade. It requires developmentally appropriate educational, vocational, career, personal and social information to assist students in problem solving and decision making. The program must also include pupil appraisal, postsecondary planning, referral, research and follow-up activities.

Importantly, the rule specifies that the program be systematically planned and provided by licensed school counselors in collaboration with other licensed pupil services staff, teachers, parents, and community health and human service professionals. School counselors are uniquely prepared for this responsibility through graduate-level education and state licensure in career development, child and adolescent development, counseling, career assessment, labor market information, postsecondary planning, ethical practice and data-informed program development. Working alongside educators, families, employers and community partners, school

counselors design, implement and continuously improve comprehensive career development experiences that help students connect their strengths, interests and goals with meaningful educational and career opportunities. Together, PI 26.03 and PI 8.01(2)(e) establish both what Wisconsin expects districts to provide and how comprehensive school counseling programs support the delivery of K–12 career development.

■ Why universal access matters

Wisconsin's framework is built on a simple principle: every student deserves opportunities to explore their future.

Research demonstrates why universal access is so important. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that approximately 39% of 15-year-olds are uncertain about their future career expectations, while one-third report that school has not taught them things they believe will be useful in a job. The research also found that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly more likely to have career plans that do not align with their educational expectations and are less likely to participate in meaningful career development experiences.

These findings reinforce why career development cannot be limited to students who already know what they want to do or those whose families have extensive knowledge of postsecondary systems. A comprehensive K–12 program ensures that every student has access to information, experiences and guidance to help them make informed decisions about their future. It broadens aspirations, reduces opportunity gaps and helps ensure that a student's future is shaped by their interests, strengths and goals; not simply by the opportunities they happened to encounter.

Career development also increases the relevance of learning. When students understand how reading, mathematics, science, communication, creativity and problem solving connect to real careers and future

opportunities, school has greater meaning. Instead of asking, "When will I ever use this?" students begin asking, "How can I use this to achieve my goals?" That sense of relevance can strengthen engagement, encourage persistence through challenges and help students recognize that the choices they make today create opportunities tomorrow.

■ Preparing students for life

Wisconsin's Career Readiness Standards reinforce that career readiness is a responsibility shared across grades and subject areas. The standards align with the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success adopted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and emphasize transferable skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, professionalism, self-management and responsible decision making.

These are not simply workforce skills. They are life skills that help students succeed in college, technical education, apprenticeships, military service, employment and their communities. They help students become adaptable learners and informed decision-makers who can successfully navigate a rapidly changing economy where many will change careers multiple times throughout their lives.

This vision is further reinforced through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's development of a statewide Portrait of a Graduate. The Portrait of a Graduate will establish a shared vision of the knowledge, skills and mindsets Wisconsin students need to succeed in college, careers, civic life and the postsecondary pathway of their choice. Rather than creating a separate program or curriculum, it reinforces the importance of preparing students with both strong academic knowledge and the durable skills needed to communicate, collaborate, think critically, solve problems, adapt to change and continue learning. These priorities closely align with Wisconsin's Career Readiness Standards and the ASCA Mind-

A comprehensive K–12 program... helps ensure that a student's future is shaped by their interests, strengths and goals; not simply by the opportunities they happened to encounter.

RESEARCH CONSISTENTLY SHOWS

that students who actively explore careers, connect learning to future goals, participate in career development activities and engage in work-based learning make more informed postsecondary decisions and experience stronger employment outcomes as young adults.



sets & Behaviors for Student Success, further demonstrating that career readiness and student success depend on intentionally developing the skills and mindsets students will use throughout their lives.

The Career Readiness Standards also encourage districts to organize career development within Wisconsin's Multi-Level System of Supports. Universal supports ensure every student benefits from career awareness and exploration, while targeted and intensive supports provide additional assistance for students who need more individualized guidance as they navigate barriers or complex postsecondary decisions.

Investing in Wisconsin's future

Preparing students for life after high school is one of the most important responsibilities entrusted to Wisconsin's public schools. It is also one of the most important investments a community can make in its future.

Research consistently shows that students who actively explore careers, connect learning to future goals, participate in career development activities and engage in work-based learning make more informed postsecondary decisions and experience stronger employment outcomes as young adults. These benefits are not created by a single lesson or high school program; they are the result of a developmental process that begins early and grows over time.

Wisconsin's framework reflects this understanding. By combining the expectations of PI 26.03; PI 8.01(2)(e), Guidance and Counseling

Services; the Wisconsin Career Readiness Standards; the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success; the Wisconsin Portrait of a Graduate; and Wisconsin's Multi-Level System of Supports, our state has created a comprehensive K–12 system that prepares students not only for their first job or college application, but for a lifetime of learning, work and contributing to our communities.

Career awareness doesn't start in high school. It starts in kindergarten, and the benefits continue long after graduation. ■

Stacy Eslick is the executive director of the Wisconsin School Counselor Association, where she has proudly served for over a decade. With more than 20 years of experience supporting children, youth and families in school and community settings, Eslick brings extensive expertise in college, career and workforce readiness. Her professional background includes serving as a school counselor, youth apprenticeship coordinator and leader of the Reach Higher Wisconsin initiative, where she advanced statewide efforts to expand postsecondary opportunities for students. Eslick can be reached at stacye@wscaweb.org.

1. Education and Employers. (2020). Drawing the future. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/drawing-the-future-report-published/>
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025). The state of global teenage career preparation. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5f8e3f2-en>
3. Wisconsin Administrative Code § PI 8.01(2)(e). Guidance and counseling services. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/document/administrative-code/PI%208.01%282%29%28e%29>

4. Wisconsin Administrative Code § PI 26.03. Education for employment program. https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/pi/26/03
5. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.). Wisconsin-adopted ASCA National Model. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pupil-services/school-counseling/models/national>
6. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2024). Wisconsin standards for career readiness. https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/cte/pdf/WCR_black_and_white.pdf
7. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2024). Wisconsin standards for career readiness: Section I—Wisconsin's approach to academic standards. https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/cte/2024_wcr_section_i.pdf
8. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2024). Wisconsin standards for career readiness: Section II. https://dpi.state.wi.us/sites/default/files/imce/cte/2024_wcr_section_ii.pdf
9. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2026). Portrait of a graduate. <https://dpi.wi.gov/families-students/programs-initiatives/portrait-graduate>
10. American School Counselor Association. (2020). ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success. <https://www.school-counselor.org/getmedia/7428a787-a452-4abb-afec-d78ec77870cd/mindsets-behaviors.pdf>



A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Strengthening Wisconsin's Postsecondary Readiness Pipeline

By Renée M. Wachter

The Universities of Wisconsin are one part of a larger public education system that serves the people of Wisconsin. Alongside K–12 schools, families, and communities, these universities help prepare the next generation for meaningful work, engaged citizenship, and lifelong learning. Each year, thousands of graduates enter into Wisconsin's workforce and communities, reflecting a collective investment that begins long before college.

Composed of 13 public universities connected to communities across



the state, the Universities of Wisconsin provide broad access to degree programs that are both affordable and relevant.

Students from rural, suburban, and urban areas bring with them a wide range of experiences and aspirations, shaped in large part by their

K–12 education.

For that reason, postsecondary readiness is best understood as a shared responsibility, an ongoing collective effort. The foundations are built in elementary and secondary classrooms, where students begin developing the habits, knowledge, and confidence that will carry them forward.



Renée M. Wachter

School boards, through their leadership of local districts, play an essential role in creating and shaping those opportunities.

Readiness extends beyond academic preparation. While strong grounding in subjects such as American history, chemistry, and algebra remains important, students also benefit from learning how to think critically, manage challenges, and adapt to new environments. Opportunities for inquiry, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving help students connect what they learn in school to what they will encounter after graduation.

Access offered by dual enrollment courses, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate programs can ease the transition to college. Expanding these opportunities, particularly for students who have not always had access, is one way districts can strengthen preparation in a meaningful way.

Nonacademic skills also matter. Time management, self-advocacy, financial literacy, and goal setting often shape whether students persist once they arrive at college. Counseling, advising, and classroom experiences that reinforce these skills can make a lasting difference.

■ Partnerships with school counselors

As a strategic partnership, school counselors are central to helping students navigate the transition from high school to college. Ongoing collaboration between these professionals and the Universities of Wisconsin aims to ensure that students and families have clear and timely information about their options.

Through presentations, webinars, publications, and college fairs, students and families can learn about academic pathways, financial considerations, and steps they can take to prepare for college. Each fall, the Universities of Wisconsin organize



Ongoing collaboration between [school counselors] and the Universities of Wisconsin aims to ensure that students and families have **clear and timely information about their options.**

workshops that bring together counselors and representatives from across the state to share updates and strengthen relationships that support students.

The Universities of Wisconsin Go Wisconsin team stands ready to assist students, parents and counselors learn more about their Universities of Wisconsin options. The team will even walk students, families and counselors through the Universities of Wisconsin Admission Application step-by-step.

■ Direct Admit Wisconsin – a smooth pathway to university admissions

Direct Admit Wisconsin, which is an initiative that offers admissions to qualifying high school students, reflects what is possible when school districts and the Universities of Wisconsin work together to simplify pathways to college. By offering eligible students admission based on their academic record, the program reduces some of the uncertainty that can discourage students from exploring higher education.

For many students, especially those who are the first in their families to consider college, receiving an

early offer can make the idea of attending more tangible. School boards and district leaders can help ensure that students and families understand these opportunities and feel supported in responding to them.

More than 500 high schools now participate in Direct Admit Wisconsin, reaching a large share of students across the state. By early September we will be well on our way to sending out our approximately 40,000 offers of admission to the class of 2027.

The timing of Direct Admit offers is particularly significant. As students receive these offers in the summer before starting their senior year, they are presented with a tangible opportunity to envision themselves as college students. School boards and district leaders can play a key role in ensuring that students and families understand these offers and feel empowered to respond. Clear communication, college-going campaigns, and targeted outreach can help demystify the process and encourage participation, especially among first-generation college students who may be navigating these

The preparation students receive over time, from early education through high school and into college, contributes directly to the strength of Wisconsin's communities and economy.

This is not the work of any one part of the system, but the result of sustained, shared effort.

decisions for the first time.

Collaboration with school districts is vital to the success of Direct Admit Wisconsin. In one district, a small adjustment to the annual course registration process resulted in participation growing from approximately 800 students in the first year to more than 2,500 in the second. This kind of local innovation driven by partnership is key to expanding the program's reach. We hope to continue to work and innovate with our participating Direct Admit Wisconsin high schools to ensure that as many students as possible have that admissions pathway available to them.

In another example, counselors shared that they wanted greater visibility into their students' progress in completing Direct Admit Forms. In response, we developed a Direct Admit Wisconsin portal that allows counselors to see where their students are in the process, including whether they have submitted forms. This added transparency enables counselors to more effectively support and guide students as they navigate the Direct Admit Wisconsin process.

Direct Admit Wisconsin is not the only pathway to a university. There are also traditional applications and guaranteed admission for high-achieving students. Together, these pathways reflect an effort to meet students where they are and provide options that fit different needs and goals.

■ Partners with a common purpose

Helping students see the connection between their education and future

opportunities is also an important part of their readiness. Partnerships among school districts, UW universities, and local employers can support earlier exposure to career pathways and help students make more informed choices.

The preparation students receive over time, from early education through high school and into college, contributes directly to the strength of Wisconsin's communities and economy. This is not the work of any one part of the system, but the result of sustained, shared effort.

At this moment, many students across Wisconsin are making decisions about what comes next.

By continuing to align efforts across K–12 and higher education, and by keeping student preparation at the center, school boards and universities can help ensure that more students feel ready to take that next step.

Ultimately, K–12 schools and the Universities of Wisconsin are partners in a common purpose: supporting every student in Wisconsin as they prepare for life after high school. When that partnership is strong, students are better positioned to succeed, and the benefits are shared broadly across the state. ■

Renée M. Wachter is the interim president of the Universities of Wisconsin. Learn more at wisconsin.edu.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about **Universities of Wisconsin Admissions resources**, visit the following websites:

- **Universities of Wisconsin:** wisconsin.edu
- **Go Wisconsin:** wisconsin.edu/go-wisconsin-admission-help
- **High School Counselor Resources:** wisconsin.edu/high-school-counselor-resources
- **Request a Go Wisconsin Event:** wisconsin.edu/high-school-counselor-resources/go-wisconsin-informational-events
- **Find Your Academic Program Tool:** wisconsin.edu/find-your-program
- **Universities of Wisconsin Admission Pathway Portal:** apply.wisconsin.edu

To learn more about **Direct Admit Wisconsin**, visit the following websites:

- **Direct Admit Wisconsin Information for Students:** wisconsin.edu/direct-admissions
- **Direct Admit Wisconsin Information for Counselors:** wisconsin.edu/high-school-counselor-resources/direct-admit-wisconsin-partner-information



Hey Wisconsin Schools, Smoother Meetings Are Here

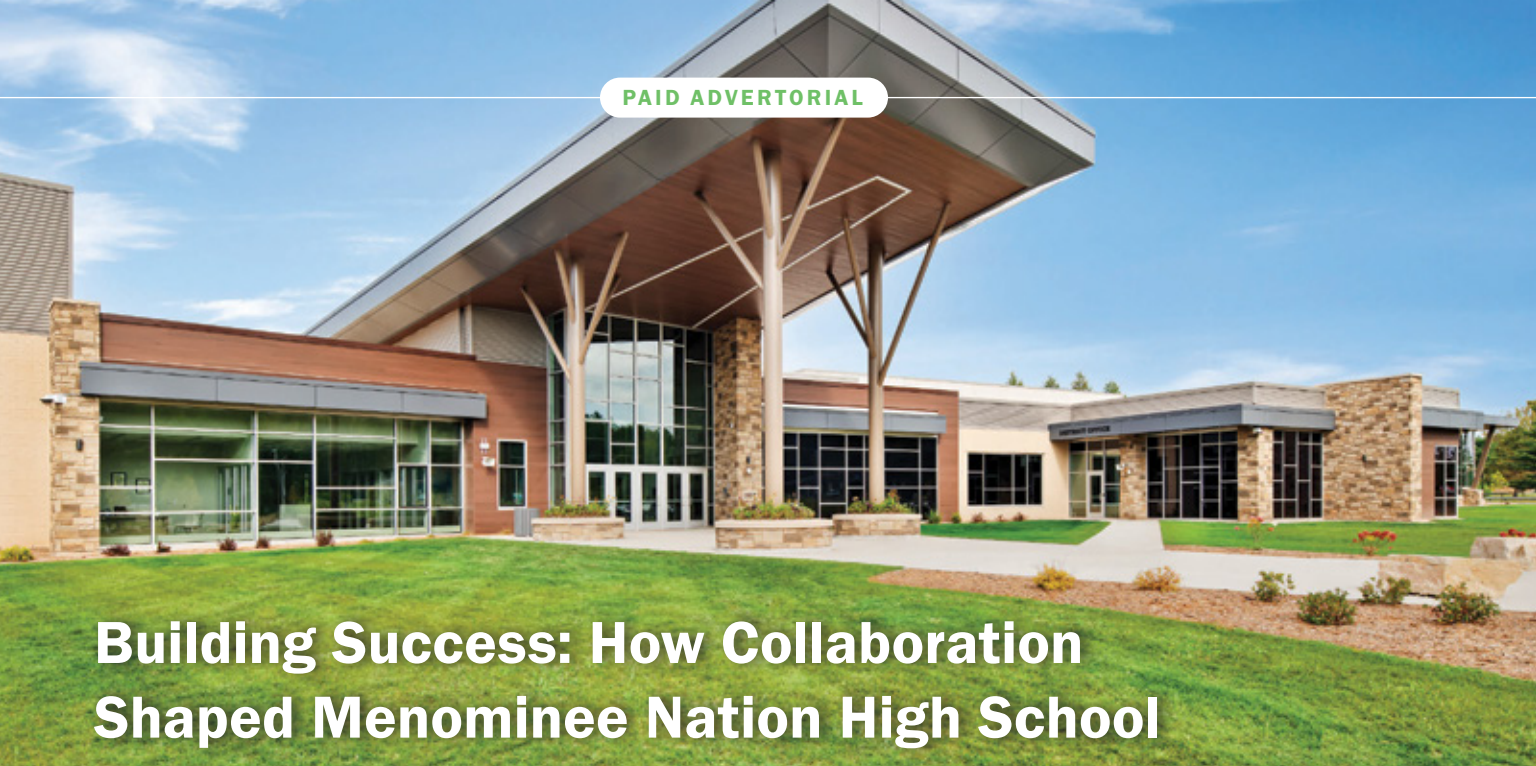
BoardBook is excited to partner with WASB to offer an all-in-one meeting platform made for districts. With BoardBook, you get:

- Simple pricing
- Expert customer service
- Long-term time and cost savings
- A feature-packed reliable system

Endorsed by



Join our upcoming group demo!



Building Success: How Collaboration Shaped Menominee Nation High School

By any traditional measure, Menominee Nation High School (MNHS) has become one of Wisconsin's most compelling educational success stories. Since opening for the 2024–25 school year, the school has experienced significant improvements in academic achievement, graduation rates, work-based learning participation, dual-credit enrollment, and student engagement. Chronic absenteeism has declined, while opportunities for students to connect learning to future careers have expanded dramatically.

These outcomes are especially noteworthy given the challenges many Indigenous communities continue to face, including the lasting effects of poverty, historical trauma, and educational systems that often fail to reflect Native cultures and identities. At MNHS, educators believe these improvements are the result of a deliberate effort to create an environment where students feel connected to their culture, their community, their land, and their future.

Beyond a Building

When planning began for the new high school, District leaders

envisioned far more than a replacement facility. Former District Administrator Wendell Waukau and Principal Kate Mikle wanted a school that reflected Menominee values while supporting students academically, socially, emotionally, and culturally.

According to Theresa Lehman, Director of Sustainable Services at Miron Construction Co., Inc., the project team approached the school through the lens of sustainability—not only focusing on environmental performance and fiscal responsibility, but also the well-being of students and staff.

Lehman explained that people are shaped by their environment and the right environment can positively influence student outcomes. The project focused on the “triple bottom line” of sustainability: creating a high-performing, energy-efficient facility; placing students and community at the center of design; and delivering the project within budget.

To understand what the school should represent, the project team first immersed themselves in Menominee history. Waukau shared books and resources detailing the impacts of land loss, federal boarding schools, termination, and

the restoration of tribal sovereignty, while also highlighting the resilience that has defined the Menominee Nation.

“The books were profoundly eye-opening. They revealed what the new high school needed to reflect to create a quality, sustainable environment that celebrated Menominee culture,” Lehman said.

Learning What Cultural Design Really Means

To broaden the team's understanding, representatives from the District, school board, and design and construction team visited the Indian Community School (ICS) in Milwaukee, a nationally recognized example of Indigenous educational design. The experience proved to be transformative.

“When we toured ICS, we experienced exactly what we had envisioned—an environment where Native students are immersed in cultural identity in every aspect of the building,” said Mikle.

That lesson became a guiding principle. Rather than adding cultural elements as decoration, Menominee values became integrated throughout the school experience.

Culture as an Educational Strategy

Students entering MNHS encounter a learning environment designed to reinforce belonging. The entrance features 13 limestone boulders representing the 13 moons on a turtle's shell. The building faces east toward the rising sun, symbolizing new beginnings. Throughout the facility, students encounter references to the Wolf River, sustainable forestry, clan structures, language, and other traditions.

The academic wing follows the symbolic path of the Wolf River, while classroom neighborhoods branch from a central gathering space anchored by a sculptural tree built from wood harvested and milled by Menominee Tribal Enterprises. Science spaces explore forestry, aquaponics, and ecological systems. Cultural arts classrooms, an animal harvesting laboratory, and Indigenous language learning spaces connect students to traditional knowledge while supporting modern career pathways.

The school also serves as a community gathering place. For students, the message is clear: their culture belongs in their school.

Research consistently shows that students who experience a sense of belonging are more likely to attend school regularly, engage in learning, and persist toward graduation. MNHS has embraced that principle by making cultural identity a foundational component.

Sustainability as a Way of Life

The school's approach to sustainability reflects the Menominee Nation's long-standing philosophy of stewardship. For generations, the Menominee have managed one of the most celebrated examples of sustainable forestry in the world. Despite harvesting timber for 150+ years, the forest contains

more standing trees today than when commercial harvesting began.

That long-term perspective influences the school's educational approach, helping students explore their culture, ecology, economics, and community responsibility.

The building reinforces these lessons through abundant natural daylight, connections to the outdoors, sustainably sourced materials, and learning environments designed to support wellness and today's learning techniques. Sustainability is not simply a classroom subject—it is a sovereign way of understanding the relationship between people and the world around them.

The Results

The impact of this approach is increasingly evident. Recent data shows significant gains across multiple measures. Graduation rates increased to 95.4%. English language arts achievement improved substantially; while mathematics achievement, participation in dual-credit coursework, and student participation in postsecondary preparation opportunities all more than doubled; and work-based learning participation increased almost fourfold. At the same time, chronic absenteeism declined significantly.

While no single factor explains educational success, the combination of strong instruction, meaningful relationships, cultural relevance, and a supportive environment is helping students feel connected, celebrated, and empowered to envision new possibilities for themselves.

A Model for the Future

MNHS demonstrates that educational environments can do far more than house instruction. They can strengthen identity, foster belonging, support healing, and help students succeed.

The success of MNHS offers an important lesson for educators: when students see themselves reflected in their learning environment, when culture is viewed as an asset, and when schools are intentionally designed to support the whole child, remarkable outcomes can follow.

At MNHS, the building is more than a facility. It is a reflection of a community's past, a celebration of its resilience, and an investment in the future success of every student who walks through its doors.

For Miron, the success of MNHS extends beyond constructing a new building. It reflects the value of true partnership throughout the entire process. As Construction Manager, our role was to bring together the District, community, design team and trade partners to transform a shared vision into a project that was buildable, financially responsible and true to the values of the Menominee Nation.

Through early collaboration, transparent budgeting, constructability reviews and continuous communication, the team delivered more than a school. They delivered a place where culture, education and community come together. That's the power of collaborative construction management.



Ensuring Students Are **COLLEGE- and CAREER-READY** Through Investment in Dual Credit

By Layla Merrifield

More than 67,700 Wisconsin students in 450 high schools earned dual credit — college credit while still in high school — from a technical college last year. Together, they completed 328,883 credits and earned 3,277 credentials. That represents nearly \$50 million in tuition savings for Wisconsin families in a single academic year, an average of \$736 per student.

At first glance, it sounds like a win-win. Students gain access. Families save money. Employers gain a robust pipeline. College enrollments rise.

But dual credit is not free. It requires real investment — by school districts, technical colleges and, ultimately, the state.

Long a national leader in connecting education to workforce needs, Wisconsin is now falling behind. Most other states are investing heavily in dual credit — both in school district supports and in the communities and technical colleges that deliver 70% of these courses nationally. Wisconsin's technical colleges deliver 80% of dual credit statewide, despite having no dedicated funding stream for these programs.

■ Dual credit: a proven pathway

Dual credit technical college courses span a wide range of high-demand fields, from welding and certified nursing assistant programs to information technology, advanced manufacturing and business. They provide affordable on-ramps to bachelor's



Layla Merrifield

degrees through articulated, logical pathways tailored to students' individual academic goals. These are high-quality, career-connected experiences that give students a meaningful glimpse into their future.

For some students, dual credit confirms a career choice or academic plan. For others, it helps them pivot early, saving both time and money. Research shows that all forms of dual credit build confidence, reduce barriers, increase high school graduation and college-going rates, and accelerate progress toward credentials of value.

Just as importantly, dual credit supports lifelong skills like problem-solving, communication, teamwork, resilience and adaptability. These programs impart college readiness, career readiness and life readiness.

Before even graduating from Belmont Community Schools, Cody

Kletecka graduated from Southwest Wisconsin Technical College in Fennimore with a CNC degree, an incredible accomplishment and a powerful example of what students can achieve through dual enrollment. But Kletecka didn't just walk across the commencement stage that day, he helped create part of it. Kletecka helped design and machine Southwest Tech's ceremonial mace carried during the graduation procession. Those who worked alongside him shared that his attention to detail, pride in his work and commitment to excellence made it clear the project was in capable hands. Years from now, graduates will continue walking behind something Kletecka helped build.

Connor O'Reilly, a Lakeview Technology student at Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, experienced dual credit as a way to challenge himself. "I have 27 credits, so that's almost an entire year of college that I can knock out and get out of the way," O'Reilly said. "I don't have to pay for that either, which is nice, because it makes financing college way easier."

■ A shared benefit, but not a shared cost

Despite the clear benefits, the cost of delivering dual credit is unevenly distributed.

School districts and technical colleges bear the financial responsibility for these courses under

strained budgets, investing in instructor time, curriculum development, equipment and student support. Though nationally renowned, Wisconsin technical colleges are grappling with growing waitlists and strained capacity, despite structural workforce shortages that are strangling the state's economy. School districts know their families want reduced tuition costs — but dual credit access varies depending on where a student lives, whether qualified instructors can be found, and what local high schools and families can afford.

This patchwork approach leads to students in well-resourced districts potentially having access to dozens of dual credit opportunities, while others — often in rural areas — have far fewer options.

If we agree that every student deserves a college or career experience before graduation, this imbalance must be addressed.

■ The case for state investment

A targeted state investment in dual credit would ensure that access does not depend on ZIP code. It would create a more sustainable model that supports students, families, schools and employers alike.

A well-crafted state investment could:

- Expand access to dual credit to all high schools.
- Offset costs for school districts, making programs more robust.
- Deliver clear pathways based on student academic and career goals.
- Strengthen Wisconsin's college attainment rate and workforce pipeline.
- Lower the overall time to degree and cost of college.

This is not solely an education issue; it is an economic imperative. Wisconsin employers consistently report



WTCS DUAL CREDIT TYPES

► Start College Now

Allows public high school juniors and seniors who meet certain requirements to take postsecondary courses at a Wisconsin technical college. Approved courses count toward high school graduation, and college credit is earned. All tuition costs for this program are covered by the high school, totaling more than \$7.5 million in 2024-25.

► Transcribed Credit

A college course and all its resources, including a college mentor, are provided to a qualified high school teacher to deliver a full college course to students while in high school. The students will receive a college transcript and both college and high school credit at no cost to students. Colleges and high schools contribute resources to support this program without passing tuition costs on to families, saving more than \$37 million in tuition costs in 2024-25.

► Youth Apprenticeship

Allows high school juniors and seniors who meet certain requirements to receive school-based and work-based instruction. A high school can contract with a technical college and instructor to teach a college-level course to high school students when appropriate. The contract is paid by the high school, supporting more than \$180,800 in costs in 2024-25.

► 38.14 Contract

Allows high school students to gain college-level instruction from a college instructor. Both college-level credit and high school credit are earned. The high school and the technical colleges engage in the contract. The contract is paid by the high school, supporting more than \$5 million in tuition costs in 2024-25.

► Advanced Standing

Advanced Standing is also referred to as "Credit in Escrow." The credit is activated when a student enters a program at the college. The college has an articulation agreement with the high school stating that one or more high school course(s) outcomes align to the first college-level course. No additional costs are incurred to the student or high school. □

challenges in hiring skilled workers, and working families increasingly say that college affordability is a top concern. Dual credit is the most effective, efficient tool to address both problems.

■ Strengthening partnerships for student success

Wisconsin's strength has always been its collaborative approach. School districts and technical colleges have built strong local partnerships to deliver dual credit opportunities that reflect local priorities and help more kids see themselves as "college material." These partnerships are intentional, responsive and deeply rooted in the communities they serve.

But partnership alone is no longer enough. It now must be backed by sustainable funding.

With the right investment, together we can scale what is already working:

- More students graduating

with college credit, or a credential, in hand.

- More seamless transitions from high school to college or career.
- More employers with faster access to a skilled, ready workforce.

■ A call to action

The Wisconsin Technical College System will advocate for dual credit investment in the next state budget. We invite our K-12 partners to help tell the story of local partnerships, the need for state funding and the students whose lives and educational pathways have been shaped by these opportunities. We can't do this work without you.

Now is the time to chart Wisconsin's future, with a bold vision to bring dual credit to every Wisconsin high school, further incentivize what is already working and strengthen economic opportunity for all.

With a serious investment in dual credit, Wisconsin can reaffirm its commitment to innovative, future-ready education that brings college to every schoolhouse door, scales the strong foundation we have already built and ensures a strong, competitive state economy for years to come.

The question is not whether dual credit works. The data — and the stories behind it — prove that it does.

The question is, will the next Legislature invest in what works? Or will they allow Wisconsin to fall further behind? ■

Layla Merrifield is president of the Wisconsin Technical College System, Wisconsin's largest higher education system, serving nearly 300,000 students through 16 colleges and 50 campuses statewide. WTCS offers more than 500 programs, including associate degrees, technical diplomas, certificates and apprenticeship-related instruction, and is a primary provider of workforce training and customized education for Wisconsin employers. Visit WTCSsystem.edu for more information.



Make your School Shine!

**Be a Community Champion with the
Gametime Community Champion Grant
100% Matching Funds Available***

Call to learn more!

MWP Recreation
800-622-5425
info@mwprecreation.com



*While Funds Last, Restrictions apply

BE PART OF THE CONVENTION!



January 20-22, 2027

BAIRD CENTER | MILWAUKEE

Proposals now being accepted for:

- **Art Exhibit**
- **School Fair**
- **Student Video Team**

HIGHLIGHT YOUR SUCCESS

Share your district's best work
to help other districts grow and learn.



**Visit the WASB website
today to apply:**

[WASB.org/convention](https://wasb.org/convention)

SUBMISSION DEADLINES VARY

*If you submitted a breakout session proposal, expect
an email from WASB staff by mid-September.*





Building on Readiness

How Wisconsin's Private Colleges Support Student Pathways Beyond High School

By Taylor Hooker

Across Wisconsin, school districts are helping students think earlier and more intentionally about life after high school. Through Academic and Career Planning, career-connected learning, dual enrollment, industry-recognized credentials, work-based learning and Wisconsin's Career Pathways, students are increasingly able to connect what they are learning today with the opportunities available to them tomorrow.

This work matters. When students understand their interests, strengths and options, they are better prepared to make informed decisions about their postsecondary pathways. School boards and district leaders play a critical role in making this possible by supporting partnerships and policies that help every student graduate with a plan.

Wisconsin's private, nonprofit colleges and universities are an important part of this broader college and career readiness ecosystem. By offering academic programs connected to workforce needs, dual enrollment opportunities, transfer pathways, personalized support and significant financial aid, Wisconsin's private colleges help students continue the momentum they began in high school.

■ Dual enrollment as a bridge

Dual enrollment is one of the clearest examples of how high schools and colleges can work together to support student readiness. When students complete college-level coursework while still in high school, they gain more than credits; they gain confidence.

Dual enrollment helps students

understand college expectations, develop academic habits and test areas of interest before committing to a major or program. It can also reduce the time and cost required to complete a degree. For students who may be the first in their family to attend college, a successful dual enrollment experience can change how they see themselves; college becomes less abstract and more attainable.

Private colleges are valuable dual enrollment partners for districts because they bring faculty expertise, advising support and academic programs connected to career pathways. Students take college-level coursework that reinforces both academic preparation and career goals.

For districts, dual enrollment can expand course options, especially in areas where staffing, scheduling or

College and career readiness should not assume that every student will follow the same route after high school. Many students change direction as they learn more about themselves and their goals.

enrollment numbers make it difficult to offer every advanced or specialized course locally. These partnerships can be part of a school district's broader strategy to increase rigor, relevance and access.

■ Transfer pathways and multiple routes to success

College and career readiness should not assume that every student will follow the same route after high school. Many students change direction as they learn more about themselves and their goals.

That is why transfer pathways matter. Students need systems that allow them to keep moving forward, even if their path is not linear. Wisconsin's private colleges work closely with Wisconsin's technical colleges and other postsecondary partners to support transfer students through credit agreements, advising, degree completion options and clear program pathways.

Transfer-friendly policies can help students save time and money, reduce duplicated coursework and maintain momentum toward a credential or degree. This includes transfer of dual enrollment credit.

Flexibility is especially important for students balancing work, family responsibilities, finances or geographic considerations. A student may begin close to home, complete general education or career-focused coursework, and later transfer to a private college to complete a bachelor's degree. Another student may earn technical credits and then decide to pursue a related four-year degree. Strong transfer pathways help students see their earlier learning as an asset, not a detour.

School leaders can support students and families by communicating that postsecondary planning is not about choosing one perfect path. It is about understanding

options, building skills and knowing how to take the next step.

■ Financial aid and the importance of early information

Affordability is often one of the biggest concerns for students and families. Many assume that private colleges are financially out of reach based on published tuition prices. Yet the listed price is rarely the price a student will pay.

Wisconsin's private colleges provide significant institutional scholarships and grants, in addition to federal and state financial aid for eligible students. For some families, the cost after aid is applied is often more manageable than expected. This is where high school and college partnerships are especially important. Students and families need clear, early information about financial aid, FAFSA completion, scholarships, grants, loans, work-study, net price and comparing college costs. Financial aid literacy is a key part of college and career readiness.

School districts can support this work by ensuring that schools have the counseling capacity, family engagement strategies and community partnerships needed to help students navigate financial decisions. Students with access to timely, accurate financial information are better positioned to make choices that fit their goals and circumstances.

■ Accessibility, belonging and student support

Wisconsin's private colleges serve students from rural, suburban and urban communities across the state. They enroll first-generation students, students from low-income families and students who may need additional academic, social or financial support. Their student-centered missions and services emphasize advising, mentoring and belonging.

These services can be especially

important during the transition from high school to college, when students are learning not only new academic content but also how to navigate a new environment.

For students who benefited from career planning and advising in high school, postsecondary support creates continuity. Accessibility also includes program flexibility. This matters in a state where workforce needs are changing and where many students will continue learning long after high school graduation.

■ A call to action

Wisconsin school districts have an important opportunity to build on the early and intentional college and career readiness work already happening in their schools. By continuing to invest in career pathways, expanding meaningful dual enrollment opportunities, strengthening awareness of postsecondary options, and helping families better understand affordability and financial aid, districts can make postsecondary planning more connected, accessible and actionable for students.

Partnerships with Wisconsin's private colleges, along with collaborative efforts with college financial aid and access networks, can help ensure that students do not lose momentum after graduation, but instead move forward with confidence, direction and support. When school districts take an active role in aligning high school experiences with postsecondary opportunities, they help more students see that the choices they make today can open doors for tomorrow. ■

Taylor Hooker is the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities' director of outreach and high school partnerships. She can be reached at taylor.hooker@waicu.org. If you are interested in learning more about Wisconsin's private, nonprofit colleges and universities, please visit wisconsinsprivatecolleges.org.

New Legislation Related to Employee Sexual Misconduct

WHAT ADMINISTRATORS AND SCHOOL BOARDS NEED TO KNOW

By Alana Leffler and Ella Martin

As the 2026-27 school year begins, school leaders should be prepared to comply with new legislation aimed at preventing, identifying and reporting grooming behavior or other sexual misconduct by employees toward students. This article provides an overview of the new laws and related action items, including policy updates, employee training and parental notification.

■ 2025 Wisconsin Act 88

2025 Wisconsin Act 88 created Wis. Stat. § 948.072, which makes it a felony to groom a child for sexual activity. Grooming is defined as “a course of conduct, pattern of behavior, or series of acts with the intention to condition, seduce, solicit, lure, or entice a child for the purpose of engaging in sexual intercourse or sexual contact, or for the purpose of producing, distributing, or possessing depictions of the child engaged in sexually explicit conduct.”¹ The statute includes examples of behavior that may constitute grooming, including but not limited to verbal comments of a sexual nature directed toward a child, inappropriate or sexualized physical contact with a child, the promise of gifts, privileges, or attention with the intent to lower a child’s inhibitions, or attempts to isolate a child from their family or peers. Consent is not a valid defense for the offense of grooming.²



Alana Leffler



Ella Martin

A person convicted of grooming as a Class G Felony may face a sentence of up to 10 years and a maximum fine of \$25,000.³ However, under certain circumstances, the penalties may be more severe. For example, if the offender is in a position of trust or authority over the child (e.g., teacher or coach), the offender may be convicted of a Class F Felony punishable by up to 12 years and six months of imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$25,000. If the child has a disability,

the offender may be convicted of a Class E Felony punishable by up to 15 years of imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$50,000. If the offender’s course of conduct involves two or more children, the offender may be convicted of a Class D Felony punishable by up to 25 years of imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$100,000.

Additionally, any person convicted of grooming must register as a sex offender.⁴

Act 88 also added grooming to the definition of “abuse” for purposes of the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect.⁵

■ 2025 Wisconsin Act 89

2025 Wisconsin Act 89 created Wis. Stat. § 118.07(7), which lays out school districts’ obligations with regard to the new grooming statute. By Sept. 1, 2026, each school board must adopt a policy on appropriate communication between an employee or volunteer, when acting in the individual’s official capacity, and pupils enrolled in the district, pupils attending a school that is not under the control of the applicable school board, and pupils attending a home-based private educational program.⁶

This policy must:

1. Contain a range of consequences, up to and including termination, for employees and volunteers who violate the policy.

Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, each school board must provide annual training to employees in identifying, preventing, and reporting grooming and professional boundary violations.

2. Specify that the policy applies to communications that occur outside of school hours.
3. Include standards for appropriate content and appropriate methods of communication.⁷

Additionally, beginning in the 2026-27 school year, each school board must provide annual training to employees in identifying, preventing, and reporting grooming and professional boundary violations.⁸ To fulfill this requirement, a school board may, but is not required to, use the training developed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

■ 2025 Wisconsin Act 57

2025 Wisconsin Act 57 created Wis. Stat. § 118.07(6), which requires schools to notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) of any student alleged to be the victim or target of the following conduct:

1. Sexual misconduct by a school staff member.
2. An individual who has been convicted of a serious child sex offense has engaged in an occupation or participated in a volunteer position that requires the individual to work or interact primarily and directly with children in a manner that constitutes a crime.
3. A sex offender has intentionally captured a representation of a minor pupil without the written consent of the pupil's parent or guardian.

The above notice requirement is triggered when a district administrator, principal or Title IX coordinator receives a report alleging such conduct and has reasonable cause to suspect that the alleged conduct occurred. Notably, the statute does not elaborate on what constitutes reasonable cause.

Notice must be provided by phone or in person. If the report is received on a school day before the end of

regularly scheduled instruction, notice must be provided by 5 p.m. that day. If the report is received after regularly scheduled instruction or on a day that school is not in session, notice must be provided by 12 p.m. on the next calendar day. Schools do not need to follow this notice requirement if the report received alleges conduct by the pupil's own parent or guardian.

Finally, each school board must provide annual notice to parent(s)/guardian(s) regarding their rights to access employee discipline records under Wisconsin's Public Records Law.

School districts are encouraged to consult with legal counsel as appropriate to ensure that their policies, staff trainings, annual notices and responses to individual reports of misconduct comply with applicable law.

■ 2025 Wisconsin Act 186

2025 Wisconsin Act 186 created Wis. Stat. § 118.227, which prohibits school boards from entering into an agreement, including an agreement for resignation or termination and a severance agreement, or other contract, or take any action that does any of the following:

1. Has the effect of suppressing or destroying information relating to an investigation of alleged immoral conduct by a current or former employee.
2. Affects the ability of the school district or any of its employees to report suspected immoral conduct.
3. Requires the school district to expunge information about

allegations or findings of immoral conduct from any documents it maintains, unless after investigation the allegations are found to be false or not substantiated.

Immoral conduct is defined as “conduct or behavior that is contrary to commonly accepted moral or ethical standards and that endangers the health, safety, welfare, or education of any student.”⁹

Under the new law, a school district that provides information about the conduct of a current or former employee in response to a request from a prospective employer is immune from all civil liability that may result from providing the requested information.

■ Conclusion

Student safety has long been among school districts' highest priorities. The legislative changes discussed above are intended not only to prevent harm to students, but also to strengthen accountability for school employees and volunteers who engage in misconduct toward students. In addition to the requirements outlined in this article, allegations of grooming or sexual misconduct may trigger mandatory reporting obligations and responsibilities under Title IX. School districts are encouraged to consult with legal counsel as appropriate to ensure that their policies, staff trainings, annual notices and responses to individual reports of misconduct comply with applicable law. ■

Alana Leffler and Ella Martin are attorneys at Renning, Lewis & Lacy, S.C. Leffler can be reached at aleffler@law-rl.com, while Martin can be reached at emartin@law-rl.com.

1. Wis. Stat. § 948.072(2).
2. Wis. Stat. § 948.072(5).
3. Wis. Stat. § 939.50.
4. Wis. Stat. § 973.048(2m).
5. Wis. Stat. § 48.02(1)(em).
6. Wis. Stat. § 118.07(7)(a).
7. Wis. Stat. §§ 118.07(7)(a)1., 2..
8. Wis. Stat. § 118.07(7)(b).
9. Wis. Stat. § 115.31(1)(c).

LAURA MCCOY

GREEN BAY AREA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEMBER

Laura McCoy has served on the Green Bay School Board for nine years and currently holds the position of board trustee. The School District of New London alumnus earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

A devoted wife and proud mother of two graduates of Green Bay Area Public Schools, McCoy recently spoke with the WASB about her decision to become a school board member, the latest developments in the Green Bay Area Public School District and why it's important to attend the WASB Delegate Assembly. She also discussed her role as a strong advocate for public education in her community and shared her perspective on the qualities that define an effective school board member.

WSN: How long have you lived in the Green Bay area? And what do you enjoy about it?

Laura McCoy: My husband and I have lived in Green Bay for 27 years. Green Bay is a fantastic community to live, work and raise a family. We look out for our neighbors here. We are a diverse community with a growing awareness of how that diversity makes our community stronger and more vibrant. And yes, we have fantastic public schools!

Why did you decide to become a school board member?

LM: As my children approached adulthood, I felt ready to start a new phase in my life. I decided it was time to engage with my community on a different level. I wasn't happy with the direction that some of our elected officials were taking with regard to public education, and I decided that it was time to get more involved.

Former Green Bay Superintendent Vicki Bayer, who retired last summer, was a well-known leader in the area. How difficult is it for a school board to replace someone like her?

LM: Vicki Bayer stepped forward when our school district was in a time of transition and profound



change. She is a strong leader, and I learned a lot from watching her. She is deeply respected in our community and amongst our staff. When she decided to retire, we knew it would be hard to replace her. However, we have been extremely fortunate with our new superintendent, Michael Hernandez. He has hit the ground running, and we are thrilled with his clear commitment to our students, families and staff. He brings a wonderful energy to his new position. I'm looking forward to seeing how our district is enhanced by his leadership.

What's going on in your district right now?

LM: The biggest item on our agenda currently is our upcoming referendum. In November, we will be asking our community to once again support an operational referendum. This will allow us to maintain our programming and staffing levels as well as combat the effects of inflation and the lack of reliable state funding.

In addition, we are in the final phase of a long school consolidation process. We recently closed six schools. While this was a very difficult decision for our school board and sad for our community, we have honored our promise to the affected families that their children will transition to an improved educational environment. One result of this consolidation process is our newest school — Starr Elementary, named after Bart and Cherry Starr — that will open for the 2026-27 school year. This new school will allow for greater efficiencies and will use geothermal and solar to provide for its energy needs. Thanks to our community's trust in our district and their generous support for referendums, we have also been able to make very substantial additions to several other schools to accommodate larger populations of students.

“Being a connector between our community and our schools

is important. At the end of the day, I refuse to give in to the narrative that our schools are failing and I continue to find my school board work rewarding and often joyful.”

How has the WASB’s Setting the Record Straight campaign helped you explain public education misconceptions to people in your community?

LM: In the last couple of years, on behalf of our board, I have focused a lot of my work on informing the community about taxpayer transparency in school funding. I am proud to say that Green Bay is the first municipality in the state to have the cost of vouchers reflected on our city’s property tax bill. The Setting the Record Straight campaign has been invaluable in these efforts. Having cited materials from a respected organization gives weight to the information provided. I have frequently shared this information publicly on my social media and individually in one-to-one conversations with community members and leaders.

You served as your board’s representative during the WASB Delegate Assembly last January. Why is it important for boards to participate in the annual Delegate Assembly?

LM: The Delegate Assembly is an opportunity for school board members across the state to gather once a year and listen to one another. I always enjoy being in a large room full of people who are committed to the work of representing their district and supporting public education. The full assembly is a cross-section of representatives from around the state and it is inspiring to watch other delegates advocate on behalf of their district and students. I have been honored to serve in this capacity eight times.

What other organizations are you involved in?

LM: I currently serve as a citizen member on the Brown County Human Services Board, and am a member of the League of Women Voters of Greater Green Bay. Over the years, I have taken an active and enthusiastic role in my community through my neighborhood association and as a board member for organizations like Northeastern Wisconsin Dance Organization and the Brown County Historical Society. On a statewide level, I was appointed by Gov. Doyle to the Wisconsin Historical Records Advisory Board.

What makes a successful school board member?

LM: When I was first elected, I had the somewhat naive view that it was

enough to simply care about my community and the quality of our schools. While that is important, I served through the pandemic and watched the list of public education challenges grow longer and more complex. I have realized that in addition to my primary responsibility as a strong, vocal advocate for GBAPS students, families and our amazing staff, I must also be an active defender of public education. If I want to be a successful school board member, it is necessary to not get caught up in the negativity that sometimes surrounds our conversations about public schools. Being a connector between our community and our schools is important. At the end of the day, I refuse to give in to the narrative that our schools are failing and I continue to find my school board work rewarding and often joyful. ■



 **RENNING
LEWIS & LACY**

Dedicated to Wisconsin’s Success.

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

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

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

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

FALL REGIONAL MEETINGS

All meetings will begin at 6 p.m., with registration and networking followed by a 6:15 dinner and 7 p.m. programming. Each pre-meeting workshop will begin at 4:30 p.m. The member fee is \$43 for the meeting (\$42 in regions 6 and 9), which includes dinner, and \$79 for the pre-meeting workshop. Register for both and receive a \$10 discount. Visit WASB.org for more details and to register.

● Times and Locations

Region 1*: Oct. 6 | Hayward, The Steakhouse & Lodge

Region 2*: Oct. 7 | Minocqua, Norwood Pines Supper Club

Region 3*: Oct. 22 | Green Bay, Rock Garden / Comfort Suites

Region 4: Sept. 30 | Eau Claire, The Florian Gardens

Region 5: Sept. 29 | Rothschild, Holiday Inn Wausau-Rothschild

Region 6*: Oct. 1 | West Salem, West Salem High School

Region 7: Oct. 21 | Neenah, Bridgewood Resort & Hotel

Region 8*: Oct. 20 | New Holstein, Altona Supper Club

Region 9: Oct. 14 | Fennimore, Southwest Tech

Region 10: Oct. 13 | Baraboo, The Wisconsin Hotel & Conference Center

Regions 11 & 15: Oct. 15 | Brookfield, Sheraton Milwaukee Brookfield Hotel

Region 12*: Oct. 28 | Sun Prairie, Hilton Sun Prairie

Region 13: Oct. 27 | Burlington, Veterans Terrace

Region 14*: TBD | Milwaukee, MPS Administration Building

Online Virtual Meeting: Nov. 5 at 12 p.m.

(No registration fee. Zoom link to come via email.)

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

Prior to each Fall Regional Meeting, WASB staff counsel will host a 4:30 p.m. workshop in the same facility in which the meeting will be held. This year's workshop covers Wisconsin's open meetings law:

● Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law — Understanding and Navigating Closed Sessions

This session provides a practical, in-depth look at Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law with a special emphasis on the rules, requirements and common pitfalls surrounding closed sessions. This workshop also includes governance advice on how school boards should approach sensitive discussions and maintain confidentiality. Whether you are a school board member, district administrator or executive assistant to the district administrator, this session provides the tools to conduct closed sessions lawfully and effectively. *Learn more at WASB.org.*

Register now — and secure your spot.

An online workshop for all members will be held at 12 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 3, on Zoom.

Upcoming Webinars

■ LEGAL WEBINAR: PUPIL EXPULSIONS (Two Parts)

PART 1: EXPULSION OVERVIEW

WED., SEPT. 9 | 12 p.m.

PART 2: THE HEARING PROCESS

TUES., SEPT. 15 | 12 p.m.

This two-part webinar presentation covers state and federal laws relating to pupil expulsions. The first part of the presentation will provide a roadmap for considering the expulsion of pupils and how to avoid common pitfalls when doing so. The second presentation will focus on procedures for administrators as well as for boards that conduct their own expulsion hearings by running a mock expulsion hearing. In addition, the presentation will also include an Expulsion Overview Guide with sample notifications and hearing procedures.

This webinar is a member benefit, and no registration is required. They will be recorded and placed on the "Online Events" page.

■ LEGAL WEBINAR: STUDENT FREE SPEECH

SEPT. 30 | 12 p.m.

This engaging webinar is designed to help school board members and administrators better understand student free speech rights and navigate challenging situations with confidence. WASB Associate Executive Director Bob Butler and WASB Staff Counsel Kara Conley will provide key legal considerations, real-world examples and best practices for handling student expression issues while maintaining a positive school environment. Participants will leave with practical insights to help them make informed decisions that support both constitutional protections and educational goals.

This series is a member benefit, and no registration is required. It will be recorded and placed on the "Online Events" page.

RECURRING WEBINAR

■ WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

SEPT. 16, OCT. 21, NOV. 18 | 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 JAN. 20-22, 2027

January 20-22 | Baird Center, Milwaukee, WI

More than 3,000 public school leaders, educators, exhibitors and advocates will gather in Milwaukee Jan. 20-22 to network, learn, grow and shape student achievement and public education throughout Wisconsin. The theme for 2027 is *Leading Today, Shaping Tomorrow*.

The event is co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials and the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators.

2027 EDUCATION TOUR SITE

Join peers on a shuttle to Fairview School on Thursday, Jan. 21, for the 2027 Education Tour, the Wisconsin State Education Convention's only off-site experience.

For \$10, attendees step inside a K4–8 school leading the way in STEM, with a comprehensive Project Lead the Way program, hands-on learning in robotics and coding, and a strong focus on arts and whole-child development.

**The Education Tour location is subject to change. Please check with WASB Director of Events Amy Qualmann at aqualmann@wasb.org to confirm the time and location.*

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Get involved in the 2027 Wisconsin State Education Convention! The convention, scheduled for Jan. 20-22 in Milwaukee, is your opportunity to highlight your innovative programs and talented students. The WASB is now accepting proposals for the School Fair, student art exhibit and the student video team. School Fair proposals are due by Sept. 18, 2026. Student art exhibit and student video team proposals are due by Nov. 15 and Nov. 20, respectively. *Submit your proposal at [WASB.org/convention](https://wasb.org/convention).*

ANNOUNCING THE FRIDAY KEYNOTE

Jeff Utecht | Friday, Jan. 22

Jeff Utecht will give the Friday General Session keynote at the 2027 Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 22, in Milwaukee. The author, keynote speaker and consultant is a recognized thought leader on the future of work, artificial intelligence and human-centered leadership.

Over the past 25 years, Utecht has worked as a classroom teacher, instructional leader, international school administrator, consultant and entrepreneur. His career has taken him from public schools in Washington to international schools across Asia and the Middle East, and into leadership conversations with school systems, government agencies and organizations around the world.

Today, Utecht works with educational leaders, business executives and organizational teams navigating one of the most significant shifts in modern history: the convergence of artificial intelligence and changing human expectations about work, learning, leadership and culture.

Utecht is the author of “Human Still Required: Leading Schools — The Work Machines Can’t Do” and “The Next Turn: Work, AI, and Human Expectations.” His work focuses on helping leaders understand what remains uniquely human in an increasingly automated world and how organizations can build trust, judgment, creativity and adaptability into their cultures.

Utecht has supported hundreds of organizations, presented to audiences around the globe, contributed to AI guidance initiatives at the state level, and continues to help leaders make sense of rapid change through practical strategies and meaningful conversations.

Based in Seattle, Wash., Jeff believes the future belongs to organizations that learn how to combine technological capability with human wisdom.

Immediately following his keynote, step outside Ballroom A/B from 12-12:30 p.m. to meet Utecht and have copies of his book signed.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Public schools have always inspired strong feelings, but today's polarized climate has intensified the discussion to new extremes. As community institutions, public schools should absolutely be held accountable. Yet too often, genuine conversation is drowned out by misleading narratives and decontextualized statistics that spread quickly through social media, news coverage, and even local board and referendum meetings.

That's why public education advocates must be prepared to respond clearly and confidently. Visit [WASB.org](https://wasb.org) to view our myth-busting guide intended to equip board members, admin-

istrators and community supporters with accurate information and effective talking points in an effort to help set the record straight. Think of these as a foundation — they become most powerful when paired with your district's own data, experiences, and stories. We encourage you to adapt them, expand on them, and use them to strengthen trust in Wisconsin's public schools.

To stay up to date with the campaign, subscribe to the Legislative Update Blog, follow the WASB's social media pages and help us amplify accurate information statewide.

SCHOOL SAFETY TRAINING *Discounted for WASB Members Only*

The WASB is excited to announce a valuable new school safety training opportunity made possible through funding from the WASB Insurance Plan. WASB members can now send up to 12 people per district, including one spot reserved for a board member, to receive hands-on safety training at Northcentral Technical College's Community Safety Simulation Center in Merrill at a substantial discount — more than half off non-member prices.

Using state-of-the-art 360' surround-sound screens and a real-time interactive response approach, individual participants are placed into hyper-realistic, immersive scenarios. From a disgruntled parent in the district office to a fight on a school bus or a student in mental health crisis, each situation unfolds while colleagues watch from an adjacent room.

Debriefing as a group immediately after each scenario brings an appreciation for how a variety of different tactics might have been employed to de-escalate challenging situations.

The cost of this training is normally \$1,500 through the end of calendar year 2026 and will rise to \$2,000 on Jan. 1, 2027.



**SCAN TO
LEARN MORE**

However, through an agreement with Northcentral Technical College, the WASB is able to offer this training opportunity to WASB member districts at the reduced price of \$625 per six-hour session.

This discount will be available to districts who are WASB members at the time they complete the training from June 1, 2026 through Aug. 31, 2027. Up to 12 individuals from a WASB member district can receive this subsidized six-hour long training. A space will be reserved in the training session to allow a school board member to participate if they wish to be part of that group.

While we are only able to provide one subsidized session per district, if a WASB member district wishes to send a second group of administrators, staff or board members to experience this training, they will receive the discounted price of \$1,250 during the period from June 1, 2026, through Aug. 31, 2027.

For more information, contact WASB Director of Member Services Ben Niehaus at bniehaus@wasb.org or 608-512-1706.

WASB/WSAA School Law Conference

SAVE THE DATE! Feb. 24–25, 2027
Hilton Appleton Paper Valley, Appleton

Day at the Capitol

SAVE THE DATE! Mar. 17, 2027
Monona Terrace, Madison

What does it take to keep insurance human?

It takes understanding...

...of local communities and local needs.
...of the importance of relationships.
...of how to keep you thriving.



This is our promise.
Let's achieve it together.
Learn more at emcinsurance.com

emc
INSURANCE

©Employers Mutual Casualty Company 2025. All rights reserved.

TEN-YEAR LOOK BACK

“ I believe the students who are entering our schools will have some of the best learning opportunities of students anywhere in the country. Our educators — teachers, principals and administrators — comprise one of the most qualified workforces anywhere.”

— **Former WASB Executive Director John Ashley** on the strength of Wisconsin's public schools.



◀ The September 2016 issue of **Wisconsin School News** highlights several important themes in Wisconsin education, including innovation, community engagement, leadership and responsible governance. The Barneveld School District demonstrates how a small school system can achieve exceptional success in technology education through hands-on learning, strong community support and diverse career-focused programs. WEA Trust shows how grant funding can support schools in developing innovative initiatives that foster entrepreneurship, cultural learning, student engagement and more. Other articles emphasize the importance of understanding legal boundaries when advocating for school referendums and the critical role trust plays in effective educational leadership.



LOOK AHEAD TO 2027

Wisconsin State Education Convention

JAN. 20–22, 2027
BAIRD CENTER, MILWAUKEE



The Federal Government Plugs Away as Wisconsin Enters Crunch Time on Election Season



Here in Wisconsin, this election season has gripped the attention of citizens statewide. While our attention has been turned inwards by a governor's race that seems to evolve daily and an election for control of the state legislature, the federal government has slowly been plugging away at K–12 education policy and funding. In a time of uncertainty about the future makeup of Wisconsin's government, Wisconsin's education advocates must be aware of federal level funding and policy efforts that may soon be affecting them.

■ Fiscal year 2027 appropriations

The end of the federal 2026 fiscal year is quickly approaching on Sept. 30, and congress does not appear to be on track to pass all 12 annual appropriation bills on time. The process began all the way back in early April, later than normal, when the president released his budget request. This request saw major cuts to K–12 education fund sources, the consolidation of funding streams into block grants, and the shifting of many responsibilities from the Department of Education to other federal agencies. Overall,

the president's budget request proposed K–12 education cuts of roughly \$6.5 billion.

The House has made progress on their education funding proposal, which passed the House appropriations committee but has not yet made it to the House floor. The House proposed deeper overall cuts to federal education programs than the president, although it rejected the consolidation of fund sources into block grants. The Senate has yet to truly begin the appropriations process, as Senate appropriation leaders are still negotiating topline numbers. The Senate normally moves a bit slower as the filibuster ensures at least some of the minority party must agree to the package.

Recognizing that it is becoming increasingly unlikely that Congress will pass an appropriations package in time, the Senate passed a continuing resolution (CR) just before recess that will keep the government funded at current funding levels through Dec. 11. The Senate's version would also block the Office of Budget and Management from enacting changes to the universal grant guidance that have been criticized widely by the public at large and both parties. The House also passed its

own version of a CR that would fund the government at current levels through Dec. 4 with no other provisions. The two chambers will now need to work out the differences in the CR packages when they return in September. President Trump has signaled a willingness to sign a CR passed by Congress.

■ E-Rate program

The Federal Communications Commission has adopted a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) that signals the agencies plans to make substantive changes to E-Rate or potentially attempt to shutter the program entirely. E-Rate funded through a tax on consumers cell phone bills (and one of only a handful of K–12 funding sources not subject to annual congressional appropriations bills) is designed to provide schools with funding to access reliable broadband internet in order to best provide for the technological education of children.

The FCC is executing these changes through the lens of protecting children from excessive screen time. Some changes the agency is contemplating include: establishing requirements for screen time limits

Reliable and affordable internet is certainly not a given, and without federal support, districts may find themselves struggling to afford or maintain the same level of access for their students.

The upcoming general elections present an excellent opportunity to engage candidates on education issues by inviting them to visit your schools or by hosting a candidate forum.

for students, narrowing the program to only send funding to rural school districts, or exploring sunseting the program claiming the program has achieved its original intent.

While many of these goals are laudable, the WASB is concerned about the proposed changes. The FCC, as a regulatory body, does not have expertise in children's mental health, and decisions about children's screen time are local and personal matters that, in our belief, are best determined by school boards with input from communities. Promoting rural access to broadband is crucial, but it should not come at the expense of other school districts. Additionally, most of us know that access to reliable and affordable internet is certainly not a given, and without federal support, districts may find themselves struggling to afford or maintain the same level of access for their students.

The agency has adopted the NPRM, but as of this writing, it has yet to "start the clock" and open the public comment period on the proposed changes. WASB will be keeping an eye on this process as it plays out and encourages members that may be affected by these changes to submit comments to the FCC upon the comment period's opening.

■ Senate committee's work on a number of K-12 related bills

While we don't have enough time to dig into the weeds on all the K-12 bills being debated amongst Congress right now, a number of important pieces of legislation have cleared their respective Senate committees, many on a bipartisan basis. Below is a list of the most relevant

bills we are tracking, all of which have passed committee unless otherwise stated. For more information on these bills, visit congress.gov/quick-search/legislation.

Student data and privacy bills

- SCREEN Act (S. 737) — Committee marked up the bill but did not pass it.
- Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA, S. 1748)
- Youth AI Privacy Act (S. 4199)
- CHATBOT Act (S. 4407);
- Children's Artificial Intelligence Toy Safety Act (S. 5171)

Other legislation

- S. 5046 — Prohibiting the Department of Education from transferring responsibility for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to other agencies.
- The READ Act (S. 4689) — Promotes the science of reading in federal education programs.
- The 21st Century Dyslexia Act (S.3010) — Creates dyslexia as a distinct disability category within IDEA.

■ WASB heads to Washington

The WASB's Government Relations Team and Executive Committee is heading to Washington, D.C., at the end of this month to meet with our congressional delegation and to discuss federal education policy and funding. This trip is part of the Consortium of State School Board Association's Federal Advocacy

Conference. During this trip, we will be reiterating the importance of federal education funding and public education's positive affect on the U.S. citizenry and economy. We encourage you to reach out to us with stories, data or concerns that we can relay to our representatives in Washington on your behalf.

■ Wisconsin's general election

The Aug. 11 partisan primary election is now behind us, and Wisconsin's focus shifts to what is expected to be a highly competitive general election in November. The field is set, with Republican Congressman Tom Tiffany and Democratic Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley advancing in the race for governor. Candidates for congressional, state Senate and Assembly seats are also now determined across the state. Due to recent redistricting and a number of legislative retirements, voters in many areas may see new candidates on their ballots this fall.

This is an excellent opportunity to engage candidates on education issues by inviting them to visit your schools or by hosting a candidate forum. These events help community members better understand how local legislative candidates view the challenges and opportunities facing public education.

If you are interested in hosting a candidate forum, we encourage you to explore the newly updated Advocacy Toolkit available at WASB.org. The Government Relations Team wishes you a successful and productive election season as you navigate the inevitable wave of political advertising in the months ahead. ■



Medication and Field Trips: Navigating School District Responsibilities

School-sponsored field trips provide valuable educational experiences, but they can also present unique challenges related to student medication administration. Field trips are an extension of the school day and, while the location might change, a school district's responsibilities generally do not. Many school boards have adopted policies regarding field trips and might require board approval for certain field trips. School boards should review these policies to ensure that they adequately address questions regarding the administration of medications to students during field trips. Furthermore, when approving field trips, board members might want to verify that school officials have a sufficient plan to ensure students receive their medications while on the trip. Appropriate medication distribution protocols for field trips must account for applicable state and federal laws, including the important role of school nurses in the distribution of medications.

■ Wisconsin's medication administration framework

Pursuant to state law,¹ subject to certain requirements, authorized

school employees, volunteers, and other designated individuals can administer both prescription and non-prescription medications to students. The requirements generally include appropriate parental consent, and practitioner authorization, if necessary. The requirements also include medication storage and packaging requirements, like maintaining medications in their original manufacturer or pharmacy-labeled containers, and completion of any applicable training. This medication administration framework continues to apply even when students leave the school building for school-sponsored activities. In other words, a field trip does not create an exception.

■ Field trips and equal access

Medication administration often intersects with a school district's obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and, in some circumstances, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Students who require medication administration might be entitled to certain protections and accommodations under these laws. For example, these laws generally require school districts to provide students with disabilities with an equal opportu-

nity to participate in non-academic and extracurricular activities, including field trips. Consequently, concerns related to medication administration cannot serve as an automatic basis for excluding a student from a field trip.

Initial field trip planning should include a careful assessment of any medication needs of students attending the trip. Districts should evaluate in advance what supports or accommodations might be necessary to enable students to participate safely in the trip. School nurses should play a central role in this process, helping districts assess student health needs, plan for medication administration, and prepare staff to respond to any medical situations that might arise during the trip. This planning is particularly important because a task that can safely be performed in a school building might require additional consideration when it has to be performed on a hiking trail, at an overnight campsite, or miles from emergency medical services.

■ The difficult question: missing emergency medication

One of the most challenging situations occurs when a student requires

Concerns related to medication administration cannot serve as an automatic basis for excluding a student from a field trip.

When approving field trips, board members might want to verify that school officials have a sufficient plan to ensure students receive their medications while on the trip.

physician-ordered emergency medication, such as an epinephrine delivery system for severe allergic reactions, emergency seizure medication, glucagon, or a rescue inhaler for asthma, and arrives at school without their medication necessary for safe participation in a field trip. Guidance from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (“DPI”) provides that students should be permitted to participate in field trips even when their emergency medication has not been supplied.² In those circumstances, DPI recommends that school nurses work with families and school staff to develop an emergency action plan (“EAP”). The viability of any EAP, however, will depend on a student’s individual needs and the specific circumstances of the trip.

School districts might occasionally encounter circumstances where a school nurse concludes that the absence of the medication creates a risk that cannot be adequately addressed through an EAP. For example, a remote field trip destination might have limited cell-phone coverage, delayed medical service response times, difficult terrain, or other conditions that significantly increase the risk of serious harm if an emergency occurs. In such circumstances, school districts will find themselves balancing competing risks. On one hand, exclusion from the trip could expose a school district to allegations of disability discrimination. On the other hand, allowing participation without available emergency medication could

expose the student to significant health and safety risks. While there is limited authority directly addressing this situation, there are a handful of older non-binding decisions from the Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights that suggest students can be excluded from field trips if the school district believes the student’s participation poses an unacceptable risk to the student’s health or safety.³ Accordingly, school districts should avoid categorical rules and instead conduct individualized assessments. Any determination should be based on the student’s specific medical needs, the nature of any risks, the availability of emergency services, the characteristics of the field trip location, and whether an EAP can adequately mitigate any risks.

■ Practical risk management strategies

Fortunately, school districts might be able to avoid these difficult situations with proactive planning.

First, schools should ensure that field trip planning begins early enough for any medication concerns to be identified. Importantly, school nurses should be notified of all field trips well in advance so they can address student needs.

Second, schools should develop clear communication procedures with families. Field trip forms can remind parents that physician-ordered emergency medications must be provided to the school or carried by the student, if authorized. Follow-up reminders shortly before the

trip can further reduce the likelihood that medication will be forgotten.

Third, when schools become aware that medication might not be available, the school nurse should be informed so they can assess whether an EAP can be safely implemented. If an EAP can be developed, the plan should be communicated to parents in advance of the field trip. If significant limitations exist and an EAP cannot safely address the situation, schools should clearly explain those realities to families. School districts should document discussions with families concerning the risks associated with the absence of emergency medication and the emergency-response measures available on the trip. In these extremely rare situations, districts should also consult with legal counsel to weigh the legal risks in excluding the student against the legal risk in permitting the student to attend notwithstanding that the district cannot design an adequate EAP.

Fourth, where permitted by law and school district policy, schools can consider maintaining an additional supply of certain emergency medications for use during field trips, while ensuring that an adequate supply remains available at the school. Depending on the circumstances, districts might determine that emergency medications should remain in a central location, such as a bus, or be carried by a trained staff member who can remain reasonably accessible to students who might require the medication. While maintaining additional supplies might

DPI recommends that school nurses work with families and school staff to develop an emergency action plan.

involve financial and logistical challenges, doing so could reduce both student safety risks and potential legal exposure.

■ Conclusion

Although challenges can arise when medication administration needs affect a student's participation in a field trip, particularly when emergency medication is unavailable, the best approach is often proactive planning. By involving school nurses

in field trip planning, maintaining open communication with families, and conducting individualized assessments when concerns arise, school districts can better balance their obligations to promote student access while safeguarding student health and safety. ■

This Legal Comment was written by Libbie B. Osaben & Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For a related article, see Wisconsin School News: "Administration of Medication to Pupils" (Apr. 2012).

1. Wis. Stat. § 118.29.
2. Wis. Dept. of Pub. Instruction, Meeting Student Health Needs While on Field Trips: Tool Kit for Wisconsin Schools 7 (2019), https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Meeting_Student_Health_Needs_While_on_Field_Trips_Tool_Kit.pdf.
3. Howard County (MD) Pub. Sch. Sys., 41 IDELR 215, 104 LRP 32079 (OCR 2003); North Hunterdon/Voorhees Reg'l High Sch. Dist., 25 IDELR 165, 25 LRP 4090 (OCR 1996).

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.


ISG

Wisconsin School's Partner For FACILITY ASSESSMENTS



ISG's facility study was an integral step in South Milwaukee's strategic planning. South Milwaukee was provided with a clear, comprehensive, and user friendly 10-year capital improvement plan which will guide our fiscal strategy for years to come.

DAN ARNOLD,
Director of Business Services,
School District of South Milwaukee

Architecture + Engineering + Environmental + Planning | ISGInc.com | [f](#) [X](#) [in](#) [@](#) [v](#)



Educational Services and Products

2026 WASB SERVICE ASSOCIATES

HIGHLIGHTED BUSINESSES are members of the WASB Endorsed Insurance Agency Program.
Learn more at wasb.org/wasb-insurance-plan.

Architecture, Engineering and Construction

► Bray Architects

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

Architecture, interior design, planning, referendum support.

► C.D. Smith, Construction, Inc.

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

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

► CG Schmidt

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

Construction management, general contracting, design-build.

► Epstein Uhen Architects

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

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

► Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, Inc.

800-236-2370
jandres@hoffman.net, hoffman.net

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

► Findorff

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

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

► JP Cullen

608-754-6601
alex.mielke@jpcullen.com
jpcullen.com

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

► Miron Construction Co., Inc.

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

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

► Performance Services

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

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

► Plunkett Raysich Architects LLP

414-359-3060
skramer@prarch.com, prarch.com
Architectural and interior design services.

► Scherrer Construction Company, Inc.

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

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

► The Boldt Company

920-225-6216
theboldtcompany.com

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

► VJS Construction Services

262-542-9000
ccoggins@vjscs.com, vjscs.com
A top-10 construction management, general contracting and design-build firm, with over \$1B in K12 education project experience.

Computer Hardware, Software, Consulting

► Skyward, Inc.

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

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

Financing, Banking, Consulting

► Baird Public Finance

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

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

► PTMA Financial Solutions

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

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

Insurance and Employee Benefits

► Community Insurance Corporation

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

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

► EMC Insurance Companies

262-717-3900, emcins.com
Phil.R.Lucca@EMCIns.com
Property and casualty insurance.

► Foster & Foster Consulting Actuaries, Inc.

262-522-6415, foster-foster.com
Sarah.plohocky@foster-foster.com
Actuarial and employee benefit consulting services.

► M3 Insurance Solutions, Inc

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

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

► National Insurance Services of Wisconsin, Inc.

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

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

► R&R Insurance

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

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

► TRICOR, Inc.

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

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

► UnitedHealthcare

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

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

► USI Insurance Services

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

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

► WEA Member Benefits

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

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

Leadership Consulting

► Excel Leadership, LLC

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

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

Legal Services

► Buelow Vetter Buikema Olson & Vliet LLC

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

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

► Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c.

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

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

► von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

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

For more than 50 years, von Briesen has delivered client-driven results to school districts throughout Wisconsin. Our team's depth and breadth of experience allows us to understand the unique challenges facing school districts today and help our clients become true leaders and innovators.

► Weld Riley, s.c.

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

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

School/Community Research

► School Perceptions, LLC

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

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



SUPPORTING, PROMOTING AND ADVOCATING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION



UPCOMING PROGRAMS



2026 FALL REGIONAL MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS

September - October | Dates and locations vary by region

For more information, turn to page 24.

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