

2020 CONVENTION RECAP



# WISCONSIN SchoolNews

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Thursday keynote speaker  
**Yong Zhao** at the  
99th State Education  
Convention



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ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE were written by freelance writers Anne Davis and Joe Quick  
and contributed by convention presenters as noted.

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## THE GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS

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## As Centennial Dawns, Reminders of the Power of Connection

Thank you to everyone who attended and participated in the 99th Wisconsin State Education Convention in January! We hope you found the experience informative and rejuvenating.

My biggest takeaway from the convention was the importance of meaningful connections with and among our students. Each of our general session keynotes wove this theme through their presentations.

On Wednesday, kickoff keynote Scott McLeod showed us how technology is providing more opportunities to connect students around the globe. Moreover, because these students are doing work that's valuable to their communities, they pay more attention and pull greater meaning from it.

The next day, Yong Zhao asked board members to rethink the connections between school and success. He asked us to rely less on test scores and more on finding greatness in each child.

Shane Feldman on Friday made forging connections among students — with their peers as well as with adults — the crux of his answer to the struggles too common among teens. His effort to productively link students with clubs, groups and peers led to the global nonprofit Count Me In.

It should be a surprise to none of us that even one meaningful relationship, whether with a teacher, peer or other mentor, can remake a student's school experience. I challenge each of you to take a close

look at the culture and climate in your schools. Is your leadership fostering an environment where every one of your students has the ability to make meaningful connections within the school and within the larger community? What can you do to support your teachers and administrators as they work to expand these efforts? Your leadership matters.

I would also like to thank the students at the convention who reminded us why we do what we do.

The Tomah High School video team diligently captured the substance and feel of the sessions while serving as excellent ambassadors for their home school. Students from the Kettle Moraine, Kenosha, Southern Door County and Union Grove UHS districts demonstrated cutting-edge innovations in the School Fair.

Student artists showed us creative and technically impressive interpretations of the convention's theme, "Expanding Your Vision."

Three student groups — the Richland Center Symphonic Band, the Beloit Memorial High School Jazz Orchestra and the Platteville High School Blue Notes — treated attendees to professional-caliber performances. And students joined presenters in several sessions to share stories of what worked for them in their home districts.

This past January's convention was our 99th State Education Convention, which means we're closing in on a hundred years — not just for the convention but for the Wisconsin

Association of School Boards as well. On Feb. 16, 1921, the first meeting of what would become the WASB was held at the State Capitol in Madison. In recognition of the upcoming centennial anniversary of the association, we'll be featuring a decade of highlights from the association's past in each issue of the *Wisconsin School News* over the upcoming year, starting with the 1920s in this issue. We hope you enjoy this look back.

Thank you to those districts that have contributed images and video for our centennial commemoration thus far. We're looking forward to sharing them in the magazine, on our website and at the 100th State Education Convention next January. It's not too late to share if you haven't already. Do you have copies of teacher contracts from decades ago? The program from when your football team went to state? School-aged pictures from a famous alumnus? Send us digital copies so we can add them to our collection to make it as diverse and interesting as possible.

Finally, we'll soon be kicking off the 2020 round of governance and leadership training events with the New Board Member Gatherings in April, governance workshops in May and August, and the Summer Leadership Institute in July. Watch your inbox and the WASB website for more information. We look forward to seeing you at these events! ■

It should be a surprise to none of us that even one meaningful relationship, whether with a teacher, peer or other mentor, can remake a student's school experience.

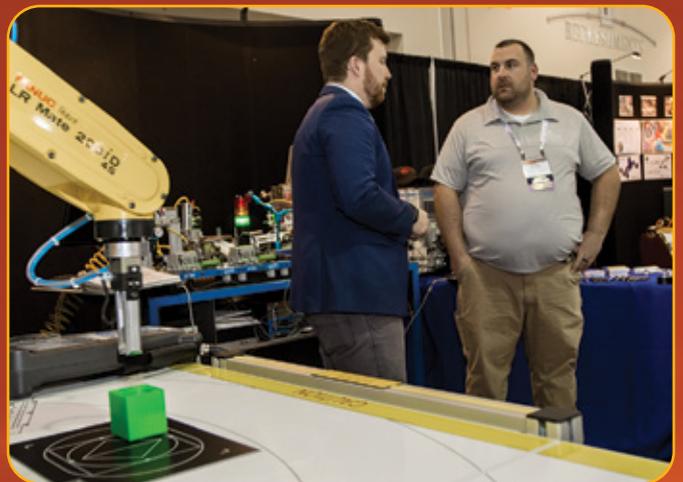
# EXPANDING YOUR Vision

School leaders from around the state gathered in Milwaukee in January for the 99th State Education Convention. This special issue of **Wisconsin School News** looks back on the many sessions, keynote speakers and special events from this year's convention.

**Holly Hoffman** entertained and inspired attendees at the WASB Breakfast, which was sponsored by The Insurance Center. Hoffman was the last woman standing on Season 21 of CBS' hit reality show "Survivor." Through that experience and others throughout her life, she was inspired to share her message of positivity, determination and confidence.



Members dug into school finance at a pre-convention workshop hosted by the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials and the Department of Public Instruction.



The **School Fair**, sponsored by Sodexo, showcased student projects from the Kettle Moraine, Kenosha, Southern Door and Union Grove UHS districts.





**Convention attendees** took advantage of the opportunity to meet with vendors, discuss their services and, in some cases, sample their work.



The **Richland Center High School Symphonic Band** opened the first general session of the State Education Convention.



**Convention attendees** had dozens of the latest education leadership books to peruse at the convention bookstore.



The award-winning **Beloit Memorial High School Jazz Orchestra** performed in front of school leaders during the general session on Thursday, Jan. 23.

# Upper-Level Thinking

## THE NEED FOR AUTHENTIC LEARNING



Scott McLeod | Keynote



There's probably not a parent who hasn't heard their child utter, "I'm bored!" Dr. Scott McLeod told State Education Convention attendees that the problem is deeper than American households and we've been warned about creeping boredom in school for over a century. For the most part, students are disengaged.

"We've known about (student passivity) since 1916, when John Dewey, the famous educator, reported back then that this same problem persisted," lamented McLeod, a University of Colorado-Denver professor. "This is what we call a structural problem. Millions of students, year after year, are bored out of their minds."

He said a recent Gallup poll of nearly one million school-aged children indicated that about 75 percent of fifth-grade respondents said they are engaged in their learning. By 11th and 12th grade, the engagement falls to 32 and 34 percent, respectively.

"What we're hearing is that students are really struggling to find meaning in the learning tasks we put before them," McLeod said.

He gave several illustrations of students engaged in authentic learning — but all out of the classroom. Martha, a 9-year-old in Scotland, was

dissatisfied with her school lunches and took pictures of the lunches to post on her blog titled "Never Seconds," where she critiqued her lunch offerings. Soon, other students from around the world shared their experiences. Martha won Scotland's "Public Campaigner of the Year" award, raising over \$220,000 for a food kitchen in Malawi for the food-insecure.

"All at age 9. She had a platform and a purpose and caused a ruckus," McLeod said. "(Students) have powerful networks and powerful learning opportunities at home and then they come to school. We say, primarily, 'sit, be quiet, listen to the teacher, read your textbook.' We wonder why they're disengaged. We know why they're disengaged: they've tasted the honey — and then they come to us.

"Why don't we set up our middle-schoolers to create apps and other solutions that address real-world problems? Why don't we have kids creating their own aircraft and drones? Why don't we have kids working on complex problems? We can't just live on the lowest level of the thinking continuum."

College, career and life readiness are three standard measures of success in education. As work becomes global, will students in the United

States be able to compete? And what skills do employers need for tomorrow's workers? McLeod described the future challenges in stark terms — offshoring, outsourcing and automating jobs dictate job prospects.

"If you're engaged in deep, higher-order-level thinking work or interpersonal work, the number of jobs available to you has gone up steadily over the last several decades while manual and repetitive jobs have declined steadily," McLeod said. "Upper-level thinking skills will allow students to thrive in the workforce of today and tomorrow."

Unfortunately, McLeod maintains that 80-85 percent of what we ask students to do is low-level thinking. He highlighted several Wisconsin schools — Kettle Moraine, Milwaukee, Appleton, Florence, Middleton-Cross Plains and Sun Prairie — that are thriving by using technology and curriculum that demands higher-order thinking skills and practical problem-solving.

McLeod implored convention attendees to discuss what they want for their community's schools and what they're willing to do to get there, saying "I think we can do better and I hope you'll join me in this work." ■

**"WHAT WE'RE HEARING IS THAT STUDENTS ARE REALLY STRUGGLING to find meaning in the learning tasks we put before them."**

# Developing Diversity

## AS A KEY TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Yong Zhao | Keynote



One size does not fit all, especially in education. That was the message author and education researcher Yong Zhao brought to delegates attending the State Education Convention during his keynote address. Using humor and frequent dives into data, Zhao warned that the current emphasis on making education about raising standardized test scores and preparing all students equally for life after high school will not work.

“Our children are different, what they are born with and what they experience,” Zhao said. “Even with the same experiences, they will be different.”

With technology — especially the rise of artificial intelligence — constantly changing workplace needs and expectations, Zhao said “this readiness concept is a lie.”

“There is no one set of skills that is right for all jobs,” he added. “You can’t be ready for something that doesn’t exist.”

Zhao is a Foundations Distinguished Professor in the School of Education at the University of Kansas, with an appointment in the School of Business. He is also the Global Chair Professor of Education at East China Normal University, a global chair professor at the University of Bath in England and a professional fellow at the Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy at Victoria University in Australia. He has published more than 100 articles and 30 books, including his most recent, “What Works May Hurt: Side Effects in Education.”

He began his keynote by noting that public school boards were a

uniquely American institution and praising school board members for their work on behalf of children.

He went on to discuss the lack of improvement in American public education — as measured on standardized tests in comparison with other countries — despite a long list of initiatives, such as the No Child Left Behind Act.

“We basically have not improved no matter what we have done,” Zhao said, adding that this phenomenon started in the 1960s. “American education is not in decline and it is not getting worse. It’s always been bad.”

He then took issue with evidence-based improvement initiatives that rely on data to prove that they work. There often seems to be short-term successes for many children, but those can come at the cost of creating long-term problems. Zhao believes that emphasizing the mechanics of reading can cause children to lose interest in the pure pleasure of picking up a book.

Although programs may lead to increased achievement in some students, there are usually others left behind. Zhao compared this to side effects in medicine. One drug may work for many patients while causing health problems for others.

“There is no panacea. There is not one thing that works for all children,” Zhao said. “In education, we cannot afford to hurt anyone.”

Despite America’s dismal performance on international tests, the country retains its place as one of the most innovative in the world. Zhao believes that is because the traditional system of local control over curric-

ulum, programming and funding in schools has allowed individual creativity and talent to flourish. He worries that the emphasis on catching up to the rest of the world on test scores will suppress that.

“We define children by one test, and that’s no good,” he said.

In the face of a world that is increasingly defined by artificial intelligence, creativity is now more essential than ever.

“Today is different. To beat the human machines, we need to be more human,” Zhao said. “Every child is uniquely different. Let’s shift our thinking to, ‘I’ll help you grow into who you should be.’”

Going forward, Zhao suggested that education should celebrate diversity and treat each child as an individual rather than hold them all to the same standards. He is encouraged by the work of the Mastery Transcript Consortium, an organization that is encouraging colleges and universities to accept students based on measures outside of test scores and grades.

Zhao ended his keynote by blaming the rise of mental health issues among students on schools’ efforts to suppress individuality, leaving many students living “a life of no meaning in our schools.”

“Children need to do something that is meaningful to be happy,” he said. “Our children need to be uniquely great, but they need to be valuable.”

Such changes are challenging, but Zhao believes they can be accomplished. “It’s possible,” he told the attendees. “It can be done, but it needs policy members like you to do it.” ■

# Finding Meaning

## IN AN ISOLATING AGE

Shane Feldman | Keynote



Seeking a transfer to a school where he'll fit in and find friends, a lonely ninth-grader walks into his school counselor's office. There, he finds a way out from his isolation, if not in the way he expects, and is set on his path toward bringing young people together on a massive scale.

Up to that point, Shane Feldman, a child of divorce, had spent much of his childhood moving from place to place. To the boy, it seemed like a series of grand adventures filled with potential. But to the adolescent, a move that put him in a new school on the eve of his freshman year fills him with dread.

On his first day of school, Shane conjures an optimistic mindset, but it dies as the lunch bell rings. As he walks into the hall, he sees hundreds of students arranged in circles, familiar with each other but alien to him. His stomach sinks, and he calls his mother and begs to be picked up. She gives him a pep talk, but the emotional weight he carries with him every day only gets heavier. It's this weight that drives him into the counselor's office seeking a new school, a do-over.

Instead of giving him a transfer, the counselor asks Shane about his hobbies, his interests. Then he hands the teen a slip of paper with the names of students and clubs who share them. Shane plays along to get that transfer, and he signs up for the radio team and other clubs. Slowly, students recognize him and seek out his company. He starts to wake up excited to go to school.

Soon, his attention turns to the many students who weren't involved

in any groups. Having been given a lifeline, Shane wanted to toss it to others. He hoped to attract 50 students to an assembly to connect them with clubs and activities. More than 380 came. "We were offering something that was entirely student-led," he told convention attendees, a chance to "connect in ways they weren't connecting."

This pilot project became the kernel of Count Me In, a global volunteering effort that has connected more than 10 million students in more than 100 countries. "And it all started in my high school locker," Feldman says.

Several years passed, and Feldman continued to work with teens. He saw teens changing — they used new apps, tossed around new slang. He began to feel as if he were falling out of touch, even becoming a fraud. It didn't help much that he could easily pass for a teenager — he still can today, at age 25 — and school secretaries would often mistake him for a student. And that gave him an idea. He went back to high school.

With six other young adults, Feldman spent more than a year undercover in several high schools, fully embedded as a student. Though the principals knew who they were, their fellow students and teachers did not. The A&E Network followed them through those schools, documenting the often-hidden lives of teenagers. The face that teens showed the adults in their lives were often dramatically different than their reality.

He expected differences among rural, urban and suburban schools

but didn't find many. "The truth is, almost every school felt the same. So many of these challenges truly are universal," he says. He befriended students and tried to nudge them onto more productive paths.

For the teachers, school board members and others who work with and for children, the lesson was to create authentic connections that can pierce a teenager's facade of indifference or hostility.

Feldman had three key pieces of advice. First, walk your talk. Say what you're going to do, then follow through. Second, tune in. Be present physically and emotionally. The length of time you talk with a teen matters less than how well you can listen. Finally, be a mentor. Students with mentors are significantly less likely to skip classes and more likely to get better grades and go to college, he said. "Mentorship can be as simple as 10 seconds of extraordinary listening," Feldman said.

After being asked to elaborate on the disconnect between teachers and students, Feldman used an example of a teacher who relied too heavily on students to help with technology. While the classroom interactions may have appeared positive, Feldman pointed out that adults didn't hear the students' hallway conversations about that teacher. Since he hadn't taken the time to learn basic technology skills, students readily dismissed the teacher as someone who would take the time to help them.

Feldman ended his talk with a brief piece of self-care advice, "You don't need to set yourself on fire to keep your students warm." ■

# Governor Evers sums up year one, looks ahead



In his second convention address as governor, Tony Evers rallied a familiar audience and returned to themes of the potential and challenges of public education. Approaching the podium to a standing ovation, Evers joked that he wished the Legislature would give him that kind of welcome.

He told attendees that he was urged by some to veto the recent state budget, which increased funding for education but not by as much as advocates wanted. He said he seriously

considered a veto but that the budget represented “the best we could do” and “set a high bar for the future.”

Evers said the public is on the side of public education. He cited a 2019 poll that asked Wisconsinites to choose between increasing K-12 spending and reducing property taxes. More than half, 55 percent, of people preferred to spend more on schools.

He also spoke directly to education leaders from across the entire state. “Rural prosperity flows right

through those rural schools,” he said, citing their impact on employment and as centers for recreation and dialogue.

Evers also called on attendees to get involved with the election of the next state superintendent of education. Carolyn Stanford Taylor, who was appointed to the post in 2019, said last month that she would not run for election next year.

“I just encourage everybody in this room to be as active as you can be in this election,” he said. ■



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# State Superintendent's Address

State Superintendent  
**Carolyn Stanford Taylor**

**Editor's note:** Below are State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor's remarks to the Wisconsin State Education Convention on Jan. 22, 2020. The following is edited for space constraints. To view the speech in its entirety, please visit: [bit.ly/36K7M7D](http://bit.ly/36K7M7D).



I have a year and a half left on my term. I will not be serving it quietly. Our equity mission is to ensure every student has what they need to learn when they need it in order to be successful.

As board members and administrators, your role is so very critical in this work. I travel the state and see the inspiring work you are doing to create these systems and supports for young people as they chart their path forward. There is more work we can and need to do to improve these systems, whether we are talking career pathways for students or regional supports for school safety, like the Wisconsin Safe & Healthy Schools Center.

I'd like to take this moment to talk about our five priority areas moving forward.

**1. Effective instruction:** Each student is taught by teachers using materials and practices that are high-quality, evidenced-based and culturally responsive.

**2. School and instructional leadership:** Each student's needs are met in schools led by high-quality, effective educators.

**3. Family and community engagement:** Each student attends a school that authentically engages with families, communities and libraries.

**4. Safe and supported students:** Each student learns in an environment that promotes social, emotional and physical well-being and removes barriers to learning.

**5. Meaningful relationships with students:** Each student has a meaningful connection with at least one caring adult in their school.

I truly believe the changes we are making within our systems today will move us closer toward realizing these goals for each and every student who attends school in Wisconsin.

While I am proud of the budget

Gov. Tony Evers signed last year, we now need to do the hard work of building on that budget. We must continue to communicate what we need to meet the needs of all of our students.

In our meetings and conversations, I heard you express loud and clear the need to have resources that are usable and sustainable. I will be focusing on special education, early childhood education, mental health and opportunities for additional learning time, such as after-school programs. I will continue to advocate for an increase of at least 60 percent reimbursement rate for special education costs. Supporting special education will allow us to better serve all students.

I am also deeply concerned about the unmet behavioral and mental health needs of our students. You see this every day. We need more social workers, psychologists, nurses and counselors in our schools to help our young people choose appropriate

**“WE KNOW THAT EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS ...  
 and has the most significant impact on [a child's] future development.”**

responses to their stressors.

We know that early childhood education matters. Studies show the early years of a child's life is when education has the most significant impact on their future development.

We have successes. Twenty years ago, in the 1999-2000 school year, there were only 115 districts with four-year-old kindergarten. Now, almost every school district has a program.

I'm happy to say that as a result of work we did with the Department of Children and Families, the state was awarded \$10 million to strengthen the state's early childhood system. Building on this success will be a necessary part of our strategy to close the achievement gap.

We have workforce needs. The role of teachers has never been more important, and the expectations have never been higher. Each of us has a teacher that made all the difference at

a critical moment in life. They are the foundation in our system.

I'm worried, however, about the difficulty in attracting and keeping teachers. We have been working with the University of Wisconsin System on a task force focused on this problem and supporting school districts' grow your own programs and Educators Rising student groups. We have revised our licensing system to respond to the needs we heard and are examining additional steps we can take.

Our outcomes, especially in reading, are not where we want them to be. We have spent a significant amount of time analyzing the reading data, looking at the research on reading, and examining the instructional materials being used and the alignment with state standards.

We are making changes. We believe it is important that the role of explicit and systemic phonics is

present in the teaching of foundational reading skills. These changes will be reflected over the coming months in the supports and best practices we provide.

As locally elected school board members, your leadership is key, and the appreciation and support you show to educators is needed. This is exemplified by the teachers of the year who are being honored today. I am asking you to also think about work we can do together to provide additional solutions and supports.

Each of us has a role to play in ensuring every child has the supports they need to graduate college, career and life ready.

I encourage you to continue telling us your ideas on how we can make improvements. Continue speaking up, speaking out and communicating the incredible accomplishments of our students and schools. ■

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# Equity Work Is Not for the Faint of Heart



Dan Nerad, WASB consultant (far left), facilitates a discussion among minority school board members including (left to right) David Miller of the Menominee Indian School Board, Tony Baez of the Milwaukee School Board and Andrew McKinney of the Monona Grove School Board.

**Several sessions** at the State Education Convention addressed equity — what it means, how it can be provided and what board members can do to promote and attain it. This article highlights the insights of the various presenters.

**M**arquise Roberson's odds for success were long. "All the cards were stacked against me,"

he says, noting his mom dropped out of school after getting pregnant at 16 years old, and his dad didn't have a high school diploma. "The people I saw were either selling drugs, playing a sport, rapping or running the streets."

Indeed, of Roberson's neighborhood group of six kids, two are dead and two are in prison. Only Marquise and another found success.

Given these circumstances, how is it that he succeeded? A 2002 graduate of Milwaukee Riverside University High School, Roberson now works with Seattle-based Equal Opportunity Schools.

"It was the impact of adults I've had in my life that always saw way more in me than I ever saw in myself," Roberson maintains. "They always told me I could."

"Equity work is not for the faint of heart. It takes courageous conversations and courage to lead at this level," argued Nicholas Wahl, a regional

director of strategic initiatives at Equal Opportunity Schools. "Equality is giving everyone the same thing; equity is giving all of our kids what they need to succeed. Giving everyone a pair of shoes is equal; giving everyone a pair that fits them is equity."

## ■ Challenges

"By far the hardest work in your school — if it's like my school — is the mindset work of your teachers. If you don't change that, the rest isn't going to matter," said Verona High School principal Pam Hammen, discussing the district's efforts to place more students of color in International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement classes. "When we first started this work in the 2013-14 school year, I would hear things like, 'We're just setting them up to fail.' There are a lot of things we had to do — like professional development — to change the mindset of our staff, but that is key."

Discussion during one session raised the subject of talking about difficult issues, similar to what

Hammen noted with her staff. Stephan Harrison, an Appleton assistant superintendent, thought board members should start by becoming aware of the issues.

"Sometimes boards don't like going outside their comfort zone," Harrison said. "This might be uncomfortable for some board members."

"If we can't talk about the elephant in the room, we're not going to get past it," an audience member offered. "Get offended, get over it and let's get to work on it together."

## ■ The Board's Role

In a session where panel members offered personal experience related to equity, Menominee Indian School District board president David Miller pulled no punches talking about his people's history.

"We had a language and a way of doing things," Miller said. "But they took our children from their homes and put them in boarding schools. They were beaten if they spoke their language. They destroyed the family structure. Our children — in this state and throughout the United States — need to know what happened to the indigenous people in this state."

Tony Baez, the vice president of Milwaukee Public Schools, believes that "Everything we do in our schools has to be done with an equity lens. Equity is building possibilities. As school board members, if we don't have a mission to use mechanisms of policy and everything else, we're

failing in our obligation to children.”

Monona Grove Board President Andrew McKinney runs an after-school program and attempts to connect with youth on a more personal level. He talks to students of color about their history.

“Maybe this is uncomfortable for some people, but it’s true. The rich white man who wrote these history books put in some people of color in the books, but not a lot about what is important,” McKinney said. “I broke the cycle, but I still have challenges because of my skin color and that’s not right.”

### Next Steps

In a subsequent conversation about equity policies, Brown Deer Superintendent Deb Kerr explained that, “We have an equity policy and equity ‘non-negotiables’ developed with our teachers, teacher-leaders, administrative team and school board. It took us four years to develop that policy.” She elaborated on how buy-in is needed from all partners before finalizing the policy. “It is hard work. Equity does not mean equal. Equity means giving kids what they need. You have to believe it and make decisions based on that belief. We can do this, but we have to be committed.”

In the Oregon School District, the board adopted five district values, one being educational equity. The board provided an opportunity to discuss what equity means and receives an annual update on the district’s goals and progress related to equity. Teachers have a variety of learning opportunities on the topic.

“Having that statement allows us to put the resources behind equity and say ‘this is important,’” an audience member told attendees.

School districts have had limited success in attracting teachers of color into their schools. Stoughton school board member Yolibeth Rangel-FitzGibbon bemoans that Stoughton has only one African-American teacher in a district with 3,000 students.

“That’s one of the things we really need right now, attracting and

retaining teachers of color,” she said.

Encouraging students to enter teaching isn’t enough, stressed an audience member who said “the barriers I’ve seen presented are unbelievable” while working as an adjunct professor with students of color seeking teacher certification. The audience members suggested similar impediments to success that confront students also confront teachers.

Marquise Roberson gives a high degree of import to teachers in his life who cared about his success. No special seminar. No goal statements. They just simply cared about him. He talks about Thomas Wilde, his high school social studies teacher who set high expectations.

“Most of my teachers just saw me as an athlete who would get into a college. ‘No need to push you, you’ll be fine,’” Roberson said. “Mr. Wilde really treated us as thinkers. He forced us to think outside of how we were usually learning.” Wilde pushed Roberson to take an AP class and wouldn’t

take no for an answer.

“It ended up being the best decision I ever made,” said Roberson, who took three more AP classes in high school and eventually became the first in his family to graduate from college, which encouraged his siblings to succeed. “Because of a handful of teachers, my trajectory changed drastically — not only my trajectory, but that of my family. AP or IB classes isn’t a magic bullet, but it opens the possibilities of what that person can be.”

“Everyone wants equity,” McKinney said. “No one should be empowered to say you can’t have it. We’re elected to help our school districts get better at (equity) and it’s not fair to these kids — of any color — if we don’t. We need to come together, build equity and give them the opportunity to learn together to be a better state and a better country.”

“This is a long journey,” Rangel-FitzGibbon said, “We have to change the way people think and be more intentional in our work — this isn’t just going to be for five or 10 years.” ■

“GIVING EVERYONE A PAIR OF SHOES IS EQUAL,  
giving everyone a pair that fits them is equity.”

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# Remaining Engaged With Your Community When Crisis Hits

The Barron and Baraboo school districts shared their recent experiences navigating crises while others discussed the steps they've taken to build community goodwill as an ongoing practice.

For the Baraboo School District, it was a perfect storm. A provocative photo turned into a viral social media post that drew worldwide anger, hatred and condemnation upon a district and a community that were surprised and unprepared.

The photo, of course, was of high school boys dressed for prom standing in front of a courthouse appearing to give a Nazi salute. Largely unseen, the photo suddenly surfaced six months after it was taken when someone — unknown to this day — put it online. It became a sensation, drawing views, shares and comments from around the world.

Baraboo Superintendent Lori Mueller detailed the resulting “nightmare” during a presentation at the State Education Convention, sharing the steps officials took to contain, acknowledge and move on from the incident as well as the many lessons learned throughout the process.

“We live this day by day,” Mueller said. “What happened in Baraboo can happen in any community because kids do things.”

Baraboo is a smaller school district with little racial diversity among residents and where 50 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The 2018-19 school year was going well until the photo was posted in November. Mueller,



Lori Mueller, Superintendent, Baraboo School District

who was alerted to the post by an email from a former student, immediately contacted the school board president and police chief.

Mueller issued a short press release, saying the district would pursue any and all action possible against the students. However, this only inflamed the situation. The district started drawing criticism from First Amendment supporters as well as those condemning the photo and blaming the district. The district’s phones were ringing off the hook and its Facebook page was overwhelmed with posts. The district received 4,000 emails that first day.

The district’s lawyers advised Mueller that the district could do

nothing about the photo legally. She also researched policies to restrict media access to district buildings. Because of constant online comments, including death threats against district staff, the district’s social media sites were deactivated. They were rebranded and reactivated at the start of the 2019-20 school year.

After tracking down as much information as she could about the photo and calling in outside public relations help from the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators and the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association, Mueller switched her focus from the intent of the photo to its impact on the community and the school.

## “WHAT HAPPENED IN BARABOO CAN HAPPEN IN ANY COMMUNITY because kids do things.” — Lori Mueller, Superintendent, Baraboo School District

Subsequent communication was directed at families while Mueller made protecting students her first priority. The police department and staff from the Wisconsin Department of Justice’s Office of School Safety provided security for district staff and events.

Two days after the photo was posted, there was a meeting of city officials, faith leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, school board members and school officials. They set up three events for the community to help process its feelings about the situation and take measures to highlight tolerance going forward. Mueller was the only district spokesperson — the school board supported her, but all members agreed not to talk to the media.

At the first event, Baraboo Gathers, Mueller talked about what was known about the incident and urged the community to condemn the photo, forgive the students and move on. At the second event, Baraboo Talks, people gathered in small groups and took part in facilitated discussions to process their feelings and reactions.

The final event, Baraboo Acts, celebrated a community action plan for moving forward. There were short-term events, such as a student trip to the Holocaust museum in Skokie, Ill. and a presentation from a Holocaust survivor as well as long-term plans including an equity audit. Equity was also listed as a core direction in the district’s strategic plan.

The community engagement paid off, with community support for a \$41.7 million building referendum that passed five months after the photo incident. Mueller ended her talk at the convention by sharing eight tips for districts facing similar situations:

1. Keep an open line of communication with stakeholders
2. Seek outside help
3. Prioritize student safety
4. Consider legal options and duties
5. Lean on the community’s past and present engagement
6. Deal with the impact versus the intent
7. Students are eager supporters
8. Don’t forget self-care

### ■ Responding to a tragedy

Communication and engagement with the community were also critical when the Barron Area School District dealt with its own tragedy

— the kidnapping of student Jayme Closs and the murder of her parents. Barron District Administrator Diane Tremblay joined Jeff Nelson, who is the Barron school board president and chief investigator for the Barron County Sheriff’s Department, at the convention to discuss how they retained community support during the crisis, especially during the search for Jayme, who eventually escaped on her own.

The summer before the incident, Barron school officials took part in a live shooter drill put on by local law enforcement. Tremblay said the drill helped them refine their communication plan and be better prepared to talk to the media. The district also participated in a workshop on media relations, which provided information that became useful during the tragedy.



Diane Tremblay, Superintendent, Barron Area School District

“We were ready, we were prepared for anything,” Tremblay said, advising other districts to follow Barron’s lead. “As much as we would like to close our eyes to it, unfortunately evil exists in our world. It’s going to happen.”

The district initially decided to keep media off the premises, which resulted in an adversarial relationship. Tremblay advised her audience to learn from her mistakes by not

community needed a way to process the traumatic events. Kidnap survivor Elizabeth Smart came to a community gathering and helped the community see the need to move forward by reminding them that was what Jayme wanted, too.

And she has. After graduating from eighth grade last summer, Jayme is now a freshman in high school, participating in extracurriculars and socializing with friends.

someone else will,” said Wrightstown Superintendent Carla Buboltz. “Our goal is to inspire and be inspiring for our students, our family and our community.”

Before Wrightstown hired Social-School4EDU, the district had eight separate Facebook accounts, making it hard for parents to know where to go for information. There is now a single Facebook page that is updated daily by the district’s account manager.

The district also rebranded itself with a new logo, began using “Wrightstown Strong” as a hashtag on all social media posts and other communication, and built a presence on Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.

Wrightstown uses its website to post information that is “static” and needs to be available for a longer period of time. The power of social media, Buboltz said, is that it comes directly to parents who live on their phones all day.

The district has a single email address for all social media accounts while staff members are encouraged to submit pictures and information. #SocialSchool4Edu account manager Liz Zimmerman monitors the email and prepares at least two social media posts per day. She also has set “hot bed” times to post when parents are most likely to be on their phones — first thing in the morning, noon, after-school pickup time and early evening.

The district now receives regular reports showing the usage patterns of its social media accounts. In the 17 months since Wrightstown transitional to a single Facebook account, fans of the district Facebook page have grown from 450 to over 1,400.

By using social media, the district gets to share its events with community members who no longer have children in school. A particular favorite is Throwback Thursday, where old pictures of students and school events are posted. This leads to lots of comments and even draws in people who aren’t following the district on social media.

**“SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE ICING ON THE CAKE.**

**It’s not the cake.”** — Heidi Feller, SocialSchool4EDU

getting physical with the media and by not telling them they can’t do things they are legally allowed to do. She found the more successful approach was asking the media to consider the family’s emotions.

The district worked with law enforcement to keep hope for Jayme’s return alive, and community support was overwhelming. After she was found, dozens of area districts sent videos to Barron to celebrate.

Even as Jayme healed and prepared to return to school, the com-

**Strengths of social media**

Although Baraboo’s story illustrates the negative power of social media, it can be used as a positive force for school districts to share their stories with the community. The Wrightstown School District recently partnered with a national firm that manages social media for school districts. Company and district representatives shared their story during a convention presentation.

“If we don’t share our story,



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Other posts showcase district staff — not just teachers or aides but custodians and kitchen workers who aren't always recognized. Posts also share pictures of student artwork, field trips and extracurricular competitions.

The district has just started experimenting with using social media to post job openings for support staff and substitutes. Reaction has been positive. "There's nowhere else where we could reach 2,000 people in one post," Buboltz said.

By sharing positive information about the district and connecting the community with the schools, social media can be a powerful tool to build goodwill that can be leveraged when the district needs support during a crisis or when going to referendum.

"Social media is the icing on the cake. It's not the cake," said Heidi Feller, chief inspirational officer of SocialSchool4EDU.

### ■ Face-to-face communication

Despite the power of social media, sometimes the best way to connect with your community is face to face. That was the message delivered by representatives from three rural school districts — Howard-Suamico, Mineral Point and Sauk Prairie — and Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance Executive Director Kim Kaukl.

It is critical for school district representatives to develop a relationship with their legislators in order to understand the issues facing the district, Kaukl said. The Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance arranges for legislators to meet with community members and answer questions. The organization holds an education academy for new legislators to learn from school district representatives about the school funding formula and its impact.

It's also important to invite legislators to school districts for special events, as well as everyday events, so they can see public education in action.

Referendum campaigns take a lot of communication. Before a referendum is considered, a district should



*Damian LaCroix, Superintendent, Howard-Suamico School District*

invest heavily in an overall communication plan to build a relationship with its community, said Joelle Doye, communications director at the Mineral Point School District.

Damian LaCroix, superintendent of the Howard-Suamico School District, discussed the importance of referendum task forces and suggested inviting residents who might be opposed to join. He recommended changing the traditional format of community information sessions from presentations by school officials to open forums in the community to allow residents to ask questions in a more comfortable setting.

Speakers touted social media as a way to build relationships, but also stressed building a good rapport with local print and media outlets. LaCroix regularly feeds positive stories to local media. He also believes it's critical to make sure that staff members know what is happening in the district.

Jeff Wright, superintendent of the

Sauk Prairie School District, suggested bringing community members into schools to meet with students and teach them about the "soft skills" they need to succeed in the business world. He also meets regularly with faith leaders and law enforcement representatives to develop relationships that might be needed during a crisis.

Wright recommended taking students into the community to volunteer. His high school holds a community service day for students every two years.

Overall, the speakers recommended building genuine relationships in the community and holding ongoing conversations that involve listening for understanding, rather than just responding.

"It's always easier to ask for something when you have an existing relationship," Wright said. "There will always be a need to ask for community support — whether it's a building referendum or a crisis." ■

# Fiscal Fluency, One Budget Season at a Time



**If you were learning to garden,** you'd probably think about it in terms of the seasons, from winter planning to fall harvest. A district's budget is a little like that. A budget and a garden are both cyclical, meaning they repeat year after year. Managing either means understanding where you are in the cycle — looking behind and ahead, not just in the present.

In a garden, you may consider which plants thrived and which wilted. And you always have one eye on making changes for next year.

In a budget, looking back may mean taking the time to understand last year's audit while beginning your forecast for the next year. Are health insurance costs projected to rise? Are there any leaky roofs?

"There's a three-plus-year financial cycle that board members need to keep in their head," Dan McCrea, chief financial officer of the School District of Janesville, said in the convention session focused on the financial roles and responsibilities of school board members. "It's really a rolling three-year fiscal cycle, if not more."

For most of us, a budget is not as intuitive as a garden. For starters, it has its own calendar, starting on

July 1 and ending June 30. Fortunately, several sessions at the State Education Convention focused on isolating each budget "season" and arming attendees with the questions they need to understand their budget.

One brief caveat: The timelines in this article are not meant to be prescriptive. Budgetary practices vary by district, and these dates are meant as suggestions, not directives.

## ■ 1st Quarter (July–September)

As a fiscal year dawns on July 1, the new budget is only now starting to take shape. A preliminary version may be approved that same month, but the final one is perhaps four months away.

"You're spending money on July 1 even though you're not

approving the budget until October," school business management consultant Tim Stellmacher said.

That preliminary budget may be approved in July, but it will have plenty of question marks.

Districts don't yet know how much money they'll be receiving throughout the already-begun fiscal year. Revenues are driven largely by school enrollment, open enrollment transfers and state aid. As a board member, you'll likely have to wait until October to get solid revenue projections.

So what can a board member ask about early in the fiscal year?

Because most of a school's costs are salaries — and teacher contracts are already approved — the spending side of the equation is more clear in the first quarter.

Finally, the first quarter is a good time to create or review a timeline to engage the community, board and district staff in the creation of the final budget. That can include budget preview and goal setting, stakeholder input (include key budget benchmarks) and final adoption.

**A BUDGET AND A GARDEN ARE BOTH CYCLICAL,  
MEANING THEY REPEAT YEAR AFTER YEAR.**

Managing either means understanding where you are in the cycle — looking behind and ahead, not just in the present.



**2nd Quarter  
(October–December)**

For many districts, the second quarter is when the ability to think about three years’ worth of budgets — the current year along with the year before and after — is most valuable. We’ll start with the previous year.

First, the audit of the previous budget will be in full swing, as it’s due to the state by Dec. 1. The audit process isn’t only about accountability; it’s also about continuous improvement. For example, if you’re not sure whether you’re accounting for student activity funds correctly, you can ask an auditor about it.

Soon afterward, the board should get a copy of the audit report. It can be useful even for board members who aren’t as comfortable with technical language. “Look at the notes even if you’re not a numbers

person or don’t understand their financial aspects,” said Bob Chady, business manager at Marshall Public Schools and McCrea’s co-presenter. “Also, look at the management letter. It identifies areas where the district can be stronger, and that’s what we all want.”

Understanding an audit report can also help you talk to constituents. “An audit report can help a district put across a message,” Chady says.

At the same time, boards are looking ahead to finalize the current fiscal year budget. McCrea posed this scenario to attendees: Suppose, during the first meeting in October, you ask your business manager where you are on the current budget, year-to-date.

It sounds like an informed question, but if you haven’t approved your final budget, you aren’t likely to

get a useful answer. The district likely won’t have enrollment figures this early — they’re based on late September counts — so revenue comparisons probably won’t be helpful.

It’s not as if all budget monitoring is off limits before the final budget is in. But members should approach them with the understanding that revenue figures in particular are likely to be soft ones, McCrea said. By October’s end however, the current-year picture should be coming into focus. That means questions about comparing the budget to actual spending start to make more sense.

Then, of course, the board adopts the final budget and certifies the tax levy in time for December tax bills.

Because taxpayers may have questions when they get their bills, now is a great time to brush up on the basics of how a levy turns into a

**BUDGET CYCLE CALENDAR**

	QUARTER 1 (JULY-SEPT.)	QUARTER 2 (OCT.-DEC.)	QUARTER 3 (JAN.-MARCH)	QUARTER 4 (APRIL-JUNE)
PREVIOUS YEAR	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Conduct field work for audit</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> May adopt audit recommendations</p>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Complete and submit audit to DPI by Dec. 1</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Receive and read audit</p>		
CURRENT YEAR	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Present preliminary budget; hold annual budget hearing; conduct Sept. head count</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Adopt preliminary budget</p>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Present final budget</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Adopt final budget, certify levy for tax bills</p>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Active monitoring of budget</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Receive updates of budget performance</p>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Active monitoring of budget</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Receive updates of budget performance</p>
NEXT YEAR		<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Develop initial budget assumptions, preview administrative contracts</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Adopt initial budget assumptions</p>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Preliminary staffing and programming</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Approve administrative contracts; make open enrollment determinations</p>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATION:</b> Staffing, insurance and preliminary budget recommendations</p> <p><b>BOARD:</b> Sign employment contracts, work on preliminary budget</p>

property tax bill. An ensemble cast of school finance experts from the Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials guided attendees of the pre-convention workshop “The School Finance Puzzle” through how a levy becomes a tax bill.

Most simply, a tax bill is the result of two math problems. The first one figures out what percentage of the district’s total levy is comprised of a given property. A \$200,000 home, for example, represents 1 percent of the value in a district with a \$20 million tax base. Then take that little sliver of pie — one taxpayer’s share of the whole — and multiply it by the total levy.

Changing property values often introduces confusion into these

conversations. We often equate rising values with rising taxes, but that’s not necessarily the case. Even if the total pie changes in size — if property values rise, in other words — a taxpayer’s bill may not change as long as her property value rose by an average amount.

As a little quiz, ask yourself this: What is the effect of a re-assessment on a district’s total tax levy? The answer is \$0. Nothing. Your district’s total property value could double and your levy stays the same. Assessments only determine each property’s piece of the pie.

If this isn’t crystal clear at first, talk to an expert on your staff. Just remember that when tax bills are mailed in mid-December, you should be ready for questions.

Finally, forward-looking boards can start looking ahead toward the

assumptions that will underlie the next year’s budget. Does the district need to purchase new curriculum? How might health insurance costs change? What is the inflation rate likely to be?

### ■ 3rd Quarter (January–March)

By January, the previous year’s budget may be put to bed. But by now it’s time to examine whether the current budget is tracking with actual expenditures and revenues. Finance officials will monitor the budget on their own, but they also have an obligation to paint a picture others can understand.

Budget tracking practices vary by district, but board members have a right to know how well their budget is lining up with reality, says Roger

**“FORWARD-LOOKING BOARDS CAN START LOOKING AHEAD,  
toward the assumptions that will underlie the next year’s budget.”**



## “YOU NEED TO SAY, ‘I NEED MONTHLY REPORTS.’ You need to understand what a balance report is in your district.”

— Roger Price, WASB education finance consultant

Price, a 35-year veteran of education finance and a WASB consultant. He and Susan Schnorr, business manager in the Oshkosh Area School District, presented a session focused on the school district budget cycle.

“You need to say, ‘I need monthly reports,’” Price said. “You need to understand what a balance report is in your district.” If there’s a meaningful variance in the report — if any part of the budget is, say, 5 percent above or below budget — board members can ask for a reason. These reports don’t have to be complicated, says Schnorr, who gives her board a simple monthly report.

And board members aren’t the only people who business officials can keep up to date. Price likes to put it this way: “Who else knows?” Yes, staff know the budget. But does the board? Do interested taxpayers? Keeping others up to date helps build trust.

Meanwhile, spring includes planning for the next year’s budget, perhaps including preliminary staffing counts.

### ■ 4th Quarter (April–June)

Aside from budget monitoring for the twilight of the current year’s budget, much of the fourth quarter is spent looking ahead.

Because staffing tends to represent more than two-thirds of a budget, finalizing employment contracts is a major element of the coming year’s budget. But there is a limit to a board’s proper financial oversight role.

McCrea told a brief story about one board member who took that role a little too far. That board member, faced with approving a

slate of employment contracts, said he couldn’t sign his name to them without the employees’ evaluations. Though fiscal oversight is one role of a school board, this scrutiny takes it too far, McCrea says.

Instead, board members should ensure they trust their own evaluation policies as well as the administrators who carry them out. “The teachers brought forward for renewal have met criteria in a board-adopted evaluation system,” he adds.

This is also a good time to look forward, into the next year and beyond. As you’re planning a budget in wide strokes, consider the impact of these decisions on your state aid and tax rate. For example, you can save money next year by spending down a fund balance or deferring maintenance. But when that bill

comes due, it will be all the larger. “The districts with trust issues allow their tax rate to yo-yo up and down,” Price says.

One way to get long-term perspective, McCrea says, is to cultivate an ongoing relationship with a ratings agency, such as Moody’s Investors Service. Because they rate creditworthiness — how well your district will be able to pay its debts back — these agencies are in an excellent position to rate a district’s overall finances. “The last 10, 15 years of my career, I wouldn’t go six months without talking to a rep from Moody’s in Chicago,” McCrea says.

By looking at budgets more like a business manager, in three-year rolling cycles, board members can monitor prior budgets, craft new ones and plan for the financial future. ■

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# OPTIMIZING Generation Z Education

## These Kids are Different From School Staff and Parents



● *Jim Froemming, Director of Business Services, Port Washington-Saukville School District*

**E**ducators need to be conscious of the demographics, interests and tools of their students.

When educators better know their audience, they can be more effective in facilitating their learning.

While there are many teaching and learning strategies that are consistent over time, the evolution of societal, economic and technological demands require educators to update their delivery methods. Teachers cannot rely on using outdated lesson plans or teaching the way that they were taught.

The newest group of students were born after 1995 and are considered part of Generation Z. This group has always had technology available at their fingertips. But they also experienced the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, watched their families wade through financial uncertainty, witnessed the growth of political distrust, and have regularly heard about violent acts that make their personal safety an ongoing concern.

With each new generation, the pace of the world gets faster. It is said that attention spans have reduced from 15 seconds for baby boomers, to 12 seconds for millennials, to eight seconds for Generation Z. We need to capture their interest quickly or they will be on to something else. At the same time, they are multi-taskers. They can

manage up to five devices at the same time to be on top of the information they want to know.

Gen Z kids are known to be:

- Financially conservative
- Socially conscious
- Optimistic about their place in the world
- Loyal
- Able to accept and learn from mistakes
- Accepting and applauding of diversity and individualism
- Informed advocates for what they believe in

Generation Z kids name their parents as role models and participate more in family decision-making than children of previous generations. They also cite teachers and even fictional characters, such as Harry Potter, as people they have formed a trusted relationship with to help their personal growth.

It may not be the best to try to keep up with Gen Z students on Snapchat or Instagram, but we can be cognizant of how they communicate with their peers by fostering digital citizenship and encouraging the positive use of electronic tools.

Since Gen Z students are willing to take some educational risks,

embrace failures and learn from their mistakes, educators have the responsibility to differentiate learning to maximize the outcomes. The authors of “The Gen Z Effect: The Six Forces Shaping the Future of Business,” introduced the concept of creating a “Flow Channel” for learning.

The Flow Channel outlines a zone between boredom and anxiety, where optimized active learning takes place on a non-linear path. The zone doesn’t allow students to get too bored with non-challenging tasks while taking them to a level just short of anxiety. It demands high-level thinking skills and working through mistakes to reach desired outcomes. The goal is use inquisitive discovery to develop students who are resilient and in-depth thinkers. The keys to students embracing the Flow Channel of thought are teaching and learning qualities that have passed the test of time, not only in education but also in parenting, managing and life in general. Better connections can be made by knowing the audience and building relationships through trust, authenticity, listening, flexibility, empathy, humor and celebration.

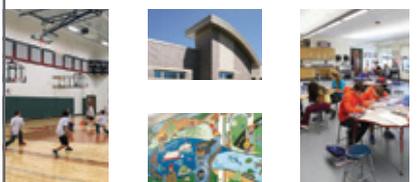
The task for educators at every level is challenging. Teaching practices must be modified to allow Generation Z and the generations to come to experience their dreams. ■

# 2020 WASB Delegate Assembly

The WASB positions on policy issues and potential legislation at the state and federal levels are generally decided by the WASB Delegate Assembly. The Delegate Assembly is comprised of one representative from each member school board and CESA board of control and meets annually at the State Education Convention in January. The 2020 Delegate Assembly met on Wednesday, Jan. 22 and took up 14 resolutions submitted by member boards, two resolutions submitted by the WASB Policy & Resolutions Committee and one resolution submitted by the WASB Board of Directors. Of the total 17 resolutions considered, 16 were adopted.

The topics addressed by the 2020 resolutions included the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding recommendations, English learner services funding, mental health categorical aid, weighting of low-income pupils, Native American mascots and student equity statements.

**For more information on the resolutions** that were considered, go to [WASB.org](http://WASB.org), Services & Resources, Advocacy & Government Relations, and then Delegate Assembly.



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# DATA IN/DATA OUT: Using Data to Tell Your Story

## • CESA 7

School boards can be bombarded with data. What stories do the data tell? What data questions can we ask? How can board members provide support for the data work school staff continually face?

Data can be a powerful ally for decision-making and continuous improvement. However, it is critical that data be accurate, accessible, secure and manageable in order to guard against decisions made on faulty information.

For data to become a trustworthy ally, systems must be in place to foster the qualities we want.

“The best boards use data to make informed decisions and develop policies,” according to the National School Boards Association. “They review disaggregated data on students’ gender, race and socioeconomic status to ensure that all students are treated fairly and have equal opportunities to learn. They demand truthful and complete data on new programs to gauge results.”

Create effective data practices by finding systems at the input and output sides of data. Board members should be reassured that the district has put protocols in place on the “data in” side of the equation.

Administrators should be confident that they have put into place routine and reliable internal data systems, beginning with the local student information system. Provided by vendors such as Skyward, PowerSchool, Infinite Campus and others, the SIS is the powerful input

system where the data stories for students begin. The way staff enters data should follow carefully designed protocols, including:

- Protecting student data privacy
- Providing secure access to data
- Ensuring accurate data entry
- Assigning trained staff

It’s one thing to be sure that data is being inputted accurately, but it’s another to be assured that it is used effectively. Data cannot be analyzed or interpreted for decision-making unless it’s accessible and clearly reported. Data warehouses and tools, such as Wisconsin’s WISEdash Public Portal, provide colorful and helpful charts, graphs and unique data graphics that help tell a story for students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members and community members.

Effective board members know which data questions to ask by seeking summative data that describes patterns, trends and gaps in several key educational areas. Example questions include:

- 1) To what degree are all students progressing and achieving grade-level expectations? Are there gaps that reveal needs for improvement in equity?
- 2) To what degree are all students engaged in our schools, in our classes and in their own learning?
- 3) To what extent are students enrolled in the programs we provide, such as interventions,

advanced programs, extracurricular and co-curricular programs, special education and others? What evidence do we have about the implementation of, and improvements to, our programs?

- 4) What perceptions do students, staff members, parents and community members have about our schools?
- 5) What are the patterns of parent involvement with teachers regarding the progress of their children? To what degree do staff work to engage parents and community in their school?
- 6) What are the enrollment trends of students in our schools by race/ethnicity, English learner status, economic status, gender, migrant status, homelessness and disability?
- 7) To what degree are our resources supporting the goals set to achieve the district’s mission and vision? What are the trends in licensure and retention?

To tell your district’s story and make sound decisions, you need reliable and accessible data. Is data a powerful ally for your board?

But data can’t speak for itself. That’s your job. As the National School Boards Association said in a 2019 report, “Data can tell stories, but school leaders must give data a voice. Turn the data into positive practices — that’s the bottom line.” ■

# THORP SCHOOLS USE

# Science of Reading

## to Raise Achievement and Close Gaps

• John Humphries, Superintendent, School District of Thorp

Wisconsin's fourth-graders ranked 34th in the country in reading in 2017, the state's lowest ranking since the Nation's Report Card was first published in 1964.

The problem isn't isolated to urban areas. Looking only at white fourth-grade students who do not receive free or reduced-price meals and do not have disabilities, Wisconsin ranks 42nd in the nation, with just over 50 percent proficiency (WI Reading Coalition, 2019). That's right — about half of these students are not reading well enough to succeed in the classroom.

This is a problem across the entire state, to say nothing of the persistent achievement gaps. In rural Thorp, a district of about 600 students near Eau Claire, we knew we could do better. With a focus on closing gaps and raising proficiency levels for all students, Thorp concentrated on solutions that are making a difference — specifically, teacher training in the science of reading.

Thorp's teachers were not well trained to provide explicit and systematic instruction in basic early literacy skills like letter sounds, phonics and fluency. Their approach was piecemeal, with each teacher being asked to identify the elements of curriculum they wanted to emphasize.

The science of reading is a robust body of evidence that has demonstrated the key early literacy skills for successful reading instruction. The research has also demonstrated

what doesn't work — piecemeal approaches, strategies that emphasize guessing at words, and a lack of emphasis on the connection between sounds and letters that lead to fluent reading.

In the past three years, Thorp has focused resources on training, coaching, collaborating and using supplemental resources. Teachers have had 12 days of paid in-service focused on the science of reading. Professional coaches have been hired

if faculty members used the skills they learned during in-service, faculty members were observed in order to identify any needed support.

So, how's it working? Thorp's student's scores on the Forward Exam have not increased yet. But the early literacy skills the district has been emphasizing are increasing rapidly. In fall 2018, Thorp had 22 second-grade students at high risk of failure in one basic

**TEACHERS HAVE HAD 12 DAYS OF PAID IN-SERVICE**  
focused on the science of reading.

to train the Thorp teachers on building a leadership team. They also train and support our staff coach, who was hired using state Achievement Gap Reduction funds.

Thorp modified the district calendar to provide early release every Wednesday, allowing 90 minutes of collaboration time for teacher teams. Finally, the staff realized that Thorp's core curriculum had the essential elements of a strong resource, but they needed to know exactly which parts of the resource to use as well as when and how to use them.

Staff also decided to stop using leveled literacy interventions and a reader's workshop model and began more direct, explicit class-wide instruction. Rather than wondering

early reading skill — nonsense words. A year later, there were seven. In the sight words skill, Thorp second graders went from 21 high-risk students to two.

When disaggregating the data by economic status, Thorp students from low-income families are growing just as fast as the rest — faster than about 80 percent of the nation.

The Thorp team was excited when State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor recently announced a new emphasis from the Department of Public Instruction on "... explicit and systemic phonics...in the teaching of foundational reading skills." Thorp believes it is well ahead of the curve. ■

# VAPING: An Unconventional Addiction

• Catch Global Foundation and CESA 10

**Over the past few years,** the number of students vaping has skyrocketed. Articles on vaping appear in the news on nearly a daily basis, and schools are at a loss on how to detect and handle vaping violations.

To help Wisconsin districts, CESA 10 created a toolkit on vaping with support from a Department of Public Instruction grant. One of the sources cited in their toolkit is CATCH My Breath, an evidence-based youth e-cigarette and JUUL prevention program that meets national and state health education standards. Evaluation of students who have completed the CATCH My Breath program have shown significant increases in knowledge about e-cigarettes and their negative health effects. Seventy-nine percent of students say they are less likely to vape because of the program and 81 percent say they are confident using a refusal skill learned in the program.

CATCH Global Foundation CEO Duncan Van Dusen will soon be releasing a book, *Let's Teach Health*, that touches on the importance of health education in vaping prevention efforts. According to his book:

The FDA and CDC's annual National Youth Tobacco Survey concluded that in 2019, 5.3 million middle and high schoolers currently used e-cigarettes, up a staggering

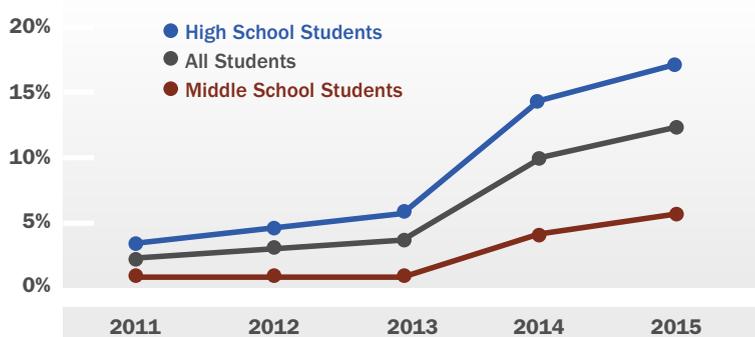
152 percent from 2.1 million in 2017. The dizzying rise of youth vaping shows that when it comes to health education, parents can't keep up, and without making it a priority, schools don't keep up. Skills-based health education that applies social cognitive theory can help in three ways.

First is knowledge. Youth familiarity with vaping does not equate to understanding it. For example, 59 percent think e-juice is mostly water (it has none), and 41 percent

think that flavored e-cigarettes don't contain nicotine (99 percent of mass-market products and all JUULs do). This latter untruth was passively stoked by the industry who did not clearly label their products until required to do so in August 2018.

The second benefit of health education is to cultivate healthy attitudes about avoiding e-cigarettes. Youth mostly still harbor social antibodies against smoking combustible tobacco but see vaping as different. E-cigarettes are portrayed as

## MORE STUDENTS USING E-CIGARETTES



Source: National Youth Tobacco Survey 2011-2015

# CATCH<sup>®</sup>

## MY BREATH

YOUTH E-CIGARETTE PREVENTION PROGRAM

### 2018-2019 Program REACH

**49**

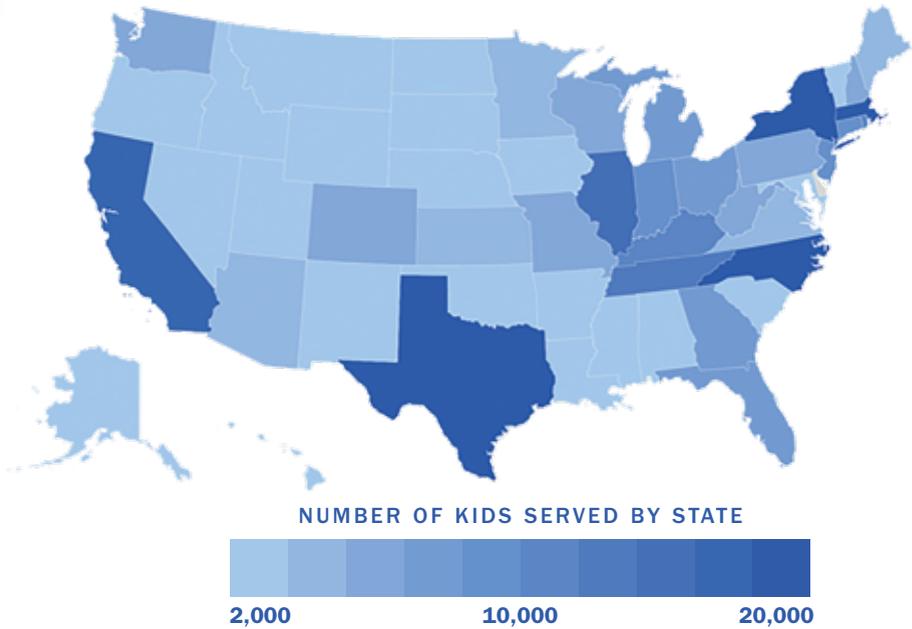
STATES

**1,100+**

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOLS

**326,000+**

KIDS



a potentially safer alternative to cigarettes. But “potentially safer” is hardly consolation when you compare something with an unquantified risk to the most deadly product of all-time. Health teachers can guide youth to re-frame unhealthy beliefs and thus significantly improve health behaviors.

Finally, health education can combat vaping demand through youth empowerment. For example:

- Ask for a “choice” about vaping rather than a “pledge.”
- Structure peer-led, small-group discussions and report-outs.
- Ask open-ended questions about how vaping could hinder kids’ own goals.
- Help youth name, preview and practice refusal skills.
- Provide learning opportunities for teens to explain, share and advocate publicly for their healthy choice, which will help cement it in their own identity while potentially persuading peers to follow.

These last two benefits of health education are particularly important to combat the billions of advertising dollars poured into making vaping look cool. The strongest and most durable health choices are the ones cultivated by training youth to think and act for themselves. ■

#### Resources:

CESA 10’s Toolbox Talk: Vaping in Wisconsin Schools: [cesa10.k12.wi.us/services/facilities](http://cesa10.k12.wi.us/services/facilities)  
 Let’s Teach Health: [letsteachhealth.org](http://letsteachhealth.org)  
 Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH): [catchmybreath.org](http://catchmybreath.org)

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# Three Dimensions of Governance

● *David Czech, Board President, Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District*

In 2014, the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District Board of Education confronted its reality of underperforming students and a fractured focus.

Having no formal governance model in place, the board sought to establish and implement a governance model focused on tangible outcomes while balancing accountability with delegation. The board began with implementation of the coherent governance model. Over the past six years, the board and administration have worked together to embrace the core systems and processes of coherent governance while building accountability around local priorities and values.

In Chippewa Falls, the school board embraces three dimensions of governance in their system of accountability and oversight: defining expectations, determining progress and developing systematic program sampling.

## ■ Defining Expectations

The board defines its expectations through policies which articulate the board's direction for outcomes in areas like the relationship between the board and superintendent, the board management of itself, the operations of the district, and student outcomes.

The board has defined expectations in a variety of areas from academic achievement to the maintenance of confidential records, facility planning, and student preparation for becoming contributing citizens.

As stewards of the community, the board articulates the expected outcomes the district is to pursue. They task the administration to leverage their practitioner expertise to determine how the district will achieve the outcomes defined in policy.

## ■ Determining Progress

The board defining expectations and delegating implementation to administration is not where its expectation-setting work ends. Rather, the board annually adopts a workplan that includes monitoring progress for every policy area. Monthly, administrators present reports of tangible, verifiable progress indicators. For student-result policies, administrators present student outcomes data and report to the board where the district has met the board expectations for progress and where additional work for improvement will occur.

Additionally, administrators present evidence that show how the district is in compliance with expectations of the board and where additional corrective action will be taken.

Rather than waiting for an end-of-year summary or report, the board reviews organizational progress indicators at every single meeting. Because the board understands the way they use their time communicates their priorities, board meetings are designed so the board spends its time focusing on its most important priorities and leverages consent agendas to manage routine processes.

## ■ Developing Systematic Program Sampling

While the data and artifacts presented monthly through the monitoring process serve as the concrete indicators of district progress (or non-progress), the board has found benefit in sampling the student and staff experience in person. This happens through school showcases and learning walks.

Monthly, the board hosts a school showcase at its meeting. Staff and students come in to demonstrate an aspect of their learning work. The school showcase is scheduled and designed to match the board's monthly monitoring focus. For example, the month the board monitored social studies academic progress, it saw a showcase of how students use inquiry to individualize their learning of social studies concepts.

**THE BOARD AND ADMINISTRATION HAVE WORKED TOGETHER**  
**to embrace the core systems and processes of coherent governance while**  
**building accountability around local priorities and values.**

Additionally, board learning walks are an opportunity for board members to visit a school and walk through classrooms. Principals take them to classrooms to let them sample the student learning experience. Again, learning walks are designed around the board’s monthly monitoring focus. The month the board monitored incorporating student interest in learning, the group visited the high school to see career-based classes and watch a

demonstration of the individual student career planning portfolio.

■ **Results of the Governance Model**

Having an outcomes-based, high-accountability governance approach has resulted in the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District demonstrating an increase in student achievement over the past five years. The board provides clarity to the administration with its definition of

expectations in policy and the administration has leverage to use its expertise in planning the pursuit of the expectations. The clarity of communication and honoring of roles has led to increased feelings of trust and measurable results for students. ■

**Wisconsin boards interested in learning more** about coherent governance might begin with a book study around a text like: *“The Art of Governing Coherently,”* by Linda Dawson and Randy Quinn, visit other boards or attend an annual information meeting held each May.

**IT’S ALL ABOUT  
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 ACHIEVEMENT**  
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 and we  
 can help.**



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## HOW SCHOOL LEADERS CAN SUPPORT A COLLABORATIVE

# Inquiry-Based K-12 Curriculum

• Altoona and Menomonie school districts

**“Inquiry” has been a buzzword** in the educational community for many years, but administrators, school board members and educators often find themselves wondering, *“What is inquiry, really?”*

**A**ltoona School District teachers Todd Lenz and Rachel Haling, and Menomonie School District teacher Becca Minnich have been defining inquiry, explaining its benefits and mapping its place in a collaborative K-12 curriculum. Lenz, the co-author of *“Brainball Science Edition: Teaching Inquiry Science as a Team Sport,”* defines inquiry as the process by which students generate their own questions and seek answers.

So how is that different than regular instruction? Traditional science instruction has teachers posing a question to students who, in turn, complete a fully outlined lab that drives them to one specific answer that has been engineered by the author of the lab.

Inquiry instruction creates a space for students to ask their own questions about the content. They create these questions from their own observations. Then, they have the opportunity to engineer their own lab to answer their own question. It puts the onus of learning on the students and it creates relevance for each student.

Instead of following step-by-step instructions for a prescribed lab, they get to become true scientists and explore their own curiosities.

Lenz has gathered eight years of data on the effects an inquiry-based

science curriculum has had on student achievement at Altoona High School. His work shows that inquiry-based teaching and educator collaboration inspire students to learn more and study all disciplines more thoroughly.

Multiple studies have found inquiry-based curricula lead to gains in student learning among low- and high-achieving learners. There is a statistically significant difference in student achievement when science is taught with an inquiry emphasis and when there is a high level of collaboration among K-12 teachers.

Lenz, Haling and Minnich explored a collaborative, inquiry-based curriculum in the spring of 2019. Lenz and Haling brought two high school seniors from Altoona to work with Minnich’s fourth-grade students in Menomonie. The day consisted of exploring data the fourth-grade students had collected on mealworms. By the end of the afternoon, students had constructed graphs of their data and worked with their secondary school counterparts to generate a test to analyze the data.

“Students were engaged in their learning the whole time and were able to explain what they learned to teachers, peers, parents and community members,” Minnich observed.

Following the collaboration day, students created posters to present to their peers, families and the community. “One of the huge benefits I saw as a building principal is linking the knowledge that they are learning in the elementary school with expectations in the high school,” Menomonie principal Mary Begley said.

To help foster a collaborative, inquiry-based K-12 curriculum in your district, administrators and school board members should allow time for K-12 collaboration and freedom to experiment within the framework of the standards. Inquiry instruction can be done with materials already purchased. However, administrators can further their support by providing funding for appropriate resources, such as equipment, technology and field trips. Additionally, school leaders can assist by helping their teachers collaborate with other professionals and experts engaged in inquiry learning as well as providing encouragement and support for science, particularly at the elementary level.

Lenz, Haling and Minnich believe that inquiry is the crux of student learning and preparation for life beyond the classroom. Not only does inquiry curriculum support increased student achievement but, on a larger scale, it also fosters critical thinking and creative exploration. Inquiry curricula support a culture of hard work and perseverance while helping create a generation of productive problem solvers. ■

# Controlling Costs

## THROUGH HEALTH BENEFIT STRATEGIES THAT ATTRACT, ENGAGE AND RETAIN EMPLOYEES

• WEA Trust

Now more than ever, districts face difficulties in filling their open positions with top candidates. Whether it's a low number of applicants, a first-choice candidate who chooses a position at a different school, or an inability to provide the top level of pay or benefits to recruit, this hiring battle is never-ending. In fact, in Wisconsin the current unemployment rate is at 3.3 percent<sup>1</sup>. When you build a strong workforce, fighting turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism (working while sick) should be a major focus.

Turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism are some of the largest hidden costs that we see within Wisconsin school districts. On average, when you experience employee turnover, it generates a cost upwards of \$30,000<sup>2</sup> for each position that needs to be replaced. Absenteeism produces an average cost of \$3,000<sup>3</sup> per employee annually to the district. Lastly, when examining presenteeism, or the amount of time an employee is present but unproductive at work, it creates one of the largest unexpected costs of over \$15,000<sup>4</sup> annually per employee.

This cost is a burden that every employer in our state faces — often times, with multiple employees within their organization. These types of costs are not budgeted and ultimately end up hurting your bottom line, your future forecasting and ultimately, the students across your entire district.

### Top Tips to Attract, Engage and Retain Employees

#### 1) Know your team —

##### Know your culture

Education is the single most important element of building a positive health, wellness and insurance strategy into your culture. Insurance literacy is not a common trait and more often than not, most people are not engaging with healthcare until they are sick. This creates a culture around “sick care” instead of “healthcare.” We must shift this mindset towards education on wellness as well as proactively teach employees about their resources and when to use them.

#### 2) Define where you want to be

It's critical that you use data, reports and the information that is available to you as a guideline so you know what can be impacted through programming and, sometimes more importantly, what cannot. From there, you can take a look at what issues require longer term strategies, understand what you want and what you need to do to get there. We recommend choosing only one to three goals and go all-in on them.

#### 3) Build a plan, be intentional, and be visible

After you understand and outline your goals, it's time to use your team and resources to help you build a plan, communicate your plan and execute. Whether it's your insurance carrier account manager, your broker or champions within your organization, you have a team of resources that are available and designed to help you meet your needs and exceed your goals.

#### 4) Use incentives

Incentives are a great way to introduce employees to a program or motivate them to engage in an existing initiative. You can incentivize through your health insurance premium or co-pays or through smaller raffle prizes. This is a great time to try different items and techniques and see what really helps to engage your employees. ■

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics
2. ABRC: Cost of Employee Turnover
3. Investopedia: The Causes and Cost of Absenteeism
4. Sure Hire: What is presenteeism costing your company?

**Questions about the article or WEA Trust?** Contact us at [info@WEAtrust.com](mailto:info@WEAtrust.com).

The WEA Trust provides group health insurance and administrative services to public employers throughout Wisconsin. The not-for-profit WEA Trust was created in 1970 to serve Wisconsin school district employees. Today, the WEA Trust offers its top-rated service and quality benefits to all state, county and municipal groups. Learn more about WEA Trust at [WEAtrust.com](http://WEAtrust.com).

# Accomplishments | RECOGNITION

The annual State Education Convention provides an opportunity to recognize some of the educators, administrators and school board members who make public education great in Wisconsin. **Join us in honoring this year's award winners.**



## ■ School Board Honorees

**Sandie Anderson** of the Wild Rose School District (right) was congratulated by WASB President Brett Hyde (middle) and Executive Director John Ashley for serving 20 years on the school board.

**The following board members were honored for serving at least 20 years on their local school boards:** Susan Raab, Auburndale; Jerry Grosskopf, Bowler; AnnMarie Anderson, Fall Creek; Julie Hauser, Flambeau; Jeff Anders, Lake Holcombe; Lee Bleuel, Lomira; Rick Welak, Lomira; Gail Saari, Maple; Richard Paisley, Melrose-Mindoro; Kevin Bauman, Norwalk-Ontario-Wilton; Steven Zach, Oregon; Sara McCutcheon, Port Washington-Saukville; Barbara Braker, Randolph; Mark Johnson, Seneca; Marie Colbeth, Somerset; Mark Bacon, Tri-County Area; Diane Skewes, Union Grove UHS; Sandie Anderson, Wild Rose; Kathleen Williams, Wild Rose; Steve Olson, Winter; and Sandra Hett, Wisconsin Rapids.

**Four board members were recognized for serving at least 30 years on their local school boards:** Cedric Boettcher, Cadott Community; Kenneth Bjork, Colfax; Gabe Kolesari, Hamilton; and Ronald Leja, Oconto Falls.

### Teachers of the Year

State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor (right) honored the teachers of the year (left to right): **Chelsea Miller**, Sullivan Elementary and West Elementary Schools, Jefferson School District; **Bawaajigekwe Andrea Bouley**, Ashland Middle and Lake Superior Elementary Schools, Ashland School District; **Erin McCarthy**, Greendale Middle School, Greendale School District; **Chad Sperzel-Wuchterl**, Ronald Wilson Reagan College Preparatory High School, Milwaukee Public Schools



### Principals of the Year

State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor and Jim Lynch (right), executive director of the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, honored the principals of the year (left to right): **Michele Trawicki**, Marcy Elementary School, Hamilton School District; **Ty Breitlow**, Chilton High School, Chilton School District (now the district administrator of the Randolph School District); **Debra Paradowski**, Arrowhead High School, Arrowhead Unified High School District



### Superintendent of the Year

**Robert Mayfield** (middle) of the Kimberly Area School District was recognized as the Superintendent of the Year by Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators President Cindy Zahrte of Tomah and Executive Director Jon Bales.





■ **Business Official of the Year**

**Jonathan Mitchell** (middle), formerly of the St. Francis School District and now the business official at the Greendale School District, was recognized as the Business Official of the Year by Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials Executive Director Mike Barry and President Kathy Davis-Phillips of the DeForest Area School District.

■ **Special Services Director of the Year**

**John Peterson** (left) of the Hamilton School District was recognized as the Special Services Director of the Year by Gary Myrah, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services.



**See you next year!**

**January 20-22, 2021**

WISCONSIN CENTER | MILWAUKEE

**Congratulations to Julia Ingersoll**, treasurer of the Elkhorn School Board, for winning the complimentary registration to the 2021 State Education Convention. And thank you to all the board members who dropped off a card from the 2019 WASB Regional Meetings at the Sustainable Schools Pavilion in the Exhibit Hall.

# Student Awards

Congratulations to our award-winning student artists and a special thanks to our student video team

Each year, student artists from across Wisconsin are invited to participate in an annual art contest held in partnership between the WASB and the Wisconsin Art Education Association and sponsored by Liberty Mutual Insurance. Ten pieces are selected for awards. All submissions were proudly displayed at the 2020 State Education Convention.



- 1st** — **Brianna Hintz**, Nicolet (pictured below with Dani Graf of the Wisconsin Art Education Association)
- 2nd** — **Ananda Van Wie**, Merrill
- 3rd** — **Kylie Drinkwine**, Tomah
- 4th** — **Abe Weston**, Oshkosh
- 5th** — **Haley Piontek**, Oshkosh
- 6th** — **Kayleigh Kohl**, Watertown
- 7th** — **Eva Chipps**, Wausaukee
- 8th** — **Anika Byrne**, Nicolet
- 9th** — **Amelia Cavaness**, Tomah
- 10th** — **Courtney Peterson**, Wausaukee



## Student Video Team

The WASB invited school districts to apply to have their students record highlights from the State Education Convention and create a re-cap video. Tomah Area High School students took on this special task.

Visit [wasb.org/convention](http://wasb.org/convention) to watch their video. ■



# Continuing Our Journey

*Brett Hyde of the Muskego-Norway School Board reflected on his year as WASB president at the State Education Convention*

As my year as WASB President comes to a close, I would like to reflect on what happened since January 24 of last year. At that time, I stood on this stage and asked for your assistance to help get a timely and beneficial state budget passed through the Legislature. The result of your involvement in our grassroots advocacy was a budget that saw record increases in educational spending, including several categorical aids.

But we still have work to do. Advocating for our students is neither a sprint nor a marathon. It is a journey. It's a journey that is what we make of it. It CAN be an uphill fight for every inch of progress. But if we let our elected representatives, both state and federal, know that we are there to work with them, to continually provide them with insight, personal perspectives and ideas, we can make that voyage remarkable.

This is the 13th State Education Convention I have attended. The first time I walked into a general

session, I saw a large sign signifying that it was the 87th Annual State Education Convention. Now for those of you who have done the math... yes, we are closing in on a century.

And what has been really amazing to me, is that while the landscape, and many of the issues, around education have changed, the guiding principles of this association have not. A century of advocating for education. A century of fighting for local control. A century of making an impact on our students' education. Nearly a century ago, a small group of local school leaders met to discuss some of the common problems they were facing, and to form a new organization to help solve those problems. As that organization evolved and showed itself to have a positive impact on public education, it continued to grow until the WASB had, and still has, every public school district in Wisconsin as its members.



During this year, as we celebrate 100 years of dedicated educational improvement, I would like each of you, both personally and in your districts, to consider what you, your family and your districts' involvement in local education has been. Every one of us has made an impact on education, and I would like everyone to realize how different education in our state might be if we, and our predecessors, had not been so engaged.

Because of your attendance at this convention and other events, you know about our present. What the future will hold for education in Wisconsin has yet to be determined. But by working together on the issues that matter, we can make that future a bright one for all our students. ■



## Yingst to Lead WASB in 2020

**Taking over as WASB president is Bill Yingst, Sr.** of the Durand-Arkansaw School Board. The WASB Board of Directors selected Sue Todey of the Sevastopol School Board to be the 2020 1st vice president and Barbara Herzog of the Oshkosh Area School Board to be the 2nd vice president. Each will serve a one-year term.

*Bill Yingst, Sr. (right) receives the gavel from 2019 WASB President Brett Hyde.*

# 2020 WASB BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Front row, left to right** – Mary Jo Rozmenoski, Black River Falls (Region 6); Brett Hyde, Muskego-Norway (Region 11 and Immediate Past President); Barbara Herzog, Oshkosh (Region 7 and 2nd Vice President); Bill Yingst, Sr., Durand-Arkansaw (Region 4 and President); Sue Today, Sevastopol (Region 3 and 1st Vice President); and Tony Baez, Milwaukee (Region 14).

**Back row, left to right** – Lester Spies, Germantown (Region 15); Andrew Maertz, Reedsville (Region 8); Capt. Terry McCloskey, USN Retired, Three Lakes (Region 2); Tom Weber, Sun Prairie (Region 12); Rosanne Hahn, Burlington (Region 13); Mike Humke, Dodgeville (Region 9); Bill Wipperfurth, Lodi, (Region 10); Jim Bouche, Wausau (Region 5); and Linda Flottum, Turtle Lake (Region 1).

*The Platteville High School Blue Notes performed at Friday's General Session.*





# Celebrating 100

On Feb. 16, 1921, the first meeting of what would become the Wisconsin Association of School Boards was held at the State Capitol in Madison. In recognition of the upcoming centennial anniversary, the WASB will be featuring a decade of highlights from the association’s past in each issue of the *Wisconsin School News* over the next year. In this issue, we begin our celebration with the Roaring 20s ...

## 1920s

Following the austerity and hardship from the “war to end all wars,”

the country transitioned to a free-spending, less inhibited consumer society, where credit increased along with ballooning personal debt. Spending on recreation tripled during the decade, including movies, travel, amusement parks and sports.

But prosperity manifested itself in other ways. By the decade’s end, two of three homes were electrified (only one in 10 had been at the century’s turn). Manufacturing rose over 60 percent with cars, appliances and homes leading the way. While there was the appearance of a carefree decade, tribalism and conformity lurked beneath the surface. The 1924 National Origins Act drastically restricted immigration, essentially allowing only immigrants from northern and western Europe. President Calvin Coolidge said, “Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend.”

When the stock market crashed in October 1929, the frivolity ended as the world spun into economic chaos.

The Great Depression ended the decade also remembered for flappers and the Charleston, the “Black” Sox scandal, Emily Post’s *Etiquette*, the Scopes Trial, the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, “Mein Kampf” and *Reader’s Digest*.



Mineral Point High School 1921.

## School boards played a role in advancing suffrage

2020 also marks the 100th anniversary of women’s universal suffrage in the United States. Women in Wisconsin were granted the right to vote in “elections pertaining to school matters” by a statewide referendum in 1886. But it didn’t last long. Complications soon arose when municipalities refused to print separate ballots for school board elections and advocates pushed to extend the right to all elections. By 1888, the right had been rescinded and it would be years before they got it back.<sup>1</sup>

However, women served on school boards well before universal suffrage. Fannie Wells Norris, whose son created a boys’ camp that later became the Norris School District, served on the Milwaukee Public School Board from 1905-1911

along with Elizabeth Black Kander, founder of the Milwaukee Jewish Mission.<sup>2</sup> The first WASB vice president in 1921 was Gertrude Sherman from Milwaukee. Elected in 1919, Ms. Sherman served for 18 years on the MPS board, including two terms as president. She was committed to education and made substantial gifts to what was then referred to as UW Waukesha Center. Does your district have a record of a woman serving even earlier? Share your story with the WASB. □

1. Columns, Wisconsin Historical Society newsletter, January-April 2020.
2. Milwaukee History, the magazine of the Milwaukee County Historical Society, Spring-Summer 2000. *Thank you to the Milwaukee County Historical Society for its assistance.*



School children drinking milk at Washington School in Madison in 1921. *Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-2167*

### ■ THE WASB

**1921.** John Callahan, the newly elected and first state superintendent of public instruction, calls together the first meeting of what would become the WASB. W.W. Albers of the Wausau School Board presides over the first meeting of the Wisconsin Association of High Schools and Graded School Boards on February 16 where the hat is passed at the State Capitol, collecting \$31.75 to defray expenses.

**1923.** Association bylaws are changed to base dues payment on population, ranging from \$1 for rural school boards to \$10 if the population exceeds 4,000.

**1924.** State Superintendent John Callahan outlines his education priorities at the annual convention discussing uniform state certification for teachers, consolidation of rural school districts (when practical) by a vote of the people, state funding for the cost of educating mentally and physically handicapped students, and closer relationships between home, business and schools.

**1925.** Lunch and dinner are served at the Loraine Hotel during the annual convention in Madison — 75 cents for lunch and \$1 for dinner. Public school enrollment in Wisconsin is 513,456 students.

**1926.** The association's annual convention is held jointly with school administrators. It is decided the meeting will be held in Madison (when the Legislature is in session) or Milwaukee.

### ■ OUR STATE

**1921.** Wisconsin passes the first law addressing discrimination against women.

**1924.** Sen. Robert "Fighting Bob" La Follette runs unsuccessfully for president under the Progressive banner, garnering almost five million votes, but winning only Wisconsin.

**1927.** Shorewood and Wauwatosa are the first districts to receive state financial aid for 4-year-old and 5-year-old kindergarten students.

**1928.** The Leona, Crandon and Waubeno school districts are the first to establish school forests.

### ■ OUR NATION

**1921.** The Census Bureau reports that 51 percent of Americans live in communities greater than 2,500 and knee-length skirts are standard women's fashion.

**1923.** Calvin Coolidge's address to Congress is the first presidential speech broadcast on the radio and "Yes! We Have No Bananas" is a popular hit song.

**1924.** A Model T Ford sells for less than \$300 and *Wheaties* is a new cereal.

**1928.** Steamboat Willie — the animated precursor to Mickey Mouse — stars in the first animated film with synchronized audio.



Gaylord Nelson, later governor of Wisconsin and United States senator, is sitting at the front of the third row from the left.

Students in the Clear Lake School in 1925. *Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-45300*

# Surplus Spurs Debate at Capitol as Session Winds Down



In January, updated revenue projections by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau forecast that the state will take in about \$818 million more through mid-2021 than previously estimated due to higher than anticipated tax collections. By law, half of that amount must go into the state's Budget Stabilization Fund, often referred to as the rainy-day fund. That leaves nearly \$452 million more than originally projected when the 2019-21 biennial budget was enacted that could be used for additional spending or tax cuts.

This led to a flurry of debate between Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and Republican legislative leaders on what to do with the estimated surplus. By the time this issue of the Wisconsin School News is published, this debate will likely have been resolved since the state Assembly will have adjourned for the session and the state Senate will probably only be back in session for one day before also adjourning.

Following the upbeat forecasts, Evers called for special sessions of the Legislature to take up plans to help farmers and invest a portion of state surplus funding in K-12 education. Lawmakers gavelled the special sessions into effect and just as quickly adjourned, fulfilling their obligation under the state Constitution but not taking up the substance of the governor's proposals.

## ■ Governor's School Funding Proposal

Evers' plan would invest roughly \$250 million of the surplus in public schools with about half going to equalization aids (without a corresponding increase in revenue limits, though, which means that it is a property tax cut and not more dollars for schools) and a heavy portion to special education costs. Based on our member-approved resolutions, the WASB supported the governor's plan, which included several proposals matching recommendations from the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding.

## ■ Republican Tax Cut Proposal

Legislative Republicans, instead, proposed a tax cut package with a similar \$250 million price tag, but focused on income tax cuts rather than reducing property taxes. Their plan also put \$100 million toward reducing state debt payments and \$45 million in property tax exemptions for manufacturers. Although Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau) told reporters school referendum limits were being discussed in his caucus and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Burlington) floated the idea of requiring a super-majority vote to pass a referendum, school referendum restrictions were not part of the package.

## ■ Other K-12 Bills Moving Late in the Legislative Session

**Senate Bill 423** would address lead in school drinking water by requiring testing and, if necessary, requiring that contaminated water sources be taken offline and replaced with clean water sources. However, the bill provides no state funding for this purpose and leaves it to schools and communities to address the costs associated with these mandates, which are largely unknown. As amended, the bill provides an exception to referendum restrictions for referendums related solely to lead remediation.

The WASB worked with the primary author to make several improvements to the bill, including the referendum flexibility, but was not able to secure a guaranteed funding source for mitigation. The bill does allow the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands to issue low-interest State Trust Fund loans to school districts for lead mitigation.

**Assembly Bill 779** requires school boards to allow pupils who attend a virtual charter school to participate in interscholastic athletics and extracurricular activities in the pupil's resident public school district. The WASB opposes this bill based on member-approved WASB resolutions.

**Assembly Bill 908** requires the Department of Public Instruction, for purposes of measuring a school district's improvement, to exclude

Evers' plan would invest roughly \$250 million of the surplus in public schools with about half going to equalization aids and a heavy portion to special education costs.

WASB Immediate Past President Brett Hyde of the Muskego-Norway School Board (left) recently visited with his congressman, Wisconsin 1st District U.S. Representative Bryan Steil, along with WASB Government Relations Director Dan Rossmiller (middle) as part of the National School Boards Association's recent Advocacy Institute in Washington, D.C.



data derived from a juvenile detention facility or secured residential care center for children and youth if 50 percent or more of the pupils residing at the facility do not reside there for the entire school term.

The 2020 WASB Delegate Assembly passed a resolution that supports the concept detailed in this bill.

### ■ Mandates Having Public Hearings

**Assembly Bill 109** would increase current mandates on school boards to require more specific and more frequent instruction on American Indian studies in specific grade bands.

Current law requires instruction in the history, culture and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in Wisconsin at least twice in the elementary grades and at least once in the high school grades.

Under the bill, beginning on September 1, 2020, each school board must, as part of its social studies curriculum, provide instruction in the culture, tribal sovereignty and contemporary and historical significant events of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in Wisconsin at least four times in the elementary grades. The bill specifically requires that the instruction be provided at least once

in grades kindergarten to 2, at least once in grades 3 to 5, and at least twice in grades 6 to 8. The bill also requires that such instruction be provided as part of the high school curriculum at least once in each of the high school grades, including at least once as part of the high school social studies curriculum.

(A similar bill, Assembly Bill 108, that would require voucher schools and independent charter schools to provide such instruction, was not given a public hearing in the Assembly Education Committee.)

**Assembly Bill 604** requires a school board to develop or adopt a program to identify and address pupils with dyslexia.

**Assembly Bill 632** requires that each school board must, beginning in the 2020-21 school year, assess pupils in 4K through 2nd grade for reading readiness and reading difficulties using both a voluntary questionnaire about reading difficulties in a pupil's family history and an assessment selected by the school board that evaluates whether a pupil possesses age-appropriate skills in phonological and phonemic awareness, rapid automatized naming, letter-word reading and picture-naming vocabulary.

Current law requires only that the reading readiness assessment selected by the school district must

evaluate whether a pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge.

**Assembly Bill 635** requires the board of control of each CESA, beginning in the 2020-21 school year, to employ a dyslexia specialist who meets specific criteria.

**Assembly Bill 816** requires the state superintendent to incorporate the Holocaust and other genocides into the model academic standards for social studies and to develop model curricula and instructional materials on the same subject in conjunction with an organization in this state that provides Holocaust education programs to public and private schools and offers educational tools and training to teachers and with a state agency in another state that has developed model curricula on the Holocaust.

The bill also requires a school board, independent charter school and private school participating in a parental choice program to include instruction on the Holocaust and other genocides in its respective curriculum at least once in grades 5 to 8 and once in grades 9 to 12.

Thanks for reading. In next month's column, we will provide an overall review and summary of the legislative session, including the final fate of these and other bills. ■



# Recreational Immunity for School Districts

In our March 2019 Legal Comment, we discussed the Wisconsin statute that protects districts and their officers and employees from lawsuits based on negligence for acts done in the exercise of legislative, quasilegislative, judicial or quasijudicial functions.<sup>1</sup> However, districts are also exposed to potential liability not only for the actions of their employees, but also, as the owners of significant amounts of public land for injuries that occur to those who use district land for recreational purposes. This Legal Comment will examine the two Wisconsin recreational immunity statutes that protect districts with respect to injuries that occur on their property and the case law interpreting those statutes, including a recent Wisconsin Court of Appeals case.\*

## Recreational Immunity Statutes

There are two statutes that provide districts with certain immunities from legal liability for injuries that occur on district property. The definitions in the two statutes are similar, but the second statute was enacted in 2011 to expand the scope of immunity available to districts.

### A. Wisconsin Statute Section 895.52.

This statute provides that, except in certain circumstances, districts do not owe the following duties to anyone who comes onto district property to engage in a recre-

ational activity: **1)** a duty to keep the property safe for recreational activities; **2)** a duty to inspect the property; or **3)** a duty to give warning of an unsafe condition, use or activity on the property.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, except in certain circumstances, districts are not liable for the death of, any injury to, or any death or injury caused by, a person engaging in a recreational activity on district property.<sup>3</sup> This provides districts with significant protection from negligence lawsuits.

Courts have held that, in order to determine the applicability of Wis. Stat. s. 895.52, there must be an analysis of the nature of the injured person's conduct. Each recreational immunity case poses an intensely fact-driven inquiry.<sup>4</sup> The primary issue in these cases is whether the situation involves a recreational activity within the meaning of the statute. Courts examine all the circumstances surrounding the activity, keeping in mind the legislative purpose of the recreational immunity statute.<sup>5</sup>

The statute broadly defines "recreational activity" to include "any outdoor activity undertaken for the purpose of exercise, relaxation or pleasure, including practice or instruction in any such activity." The statute also sets out a long list of activities that fall within this broad definition.<sup>6</sup> The list is not intended to be exhaustive and must be liberally construed in favor of property owners to protect them from liability.<sup>7</sup>

A recreational activity does not

include, however, any organized team sport activity sponsored by the owner of the property on which the activity takes place.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a district does not have immunity arising from a death or injury that occurs on district property at an event for which the district charges an admission fee for spectators or from a death or injury caused by a malicious act or a malicious failure to warn against an unsafe condition on district property of which the district was aware.<sup>9</sup> Conduct is "malicious" when it is the result of hatred, ill will or revenge, or is undertaken when insult or injury is intended.<sup>10</sup>

### B. Wisconsin Statute Section 895.523.

The second recreational immunity statute, Wis. Stat. s. 895.523, is similar to s. 895.52. It provides immunity from liability to a district for death or injury suffered or caused by a person participating in a recreational activity held on school grounds pursuant to a recreational agreement entered into by the school board.<sup>11</sup> This statute was adopted to close the gap in the immunity provided by Wis. Stat. s. 895.52 and to afford districts greater incentive to open up their facilities to organized public activities. Under this statute, just as under Wis. Stat. s. 895.52, districts owe no duty to keep their property safe for the recreational activity; to inspect their property used for such activities; or to give warning of an unsafe condition, use or activity on their property.<sup>12</sup>

Districts are also exposed to potential liability not only for the actions of their employees, but also, as the owners of significant amounts of public land, for injuries that occur to those who use district land for recreational purposes.

This statute defines “recreational activity” in a similar way as Wis. Stat. s. 895.52 to mean any indoor physical activity, sport, team sport or game, whether organized or unorganized, undertaken for the purpose of exercise, relaxation, diversion, education or pleasure or any outdoor activity undertaken for the purpose of exercise, relaxation or pleasure, including practice or instruction in any such activity. The statute sets forth the same list of activities contained in s. 895.52 and specifically excludes “any indoor or outdoor organized team sport or activity organized and held by a school district, school board or governing body of a charter school.”<sup>13</sup>

In order to be afforded the immunity provided by this statute, a district must have a written agreement in place covering the activity in which a person was injured. That agreement must contain the following provisions: **a)** a description of the recreational activity or activities to be held on district property pursuant to the agreement; **b)** the time and place of the recreational activity or activities; **c)** any eligibility requirements for participation in the recreational activity or activities; **d)** whether and, if so, to what extent participants who are minors will be supervised; and **e)** a clear statement describing a participant’s assumption of risk.<sup>14</sup>

The statute does not limit the liability of a district for any of the following: a death or injury caused by a malicious act or by a malicious failure to warn against an unsafe condition of which the district or its agents knew that occurs on district property designated for use in a recreational agreement during the recreational activity; the death or injury to a spectator that occurs on district property designated for use in a recreational agreement during the recreational activity; and the death or injury to a person participating in a recreational activity involving a weight room, a swimming pool or gymnastic equipment pursuant to a recreational agreement.<sup>15</sup>

## ■ Recreational Immunity Case Law

There have been several court cases involving districts and the application of the original recreational immunity statute, Wis. Stat. s. 895.52.

**A. Auman v. School District of Stanley-Boyd.** In *Auman*, the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that a district was not covered by the recreational immunity statute for injuries suffered by students during mandatory school attendance periods because students who are on school property for educational purposes are not engaging in “recreational activity.”<sup>16</sup> The student’s injury was caused by the negligent inspection and maintenance of a school playground and negligent supervision of the student. However, the district claimed immunity under the recreational immunity statute, noting that the student was playing on a snow pile on district property. The court noted that the statute provides immunity only against certain claims of a “person who enters the owner’s property to engage in a recreational activity.” The court concluded that the student did not “enter the school district’s property to engage in a recreational activity,” but instead was on the property for educational purposes as required by the state’s compulsory school attendance laws. The court held, therefore, that the district was not entitled to immunity under the statute.

The district argued that sliding down the snow pile at recess was an “outdoor sport, game or educational activity” and therefore met the statutory definition of “recreational activity.” The court concluded, however, that an educational activity in the context of Wis. Stat. s. 895.52(1)(g) means participation in a voluntary outdoor learning experience and does not include an activity during a mandatory recess period. The district also argued that the student’s attendance at her elementary school was not compulsory because state law only required her to attend some school, rather than that

particular elementary school. The court rejected this argument, stating that the critical factor was that the student’s attendance at school, whether at her school or another school, was mandatory.

*Auman* makes it substantially more difficult for a district to claim recreational immunity for an injury on school property to a student during compulsory school attendance times.

## **B. Meyer v. School District of Colby.**

In *Meyer*, the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that a district was not immune from liability to spectators who attend an organized team sport activity on district property.<sup>17</sup> A student attended a junior varsity football game at the high school football field. She sat in the top row of the bleachers near the football field to watch the game. After the game ended, the student was descending from her seat when one of the wooden bleachers suddenly broke, causing her to fall and sustain an injury.

In the subsequent lawsuit, the district asserted that it was immune from liability under Wisconsin’s recreational immunity statute. The statute specifically states that “any organized team sport activity sponsored by the owner of the property on which the activity takes place” is not a recreational activity. The issue before the court was whether the organized team sport activity exception extends to spectators at such an event or whether it is limited to the athletes and others who directly participate in that event.

While the case law is clear that a spectator who attends a recreational activity is engaged in a recreational activity, the court rejected the district’s contention that the inquiry ends at this point. Rather, the court stated that it is necessary to consider not only whether the injured person was a spectator, but also the activity at which the injured person was a spectator. The court reasoned that if the Legislature had intended to limit the organized team sport activity exception, it could have done so

expressly. However, nothing in the statute limits the exception to team players, and nothing in the statute indicates that the various classes of people involved in an organized team sport activity (such as players, coaches, umpires and spectators) are to be treated differently. Further, there is nothing in the legislative history or the case law that explains why a landowner who sponsors an organized team sport activity should be liable to some persons, but not to others. Thus, the court concluded that the injured student, as a spectator at an organized team sport activity, fell within the statutory exception and the district was not immune from suit under the recreational immunity statute.

**C. Warrington v. City of Prairie du Chien.** In a recent tragic case decided by the Wisconsin Court of Appeals, a district was held immune for the death of a 4-year old who was brought by his grandparents to a city swimming pool for lessons for “non-swimmers” supervised, instructed and life guarded by city and district staff.<sup>18</sup> During the lesson, the child was lost and staff did not realize he was missing until the lesson was over. The child was found unconscious in the pool and later died.

The parents brought a lawsuit against the city and the district. The district argued that it was immune from suit under the recreational immunity statute. While the parents admitted that swimming and receiving instruction qualify as a recreational activity, they argued that the child was not engaging in either

of those activities when he drowned because he could not have been “swimming” when he was injured (since he was a non-swimmer) and because he was not receiving instruction in swimming at the time since pool staff had lost track of him.

The court rejected the parents’ argument on the basis that the overall purpose of the child’s presence at the swimming pool was for recreational activity. The court was not inclined to dissect each moment of the child’s time at the pool to see if, at each of those moments, the child was actually engaged in a recreational activity.

### ■ Recreational Immunity Statutes

Districts generally make their grounds and facilities available for the public to use for recreational purposes. Because of this, it is not unusual that injuries will occur on those premises, giving rise to potential liability for the district for those injuries. The Wisconsin Legislature has established a zone of immunity for districts in order to encourage them to continue to keep their property open for public recreational use. However, that immunity does not extend to all activities and districts need to understand the scope of their statutory recreational immunity so they can take the appropriate steps to protect themselves from liability. ■

### ■ Endnotes

The *Legal Comment* was written by Michael J. Julka and Steven C. Zach of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel.

For related articles, see *Wisconsin School News*: “Exceptions to Governmental Immunity for Employee Negligence” (September 2010); “School Officials’ and Employees’ Civil Liability Protection” (May 2002); “Indemnifying and Insuring Employees’ Actions” (December 2007); “Liability, Records Requests, and the ADA - Recent Court Decisions (August 1999); and WASB Legal Note: “Government Employee Discretionary Immunity” (Winter 2003).

1. *Wisconsin School News*: “Governmental Immunity” (March 2019).
2. Wis. Stat. s. 895.52(2)(a)1-3.
3. Wis. Stat. s. 895.52(2)(b).
4. *Wilmet v. Liberty Mut. Ins. Co.*, 2017 WI App 16, ¶14, 374 Wis. 2d 413, 893 N.W.2d 251.
5. *Urban v. Gasser*, 2001 WI 63, ¶13, 243 Wis. 2d 673, 627 N.W.2d 511.
6. Wis. Stat. s. 895.52(1)(g).
7. *Wilmet*, 2017 WI App 16, ¶13.
8. Wis. Stat. s. 895.52(1)(g).
9. Wis. Stat. s. 895.52(4).
10. *Milton v. Washburn Cty.*, 2011 WI App 48, ¶11, 332 Wis. 2d 319, 797 N.W.2d 924.
11. Wis. Stat. s. 895.523(2)(b).
12. Wis. Stat. s. 895.523(2)(a).
13. Wis. Stat. s. 895.523(1)(c).
14. Wis. Stat. s. 895.523(5).
15. Wis. Stat. s. 895.523(3).
16. *Auman ex rel. Auman v. School Dist. of Stanley-Boyd*, 2001 WI 125, ¶2, 248 Wis. 2d 548, 635 N.W. 2d 762.
17. *Meyer v. Sch. Dist. of Colby*, 226 Wis. 2d 704, 595 N.W.2d 339 (1999).
18. *Warrington v. City of Prairie du Chien*, No. 2019AP95, 2019 WL 5792531 (Wis. Ct. App. Nov. 7, 2019) (unpublished).

A district is not covered by the recreational immunity statute for injuries suffered by students during mandatory school attendance periods because students who are on school property for educational purposes are not engaging in “recreational activity.”



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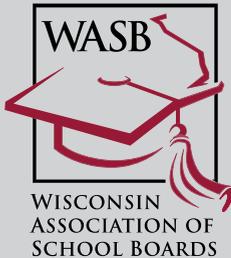
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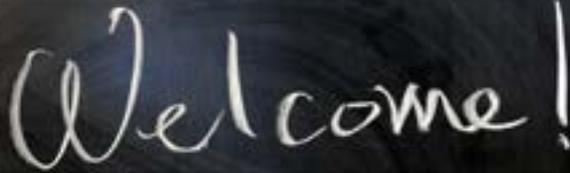
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# UPCOMING PROGRAMS



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**MAY 2020 • VARIOUS LOCATIONS**

## 2020 NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER GATHERINGS

Will a new member be joining your school board in April? If so, plan to attend a WASB New School Board Member Gathering with them during the third week of April.

The gatherings provide an informal orientation for newly elected members to begin learning about their role and the WASB services available to them.

## 2020 SPRING WORKSHOPS

With a focus on effective governance and a board's legal roles and responsibilities, the 2020 Spring Workshops will provide training by WASB attorneys for new and experienced board members.

The workshops will be held on weekday evenings throughout the state in May.

Watch the WASB website and your email inbox for details about these and other upcoming events.

**VISIT [WASB.ORG](http://WASB.ORG) FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER**

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