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Official publication of the Wisconsin Association

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Wisconsin school districts expand on a flourishing outdoor classroom heritage



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October 2020 | Volume 74 Number 13

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

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Wisconsin School News (USPS 688-560)
is published 10 issues per year by the
Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc.,
122 W. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703.
Contents © 2020 Wisconsin Association of School
Boards, Inc. Subscriptions are available to nonmembers
for \$85 per year. Periodicals postage is paid at
Madison, Wis., and other additional entry offices.

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

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



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Teacher Retirements Up 18% Through June

Wisconsin teacher retirement applications rose by about 18% in the first six months of 2020 compared with the year before, according to a report from WMTV of Madison.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Carolyn Stanford Taylor told the television station that, while the pandemic is leading more teachers to retire, she and others are working to grow the teacher pipeline.

"I know many of our districts have a grow-their-own program or know of others working in classrooms or some other profession who have an interest in education, and they're, in their own way, encouraging those individuals to get their license," she said.

Teacher retirement applications rose 25% over the first three months of 2020, compared with 2019, and about 15% from April through June. Requests from teachers for retirement estimates from the Wisconsin Retirement System also rose by 22% in the first six months of the year. □

Students, Schools Differ in Reopening Priorities

A PDK International Survey of how students, teachers and administrators are reacting to the reopening of school shows different anxieties and hopes.

Nearly half of students (45%) see the loss of extracurriculars as the largest concern, compared with 9% of teachers and 8% of district staff.

A slight majority of students (57%) expressed concerns about their ability to learn from a distance, compared with 36% of teachers and 29% of administrators. To receive a copy of the survey, visit pdkintl.org/COVID19-Resources. □

Wisconsin School Funding Drops Compared to Rest of Nation

A new report on education spending trends from the Wisconsin Policy Forum shows Wisconsin's per-pupil spending rose slower than the nation as a whole in recent years.

Between 2011 and 2018, Wisconsin's per-pupil spending increased by 4.3% (from \$11,774 to \$12,285). The nationwide increase was 18.9%, making Wisconsin 49th in the nation in terms of percentage change during that period.

This trend was driven in part by changes in staff benefits. In 2002, Wisconsin led the nation in spending just over \$2,000 per pupil on school

employee benefits. The state remained well above the national average through 2012 when a sharp 15% drop brought Wisconsin's rank on this metric to 18th in the country. It fell below the national average in 2018, as Wisconsin ranked 28th.

The drop in benefits expenditures reflects the Act 10 provisions that lowered district spending through additional contributions by teachers and other school employees toward their pension and health insurance benefits. Read the report on the Wisconsin Policy Forum's website or find it at bit.ly/3btp2Cb. □

STAT OF THE MONTH

4.3%

Percentage of per-pupil spending increase between 2011 and 2018.

The nationwide average increase for this time span was 18.9%.

Source: Wisconsin Policy Forum

Schools Nationwide Have Major Facility Needs

An estimated 54% of school districts need to replace at least two building systems in at least half of their schools, according to a Government Accountability Office report.

About half of schools visited by GAO officials had HVAC-related problems, such as leaking systems, or damaged floor or ceiling tiles. One Rhode Island school had HVAC components that were nearly 100 years old.

Most states, including Wisconsin, do not conduct statewide assessments to determine school-facility needs. The task is left to individual districts.

The GAO also reported that in nearly all the districts it visited, school security had become a top priority, with some districts prioritizing security over replacing building systems such as HVAC. Read the full report at bit.ly/32vPw1N. □



Plans Change, the Mission Remains

We've planned for a long time to make the 100th State Education Convention special. But nobody could have planned for this.

Bringing more than 3,000 people together under one roof with the current social distancing guidelines and limitations is not consistent with our responsibility to provide a safe, informative and enjoyable event. So, we've made the difficult decision to hold the 2021 State Education Convention virtually.

We'll release more information in the coming weeks and months, but we're excited about the possibilities that an all-virtual event allows us. With no time or space constraints, we're able to provide a unique professional development opportunity that will be available all year. You'll be able to participate when it is convenient for you.

Plus, we're excited to be working on securing a top-notch virtual keynote speaker who we wouldn't otherwise be able to bring Milwaukee.

We'll be updating the convention website as plans are finalized and including information in our eConnection newsletters.

So, no complaints about the weather this year! Plan to make a cup of coffee, put your feet up and watch

the snow fly as you engage with members around the state from the comfort of your own home or office. Convention registration will open on November 1 as usual.

Like you, we're trying to be creative and make the most of our situation. Leading up to the convention, we've expanded our roster of online events this fall to try to bring as much professional development as we can to you since we're not able to schedule large, in-person events.

Nearly every week there is a legal webinar, governance online workshop and/or legal and legislative video update. Some require registration while others are complimentary to members. Take advantage of as many as your schedule allows. There are always recordings if you can't attend live.

And of course, we've kicked off our Fall Regional Meetings, which are being held online as well. Visit our website to see the full schedule and agenda. I miss being on the road and seeing you in person. But I appreciate this opportunity to connect and am excited to hear from more members than we ever have at the fall meetings.

For regions electing a member of our Board of Directors, we've created webpages to allow the candi-

dates to introduce themselves to you. (Watch for details on how to vote — the process will vary depending on whether there are multiple candidates or just one.)


We know this has been an extremely challenging year to be a school board member. You're continuing to make tough decisions under unprecedented circumstances.

That makes Wisconsin School Board Week, held Oct. 4-10, even more critical this year. Our theme for the year's week of recognition — Strong Boards, Strong Schools, Strong Communities — brings to mind the shared success of schools, boards and the places they live and serve. Our website has resources to help districts plan activities and communicate about the importance of board service to your communities. I always enjoy seeing the creative ways districts find to honor their board members.

I look forward to seeing your smiling faces at the regional meetings over the next few weeks.

As we learn how to best meet your needs in this environment, we welcome your feedback and suggestions. Stay safe and be well. ■

Leading up to the convention, we've expanded our roster of online events this fall to try to bring as much professional development as we can to you since we're not able to schedule large, in-person events.



Bayfield High School alternative education students worked with Red Cliff tribal members in an effort to place manoomin (wild rice) seed in the Raspberry River.

THE TRADITION OF THE School Forest

Wisconsin school districts expand on a flourishing outdoor classroom heritage

In 1928, students in Laona started a movement by planting trees on barren land outside of their northeastern Wisconsin town. Today, 234 of the state's 421 public school districts have registered school forests that create outdoor classrooms while beautifying their communities.

We asked four districts to share the creative uses they've found for their forests, which range in size from five acres in Stevens Point to 320 acres in Marshfield. School forests were instrumental in two of these schools — Stevens Point and Bayfield — being honored as U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools earlier this year. *(See sidebar on p. 7 to learn how Green Ribbon Schools earned their accolades.)*

Of course, they tend to start with the goal of providing environmental education. But many also maintain diverse habitats, raise funds through timber sales and offer recreational opportunities to students and residents alike.

In the School District of Bayfield, the forest also continues to teach educators, as teacher Rick Erickson learned one cool and misty fall day with the help of Ivan, an inquisitive student.

As the class was checking trail cameras, Ivan asked if he could harvest a black mass growing from a paper birch tree.

"Ummm. What exactly is it, and why do you want to harvest it?" Erickson remembers asking.

The student told him it's called

Shkitaagan or Chaga, which didn't exactly clear things up with Erickson.

Ivan chuckled. "It's a fungus. You make tea with it."

"It looks like bear poop," Erickson said, his ignorance obvious.

"Well, in this case, one man's bear poop is another man's medicine," Ivan said with a smile.

Ivan went on to teach the class about the special mushroom — where it grows, its medicinal properties and how it's used to make tea. Later, the students designed an experiment to maximize the amount of tea that could be obtained from a golf ball-size chunk of Chaga.

Erickson teaches in a district with over 70% Anishinaabe students, a group of related Indigenous peoples that includes Ojibwe, Potawatomi

and Algonquin peoples, among others. The forest offers prime opportunities to teach science in a culturally relevant way.

Other districts are finding ways to incorporate their school forests into experiential and place-based instruction.

In the Marshfield School District, about 2,200 students visit the 320-acre school forest each year.

“If you have ever asked a student from Marshfield School District what their favorite field trip was as a kid, they will tell you without batting an eye, it was their trip(s) to the Marshfield School Forest,” says teacher Mark Zee.

A three-acre pond added in the 1960s offers aquatic education. A small island, accessible by foot bridge, provides a quiet area for catch-and-release fishing.

“It is at this location that many of our visitors, young and old alike, will tell you they caught their first fish,” Zee says.

The Northland Pines School District’s SOAR Charter Middle School teamed up with the SnapShot Wisconsin program to host a trail camera. Photos are used to help gather data regarding the population of various species. Students have become adept at identifying a variety of species and making connections between predator and prey numbers. They are even learning to distinguish individual animals within a species. It has become so popular that a second trail camera was installed on the opposite end of the property.

Northland Pines has gone beyond the forest itself to make investments that maximize its potential. The school forest committee arranged a teacher in-service opportunity to introduce the teaching staff to the possibilities of the forest. The district committed to fund busing for each classroom to go to the school forest.

At the McDill School Forest, part of the Stevens Point Area Public School District, physical education students use the five-acre woods in a variety of ways. Students enjoy leisure hikes or run on trails while

playing games embedded with environmental lessons.

At McDill, the principal and physical education teacher led the push to transform an unused, overgrown woodlot into a place for learning.

Play is at the heart of how the elementary school uses its forest. Staff say the natural environment provides an ideal backdrop for students to learn how to cooperate and take healthy risks.

A highlight of McDill’s outdoor learning space is a Storywalk, installed in 2018. It allows students and families to spend time outdoors while enjoying poetry and stories — giving students new connections between the outdoors and literature.

School forests aren’t just for children; many are open to residents, too. Marshfield’s forest is exceptional in this regard.

In 1992, it added a 7.5-mile system of cross-country trails open to the public and maintained by the Marshfield Area Ski Touring Foundation.

In 2015, six middle and high school students created the Marshfield Mountain Bike Club. They carved out 3.5 miles of single-track mountain bike trails that year. Five more miles have been added since



A Bayfield High School student, Ivan, inspects Shkitaagan or Chaga, a fungus found growing on birch trees, and known for its medicinal properties when taken as a tea or tincture.





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then. The team has grown to around 30 students and 10 coaches.

In the fall, the forest is open to hunters under a permit system and its facilities are used by community organizations for a nominal fee.

“No matter what time of year, if a school event is not in session, community members are welcome to enjoy recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, berry picking and bird-watching at no charge,” Zee says.

Responsible lumber harvesting is a part of many well-managed forests, and school forests are no exception.

The Northland Pines School District infused its first timber harvest — conducted as a two-day charity harvest with the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association — with student career exploration and learning components. Fourth graders planted trees to aid in regeneration of the forest.

In Marshfield, timber harvests in



School forests provide students the opportunity to hone many abilities, including their winter survival skills.

2015 and 2018 generated about \$70,000 in timber sales. Combined with fundraising, the district renovated the classrooms, bathrooms, dormitories and kitchen in its School

Forest Lodge. It also used part of the funds to revitalize the pond by installing a new aerator, stocking fish and initiating weed control.

Timber harvests aren't only about the proceeds, says forester Dan Peterson.

Logging access roads have provided new trails for teachers and students, he explains. The harvests create wildlife habitat and set the stage for the forest's natural regeneration.

“Today the property is a wonderful example of ‘multiple use’ forest management,” Peterson says, “providing numerous year-round outdoor environmental education opportunities, recreational hiking and skiing trails, public hunting opportunities, and a sustainable flow of valuable forest products off the land through the years.” ■



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FOUR LESSONS FROM THE CHAMPIONS BEHIND WISCONSIN'S GREEN & HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Since 2012, 30 Wisconsin schools have received the nationally celebrated honor of being named a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School. While none of their paths are the same, their stories provide common lessons.

From our conversations with 15 representatives from Wisconsin's Green Ribbons Schools, we've compiled four main lessons about setting and reaching green and healthy goals.

1. Understanding motivation

Only school communities that make the effort to document achievements and practices are considered for recognition and nomination. What motivates individuals in a school community to complete the comprehensive documentation required for Green Ribbon School nomination? Of the representatives interviewed, about half said it was important to someone or a group of people in the school community, or that the documentation process was valuable for informing and guiding the path forward.

Amy Callies, a teacher at Park Elementary School in Cross Plains, found herself spearheading the documentation effort because of the motivation and enthusiasm of the school's 79-year-old custodian, who as a younger man had grazed cattle on the property where the school is now located. The school community agreed that theirs was a special place and obtaining Green Ribbon Schools recognition was a way to honor the people who had cared for the school and the land, and to continue building sustainability projects and culture.

In the Washburn School District, doing the work of documenting achievements and practices for the Green Ribbon Schools nomination forced important conversations and created ideas. The application framework also brought attention to how many "green & healthy" things the school was already doing and helped define priorities and goals.

2. The importance of leadership

Perhaps the only thing that can be applied to every school community is that building culture and identity is rooted in strong leadership. Seventy-five percent of the school representatives said that having the "right people" and a spirit of collaboration is a primary factor contributing to a school culture of sustainability.

Kristen Halverson, a teacher and green and healthy school "champion" at Purdy Elementary School in the Fort Atkinson School District, says "The passion for the work we do has continued to grow, even with many changes in staffing and leadership. When we think about the extension opportunities we create for our students, we are intentional in aligning it to our work with green initiatives. The staff team that leads our Green Team are highly interested in helping students learn about green practices and dedicate time and energy into providing a place where they can share that passion with students."

In the case of school communities, leadership for creating a culture of school sustainability sprouts from a variety of people. In Wisconsin, there are examples of this leadership coming from student groups, parent organizations, district administrators, school founders and a variety of school employees.

One-third of representatives attributed their school's accomplishments to a key individual doing most of the work, but there is no succession plan for when that individual leaves. While a quarter of representatives indicated that, although the efforts started with a key individual, systems are now in place in the school community to uphold and advance sustainability efforts. Another quarter of schools started with a team and continue with a team approach.

Finally, about 40% of representatives indicated influential student leadership teams in the school.

3. Culture building is a process

Responses about the school culture of sustainability suggested that despite being recognized as a Green Ribbon School, an actual culture shift that influences every member of the school community is rare — if it exists at all (only 20% of representatives indicated that "green" is now a part of the school identity, and that practices are now habit).

When the time came for the Lake Mills Area School District to construct a new elementary school, they didn't hold anything back in designing a building that would meet the community's shared desire for a high-performing, healthy school. From the beginning, the planning process invited input from everyone, and adhered to a mission-driven and collaborative decision-making model that emphasized the core drivers of quality, durability, high performance, health and sustainability. The result is a nationally acclaimed school where operations align with student success, and sustainability has become a way of life for students and staff.

4. Making 'green & healthy' happen

This list within a list sums up the actions and mindsets that make it all happen:

- Involve students
- Seek and invite input and buy-in from school community members
- Have a process and a plan
- Start small
- Find the people who care
- Don't give up
- Build community relationships
- Don't make it "one more thing"
- Base learning opportunities on staff interests

Examples of related Wisconsin school board policies addressing energy man-

agement, sustainability and other green initiatives are available upon request from WASB Policy Services Assistant Teresa Kimball (tkimball@wasb.org).



Green & Healthy

Eau Claire Area School District commits to moving towards a carbon-neutral future

*Tim Nordin, Board President,
Eau Claire Area School District*



When my family and I moved from New Jersey to Eau Claire in 2015, we weren't sure what to expect. Immediately, we found ourselves immersed in a dynamic community committed to expanding positive environmental impact and urban planning to allow for outdoor activity.

We were minutes away from mountain bike trails, urban parks, rivers, lakes and campgrounds. Bike lanes and trails cross the city, allowing residents to forego use of cars while remaining safe and in a beautiful environment. We were delighted to join a community so committed to combining city life with responsible environmental stewardship. As we have grown into our new home, we have treasured the access to the natural world within our city limits, and the support of our neighbors and friends in pursuing green initiatives. This is a place where

individuals and groups are working together to tackle our energy future.

When I was elected to the Eau Claire Area School Board in 2019, our city was in the midst of another wave of commitment to the environment. Both the Eau Claire City Council and the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors adopted resolutions to support efforts to move toward carbon-neutral energy use by 2050. Since the school district works

closely with our community, it seemed only natural that we join our voices and practices with our local government partners.

Our largest utility provider, Xcel Energy, also announced plans to deliver 100% renewable energy by 2050. Much as we strive to do as a school board and district, Eau Claire was speaking with one voice for this effort.

The district had already begun to focus on energy-saving initiatives as we developed our ultimate resolution. Some of these mirror simple initiatives many of us as individuals have undertaken in our own homes. We automated our lighting system to cut down on electricity, updated heating systems and windows to much more efficient models, and installed lower water-use toilet fixtures. These are easy investments to make, as they are cost-effective as well as energy and resource efficient. Beyond this, we have undertaken initiatives to



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upgrade food service materials to durable materials, add LED lighting and install vinyl floors that require less chemical stripping and wax.

We also worked with community partners to develop “Safe Routes to Schools” so students can walk, bike and/or carpool safely to and from our buildings each day.

Thus, as we considered our resolution, we had only to weigh the flexibility for the district to continue to address our needs in innovative, varied ways while pushing into new areas. Should you read our district’s sustainability resolution, you will find that it lays out broad areas of focus.

We resolved five broad goals:

1. Facility planning that contains green thinking
2. An overall strategy and timetable for our progress
3. Identification of grants and other funding for these purposes
4. Short-term goals for progress toward renewable energy independence
5. Zero-waste practices

With these goals in mind, we set expectations for our district while leaving latitude for innovation and following the most recent expert input. Adding in a goal for identifying external funding would allow us to continue to be stewards of taxpayer dollars while also being stewards of our environment. The board, the district and the community were all energized to join together in pursuing these goals.

One of our first initiatives fit each of our goals precisely. We were approached by the Couillard Solar Foundation through our partner, the Eau Claire Public Schools Foundation. Couillard’s Solar on Schools program (the subject of another article in this issue) offered to provide

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up to 360 solar panels as a donation, and another anonymous donor offered to match that donation.

Our public schools foundation agreed to help us reach out to our community for donations to cover the cost of installation, engineering and maintenance for 25 years — the warranted life of the panels. This project would provide an estimated 125,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity yearly, putting another step in our renewable commitment, and would save the district roughly \$20,000 per year. Indeed, though we would ask for public support in raising the funds for the project rather than tapping into our district budget, the project would pay for itself in roughly 12 years — half the expected life of the panels.

Again, with one voice, our board was unanimous in moving forward. We wanted the opportunity, but would our community step up to support the effort? Naturally, they did.



Individuals, businesses and community groups all donated to this project. We will soon begin installation on the first phase of the project on one of our two high schools, with panels on the other soon to follow. Within the buildings, monitors will display the production of our solar systems so students

and visitors can visibly see the impacts of this decision. Science teachers can use the data provided to help guide lessons and encourage students to explore possible careers in green energy.

Of course, this is only the beginning. Our district has much work ahead of it, but our efforts to this point and the commitment of the board, district and city at large suggest that we have willing partners to invest in bringing our goals to full realization. It will take continued personal and district-wide effort to continue to move forward, and not just over the short term. Our board, and the boards that follow it, will

have to continue to work with our city and county governments and its individual citizens. Just as Eau Claire prides itself on being a community that approaches goals together even in the face of differences, our district looks forward to moving together to achieve its goals. ■

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Ten years ago, the cost to install solar was over \$6 per watt. Today, the average school-sized installation would likely cost less than \$2 per watt — a decrease of roughly 75%. This substantial drop in price has resulted in solar photovoltaic (PV) installations being not only environmentally but also financially beneficial for businesses, homeowners, utilities and schools.

In many locations, on-site solar can provide energy cheaper than traditional, grid-tied electricity sources. More and more often, school-sized solar projects demonstrate favorable returns and are designed to be cash-flow positive from day one. Energy use represents the second-largest expenditure for school districts outside of personnel. Coupled with the constant struggle of budget constraints and uncertainty, solar PV represents an innovative mechanism to reduce a fixed cost and increase operating budgets without cutting educational programs.

Why schools?

The benefits of solar schools go far beyond financial savings. Solar installations represent high-impact, high-visibility projects that bring the community together to collectively learn about the process and benefits of going solar. Schools can impact the entire community as well as surrounding school districts simply by demonstrating and broadening the visibility of solar.

Solar projects also represent important opportunities for students to be immersed in renewable energy, often for the first time. This can occur

by participating in a green team or sustainability club, leading a solar campaign or by the integration of solar into curricula. Installing solar PV onsite allows districts to provide hands-on education, promote student leadership experiences and facilitate career exploration in renewable and clean energy.

Getting started

A report from the Solar Foundation, Generation 180 and the Solar Energy Industries Association found 7,332 schools nationally with on-site solar

success is having access to resources, nonprofits and peers that understand the process and can provide guidance. The Midwest Renewable Energy Association, in partnership with the Couillard Solar Foundation, developed the Wisconsin Solar on Schools initiative to help bridge this gap of knowledge and experience. The Solar on Schools Resource Center houses a compilation of case studies, RFP and other templates, guiding documents, finance modeling tools, expert-presented videos, a Wisconsin peer network, and

more to help planning teams develop and execute a project. Additionally, to help lower the upfront cost of a solar installation, Solar on Schools provides an in-kind grant in the form of a solar panel donation. Each grant is valued up to \$20,000, with grants being awarded per school building installing solar.

Typically, the first place to start is to form a solar planning team. This could be a mix of school board members, students, teachers, staff members or community members who work together to build consensus and educate key stakeholders on the benefits and opportunities of

going solar. MREA's Solar on Schools initiative provides an introductory video as well as an automated email series that details basic information.

When exploring a potential solar project at your school, it can be important to reach out to a contractor early on. Often, contractors will develop a site assessment and cost proposal at no cost. Once your school has made the decision to go solar, it's important to receive multiple bids through a



through the end of 2019, with an average system size of 186kW. Wisconsin currently hosts 165 of these systems. While solar schools are a fast-growing trend across the nation, most district administrators, business managers, board members and community members are likely still unsure of what to ask for, who to trust, or how to proceed with developing a solar project.

A key determinant to a project's

competitive bidding process, and to vet received bids with a thorough scoring matrix. Keep in mind that your selected contractor will take care of all the necessary paperwork, including incentives, permits and utility interconnection. Explore the resources below to get started today.

Explore the Solar on Schools Initiative and learn the basics about going solar:
midwestrenew.org/solar-on-schools

Consult with a contractor...

- **MREA Business Member Directory:**
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nabcep.org/installer-locator

■ Madison Metropolitan School District

In 2019, the Madison Metropolitan School District passed a resolution to adopt a goal of 50% clean energy by 2030 and 100% by 2040. Madison West High School students and staff continue to be passionately motivated to reduce West's carbon footprint. Their solar journey began as a student-led effort in 2017. From June 2017 through 2019, the West High Green Club raised more than \$89,000 from staff, students, parents, community members, the Madison Community Foundation and other local foundations and businesses to support a solar installation.

Charles Hua, a 2018 West graduate and former West Green Club president, said, "As one of the largest youth-led sustainability efforts in Wisconsin, this clean energy initiative, titled 'Project Solis,' will provide students with hands-on learning opportunities in a growing clean-energy job market, generate savings in electricity costs that will save taxpayers money and reduce the school's carbon footprint."

MMSD went out to bid and awarded the contract to Westphal Electric, which installed the 125.8 kW DC/95.4 kW AC system in July 2020 for a total cost of \$170,086. In addition to fundraising efforts, other significant funding sources included a Solar on Schools in-kind module grant and a \$20,000 grant from the Left Coast Fund's Solar Moonshot Program.

The remaining balance was paid through existing operating budgets. The system is anticipated to produce 134,640 kWh/year, representing roughly 5.5% of the school's annual energy needs, saving the district \$13,861 annually and \$415,830 over the 30-year lifetime of the system. The system will also include comprehensive monitoring and a kiosk to provide students the opportunity to interact with the PV system in their classes.



■ Merton Community School District

The Merton Community School District is a 4K-8 grade public school district serving roughly 900 students in two schools: Merton Primary School and Merton Intermediate School. Until the state of Wisconsin changed the minimum per-pupil revenue limit, the district was the lowest per-pupil


spending district in Waukesha County. With declining enrollment, they saw their revenue limit continue to decline. At this point, they began seeking ways to save money, especially in energy, which continued to be a "fixed cost," regardless of enrollment.

In the spring of 2018, a school board member was pursuing solar energy for their home and brought the idea of solar PV to the district to potentially save on operating expenses. The school board and village representatives met several times to run numbers and build capacity. The district went to bid in March 2019 for a 389 kW DC system to be split between Merton Primary and Merton Intermediate. By December, the system was commissioned and online.

The system is projected to produce almost two-thirds of the district's energy needs, resulting in an average electricity savings of \$70,000 per year for the system's 30-year life. To help fund this project, they received an in-kind module donation for a portion of the system through MREA's Solar on Schools program and a \$68,000 grant through Focus on Energy, together totaling over \$100,000 in incentives. The remaining balance was paid through district dollars as well as a low-interest, 10-year loan.

District Superintendent Ronald Russ was exceptionally pleased with their decision to go solar, stating, "Our entire experience from start to finish was fantastic. School districts need to, at a minimum, pursue the opportunity that solar power might afford their district. After we looked at grants, the opportunity to create our own power and the very quick return on investment, (solar) was something we could not ignore." □

Amanda Schienebeck, Midwest Renewable Energy Association.



Wisconsin's school breakfast
campaign bears fruit, energizing
student activity and learning

Susan Bostian Young

the Breakfast CHALLENGE

Photo courtesy of No Kid Hungry

The results of Wisconsin's campaign promoting the benefits of a healthy breakfast are in. The Wisconsin School Breakfast Challenge decreased student tardiness while increasing reimbursements to schools, student focus and administrative support for the School Breakfast Program.

Hunger Task Force, No Kid Hungry, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin sponsored the second annual challenge to help school districts give every student a great start to the day. From December 2019 through March 2020, 236 schools across Wisconsin competed to serve more breakfasts to students. Winning schools received cash prizes for increasing participation. No Kid

Hungry, a national campaign to end child hunger, also provided financial grants for equipment that enhanced or expanded breakfast service.

While easing the financial strain for families in need, school breakfast programs that maximize participation also ensure that financial resources from the breakfast program benefit all students.

St. Anthony's 2nd Street School in Milwaukee, the winner of the "Colby" category for school districts with greater than 875 students, saw average daily participation in the school breakfast program rise from 20% of its students from December 2018 through February 2019 to 58% during the same time period the following year. St. Anthony's breakfast reimbursement also increased 38% for the challenge period.

"I am very excited about this achievement, as it was a challenge," Food Service Director Lizbeth Maturin said. "We implemented Breakfast After the Bell so the students who arrived later had the opportunity of having breakfast."

Breakfast After the Bell helps older students who tend to sleep later, arrive to school independently, and move around the halls when changing classes. St. Anthony's made meals more accessible, trained food service staff to communicate more, informed students what was offered for breakfast every day, and encouraged them to enjoy a healthy breakfast in the classroom.

"Research shows there are academic and nutritional benefits to eating breakfast," State Superintendent of Public Instruction Carolyn

WISCONSIN SCHOOL BREAKFAST CHALLENGE WINNERS

CATEGORY	DISTRICT	SCHOOL	% POINT INCREASE	PRIZE
COLBY WINNER	St. Anthony School District	St. Anthony 2nd Street	38	\$1,000
COLBY RUNNER-UP	Appleton Area School District	Franklin Elementary School	37	\$750
SWISS WINNER	Hillsboro School District	Hillsboro Elementary School	36	\$1,000
SWISS RUNNER-UP	Clayton School District	Clayton Elementary School	33	\$750
MOZZARELLA WINNER	DL Hines Preparatory Academy of Excellence	DL Hines College Prep Academy of Excellence	4	\$1,000
CHEDDAR WINNER	Our Lady of the Lake Catholic School	Our Lady of the Lake Catholic School	38	\$1,000
CHEDDAR RUNNER-UP	Gibraltar School District	Gibraltar Elementary School	17	\$750
BIG CHEESE WINNER	Stevens Point Area School District	P.J. Jacobs Junior High School	10	\$1,000
BIG CHEESE RUNNER-UP	Wausau School District	John Muir Middle School	1	\$750

COLBY: District enrollment greater than 875 students

SWISS: District enrollment between 275 and 875 students

MOZZARELLA: District enrollment less than 275 students

CHEDDAR: Districts implementing a new breakfast program in 2019-20

BIG CHEESE: An optional bonus category for all participating schools. Schools had the chance to do various breakfast-related activities and the top two schools were awarded based on the amount of points earned (participation data was not included in the analysis).

Winners in each category were determined based on the growth in the percentage of the student body participating in breakfast. The analysis compared the average daily participation from December 2018 through February 2019 to the participation from December 2019 through February 2020. Data was provided by the DPI and analyzed by No Kid Hungry.

Stanford Taylor wrote in support of the challenge in an October 2019 letter. “Students who eat a healthy school breakfast have significantly higher scores in math, increased attendance, improved behavior and decreased tardiness.”

The elementary schools in Hillsboro and Clayton won in the “Swiss” category for districts with between 275 and 875 enrolled students, for an increase in breakfast participation during the challenge.

“The Second Chance Breakfast gave children the opportunity to eat if they were late to school or were not hungry when they first arrived,” Hillsboro School District Food Service Director Carolyn Kannenberg said.

“To get them to come for breakfast required help from the teaching staff,” Clayton Food Service Manager Diane

Swiontek said. “As the students got off the bus, they were directed to come to the commons instead of running out to play.”

National School Breakfast Week, sponsored by the School Nutrition Association, coincided with the last week of the challenge. SNA provides themed materials each year for schools to plan and promote their breakfast celebrations. Adding these elements of fun to school breakfast increases participation.

“Breakfast week helps too,” Swiontek explained. “We play trivia games with prizes. The students’ names are entered each time they eat breakfast.”

Creating a fun, engaging and educational meal service motivates students to get to school in time to enjoy healthy, nutritious breakfasts.

Breakfast After the Bell is the most successful breakfast service model employed by challenge winners. It is no coincidence that Governor Tony Evers, in a letter to school administrators, encouraged all schools “to adopt Breakfast After the Bell for their students.”

To help students start the school day ready to learn, DL Hines Prep School in Milwaukee began serving Breakfast After the Bell. The school won the “Mozzarella” category for districts with fewer than 275 students. Launita Dawson, administrative professional at DL Hines, said its implementation “was one of the main changes that assisted in our ability to serve more students for breakfast. The administrators found that when the students are rushed in the morning, due to any number of reasons, it often

According to a 2015 survey of School Nutrition Association members, 96% said their student participation increases during National School Breakfast Week. **SNA website:** schoolnutrition.org/meetings/events/nsbw/2020/about



Photo courtesy of No Kid Hungry

alters the student's focus. Allowing them to receive breakfast minimized any agitation and assisted in their ability to have a positive day."

Carrie Willer is principal of Franklin Elementary School in the Appleton Area School District, a school that saw breakfast participation rise by 37 percentage points. She says teachers had questions at the outset.

Would serving breakfast in the classroom be messy, gumming up carpets and books? Would it take too much time? Instead, she and her staff were pleasantly surprised by the positive effect that eating breakfast together had on learning.

Children came to class from the playground more quickly when they

knew food was waiting. They were less distracted when they were full. And they stopped repeatedly asking when lunch would be.

To emphasize the importance of administrative support in school breakfast program success, the DPI's School Nutrition Team devised a new feature for the 2019-20 Challenge: The Big Cheese. This bonus category, open to all schools, awarded points for activities during National School Breakfast Week that promoted the program and engaged principals, school board members and superintendents by inviting them to eat breakfast at school and to post on social media in support of school breakfast.

P.J. Jacobs Junior High School in Stevens Point jumped on the chal-

lenge. Principal Dan Dobratz sent out a letter to all families introducing their new Second Chance Breakfast, sang on morning announcements to excite students, posted on social media in support of the school breakfast program and joined students for breakfast. P.J. Jacobs won the Big Cheese category and increased participation by 10% during the challenge.

"Increasing breakfast participation is a win for both kids and schools," according to the Hunger Task Force. The organization hosted the challenge website that featured a free toolkit for schools. It includes resources, statistics, letters of support and serving ideas. Having worked for more than 40 years



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towards universal school breakfast, Hunger Task Force speaks to the benefits of school breakfast to children and the ways in which school breakfast programs make financial sense for schools.

In Wisconsin, schools that participate in the National School Breakfast Program receive federal and state reimbursements for every qualifying breakfast served to students. Many schools that already participate in the National School Lunch Program can successfully implement a breakfast program, which generates extra revenue with little additional labor costs.

“The most surprising thing I took note of was how this program leveled the playing field,” Stevens



Principal Dan Dobratz promoting breakfast at P.J. Jacobs Middle School.

Point Area School District food service supervisor Crystal Orley said. “I was expecting the participation of students signed up for free and reduced-priced lunches to significantly increase. Those numbers did increase, but more noticeably, kids with a normal pay status skyrocketed ... To me, this was an indication that there is a need for all students

across the board to be able to have access to food after the school day has started and before lunch, not just students from low-income families, and this should be taken into consideration by all districts contemplating this program.” ■

Susan Bostian Young is on the School Nutrition Team at the the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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One way students can participate in the Patient Care Pathway is through HOSA, one of the career and technical education student organizations.

REGIONAL Career Pathways

Students pursue opportunities through work-based learning experiences

Karin Smith

Ensuring all students are college and career ready is a critical goal for every school district in the state. Regional career pathways have become important for building that readiness. They offer a sequence of courses and work-based learning experiences that enable students to explore and pursue careers that lead smoothly from high school to college and career.

It sounds simple, however, in order to be effective, a career pathway must include input from employers, K-12 schools, postsecondary schools and communities. Pathways provide local school districts with dynamic partnerships that include critical stakeholders so districts can replicate career pathway opportunities for students in a new way. This is a story about how pathways came to be — and how they are changing the school landscape.

■ The regional career pathways idea

Career-building opportunities traditionally depended on the community students lived in or the school district they attended. Using that method, many school districts struggled to develop and maintain the business and community partnerships needed to prepare students for college and careers.

If a district wanted to offer a career pathway, such as patient care, it had to find employers to advise the district on the jobs in that pathway with the highest potential demand, such as respiratory therapist, nurse anesthetist or phlebotomist. Employers would also review the skills needed to succeed in these jobs.

What's more, neighboring school districts might be conducting outreach and research on the same pathway, using the same employers. This approach can create significant

duplication of effort and result in inconsistent information about the pathway for students and their families. In other cases, the opposite was true. Businesses wanted and needed to engage with school districts, but did not know how to connect.

The pathways model addresses these issues and inefficiencies at the state and regional levels. At the state level, the Department of Public Instruction works with the Department of Workforce Development to identify high-skill, in-demand industries. The DPI convenes a statewide group of employers in that industry to identify the jobs that will be in demand in the future as well as the skills students will need to be successful in those jobs.

This information is sent to Wisconsin's seven pathway regions, which are based on the boundaries of the state's regional economic development organizations. Each region has



Youth apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs are an integral part of a regional career pathway.

its own regional collaborative group made up of employers; education stakeholders like Cooperative Educational Service Agencies, K-12 schools, technical colleges and universities; and economic and workforce development representatives.

Business and industry members

take the lead in the regional collaborative groups, in which local employers advise on any variations to the state-level information that better reflect the needs of the region. All the postsecondary education and training options for the pathway are identified, including registered apprenticeships,

military training, technical college and university options.

Then, the tailored industry information is provided to every school district in the region. It takes research off the plate of school districts, which are already stretched thin, so they can focus on connecting courses, providing



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Regional career pathways allow students to “try on” a career to see if it will be the right fit for them.

work-based learning opportunities, supplying industry-recognized certifications, and offering career and technical student organizations related to the regionally defined pathways.

“The pathway meetings helped us think differently about our offerings, create consistency across the region for students, and provide clarity for employers, higher education and other partners,” says Michael Vuolo, principal at Franklin High School, which was an early adopter of regional career pathways. “We have been able to learn from each other and gain a much wider viewpoint than we would if doing this work locally.”

Most importantly, pathways provide the infrastructure Wisconsin needs to make sure that all students have access to high-quality career pathways in high schools.

■ Looking back to look forward

The pathways idea grew out of a grant funded by JPMorgan Chase & Co. In 2017, JPMorgan donated \$20 million to 10 states to increase the number of high school students who are career ready upon graduation. Wisconsin used its \$2 million “New Skills for Youth” grant to fund four pilot regions in the state. Over the course of three years, stakeholders in the pilot regions created regional career pathways.

Much of the grant was used to develop the regional collaborative groups that would form the lynchpin of the regional career pathways. Within these groups, employers identify the skills, knowledge and habits that they look for in employees. High schools modify their curriculum to support the

development of those skills, and technical schools ensure that their curriculum dovetails with the participating high schools.

By December 2019, the end of the grant period, the regional collaborative groups had defined their role. They choose, build, implement, promote and monitor high school career pathways in high-skill, in-demand industry sectors. They act as an advisory group, on behalf of regional districts, to identify and overcome barriers that prevent students in the region from accessing pathways.

This year, the pathways are expanding across the state as the model is being replicated in regions that were not part of the original pilot project.

■ Students are big winners

Regional career pathways bring perspective to students who are trying to answer the questions: Who am I? What do I want to do?

However, especially in the age of COVID-19, when teachers are finding it harder to engage students in online learning, the pathways bring a real-life relevance that no other program provides. The following key benefits are provided to students and families:

■ College and career readiness.

In concert with academic and career planning, regional career pathways enable students to identify and explore careers of interest. Moreover, students are more likely to find a career field that is a good fit, enroll in and complete postsecondary educa-

tion, and enter employment with the skills they need.

“Students often feel they are committed to a certain career trajectory if they start participating in a career pathway,” says Vuolo. “We want to provide access to career pathways and allow room for students to explore multiple pathways rather than focusing on just one.”

■ **Less student debt.** The pilot project taught participants it is just as valuable for students to learn what they do not want to pursue as what they do. When students have an opportunity to “test drive” a career pathway while still in high school, they are less likely to change their major in college or take unnecessary college courses — a potentially significant savings. For students who choose the right pathway for themselves, taking dual-enrollment courses in high school earns college credit, saves money and reduces the time it takes to earn their credential.

■ The power of partnership

While students and families realize measurable benefits through pathways, all partners in the regional collaborative groups have significant returns on their investment. “Creating new pathways can involve major shifting of resources and rewriting curriculum or creating new courses,” says Vuolo.

The return on investment is significant. For school districts, the pathways offer increased capacity to implement career readiness and

academic and career planning services statewide. It also helps teachers engage and motivate students who learn how academic studies relate to real-world applications.

Pathways offer other benefits for employers. Nearly 60% of companies report difficulty filling job openings because of a lack of qualified applicants, which can cost a company upwards of \$800,000 annually in lost productivity and recruitment. Thirty-nine percent of employers say lack of experience or hard skills are top drivers of the talent shortages.¹

Pathways close the skills gaps by introducing students to in-demand careers earlier and accelerating them through the talent pipeline faster. In addition, they enable employers to support educational programming, which ensures that learning is both current and relevant.

Postsecondary and training partners see increased admission and retention rates as students are better

prepared with a plan entering college. Pathways, along with academic and career planning, ensure that students are aware of postsecondary options so that students can find the right fit.

All partners in the regional collaborative groups benefit from the level of engagement students experience. Career and technical education courses and work-based learning experiences help students understand the relationship between classroom learning and its application to real life. Research shows that students who concentrate on career and technical education are 10% more likely to graduate from high school. Advance CTE, a national non-profit that represents state leaders in career and technical education, also indicates that students who concentrate on these areas of study attend school more regularly and have higher academic achievement.²

Over time, the regional collaborative groups are the most efficient way to establish and sustain education-

business partnerships. The group empowers regional intermediaries, such as regional economic development organizations and CESAs, to fill gaps in the education-business partnership. The collaborative group helps develop stronger partnerships and sustain them, even during an economic downturn.

To learn more, visit dpi.wi.gov/pathways-wisconsin or contact regional career pathways state coach Jennifer Wagner at jwagner@pathwayswi.org. ■

Karin Smith is an education consultant in Academic and Career Planning, Dual Enrollment at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

1. From Advance CTE, "What is CTE?" bit.ly/3hZcdRV
2. From Advance CTE, "Career and Technical Education & Student Achievement" bit.ly/3gtiHs8



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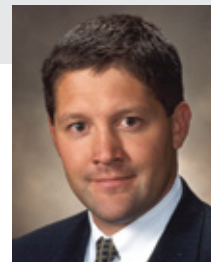
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■ The problem with cost shifting

A creative solution doesn’t reject today’s leading health-plan trends or strategies — such as referenced-based pricing, insurance pools, employee clinics and others — it incorporates them in a way that makes sense for your district. What works for one district won’t necessarily work for another.

The problem with implementing any strategy in a vacuum, without a big-picture mindset, is that one “solution” usually comes at the expense of another. Have you heard of referenced-based pricing or insurance pools

backfiring on districts, increasing health-plan costs and essentially doing the opposite of what was intended? It’s a familiar story, and it usually happens when a district uses a tactic to shift costs rather than address their root causes, so the costs just pop up somewhere else. Implementing standard health-plan solutions can be like playing whack-a-mole, except the game is not fun when costs increase, jobs disappear and educational goals are missed.

But what’s wrong with cost shifting as long as the costs pop up on the side of healthcare providers or insurance carriers, rather than on your district or health-plan members? The question almost answers itself, but it’s worth addressing because many employers across the nation fall into this trap. The answer is that such short-term solutions are not sustainable. When they fail, the problems will come back stronger — and costs higher — than ever. What goes around, comes around.

■ It’s all about partnerships

Strong partnerships between the payer (your district), the patient (your plan members) and the provider (physician or clinic) are absolutely crucial.

“There is power in partnerships and collaboration,” said Tad Wehner, director of finance and personnel for the Edgerton School District. “It’s important to build effective partnerships and collaboration between the school district and the provider as well as between regional and statewide school districts.”

Which partnership should you strengthen first, if you had to prioritize? You can’t go wrong building a sound plan with your healthcare provider. Any healthcare strategy depends on your health-plan members, and the physician/clinic is where their cost-saving behaviors culminate. The providers, for example, can provide many incentives — such as affordable costs, better accessibility or quality services — that will encourage members to use their preventative care services.

High utilization, in turn, can help reduce high-cost medical claims and strengthen your relationship with the provider, giving you more negotiating power. This powerful cycle builds on itself and basically does the opposite of short-sighted cost shifting — it creates stability and control instead of relinquishing it.

“It’s important to build effective partnerships and collaboration between the school district and the provider as well as between regional and statewide school districts.”

To help define and build this crucial partnership, consider these questions:

- What is your engagement level as a district leader with the local hospital and clinic leadership?
- Do you have a shared understanding that you both need each other to be successful?
- Have you defined what success means to each other?

Develop relationships with the leadership of your local providers to better understand how the objectives and vision of their practices align with your district. The intent of the conversation can't be one-sided or a sales pitch. With cost as an outcome, but not the focus, start with an understanding that the provider and the district need to work together to be successful.

■ Shouldn't insurance be the focal point?

Building relationships with other stakeholders also makes sense, of course, but too many solutions focus on the insurance — such as consortiums and co-ops — while failing to address unit cost at the provider level. Starting with the insurance carrier might seem like the logical place to reduce costs — for example, by pooling districts and placing buying power with the same vendor. This can provide greater purchasing power and average out the high and low claims. One insurance co-op in Wisconsin included over 80% of districts, but a lack of shared accountability resulted in a cost-increase trend of double digits. Joining a consortium to solve for a common problem isn't a bad idea, but the solution must be approached strategically and creatively.

The challenge is clear when you realize that an employer group is either subsidizing the rest of the pool or being subsidized. Rarely are all groups in the same boat. Healthy groups will exit the co-op when they can do better on their own, leaving behind a pool of unhealthy groups and many medical claims.

■ What if your partnership with the provider doesn't pan out?

Like many cost-saving strategies, working with the provider is not a one-size-fits-all solution. After getting to know your local providers, another option would be to bring the clinic to your employees if you find they are not able or willing to meet your needs or you simply do not have local providers to work with.

Consider the approach of one Milwaukee-area district. The administrators ultimately decided to bring the clinic in house, working to develop a dedicated on-site provider to meet the employees' healthcare needs. Using data to guide their decision-making, the district established the needed metrics to determine success or failure and now continually adjust their benefits strategy.

While an employee clinic can be an effective solution, it should be complemented by other resources to improve employee health and wellness, such as

health-risk assessments and biometrics, disease management programs, medical claims analysis and employee education. Districts should understand the importance of utilizing resources collectively to greatly boost their value and effectiveness. When all of the "moving parts" are working, they can form a program that is greater than the sum of its parts.

■ Bottom line

A strategic plan using tactics that stabilize healthcare costs by addressing the root causes can produce long-term results. There are no quick fixes or magic bullets. Meaningful change takes time, transparency and commitment from all stakeholders. Positive engagement not only helps the district's employee benefits and wellness programs succeed, but also helps the district ultimately provide quality education to its students. ■

Al Jaeger is a senior benefits consultant and senior vice president with USI Insurance Services.



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Upcoming Online Workshops and Webinars

Pupil Expulsions

Oct. 7, 10 am

This webinar presentation covers state and federal laws relating to pupil expulsions. The presentation will provide a roadmap for considering the expulsion of pupils and how to avoid common pitfalls when doing so.

Superintendent Evaluations

Oct. 14, 10 am

The school board's process to evaluate its superintendent should be viewed as a continuous improvement conversation. Guy Leavitt, director of organizational consulting services at the WASB, will discuss static measures to include on checklists as well as narrative feedback.

Administrator Contracts

Oct. 28, 10 am

This presentation covers all aspects of administrator contracts, including the drafting of contracts, contract terms, application of section 118.24 Wis. Stat. to administrator nonrenewals and more.

School Board Elections, Part 1: Election Procedures

Nov. 5, 1 pm

This presentation will cover key deadlines, required notices and post-election processes.

School Board Elections, Part 2: Campaign Finance

Nov. 10, 1 pm

This webinar will cover the campaign finance reporting process, reporting exemptions, and touch on topics such as "paid for by" attribution statements on campaign materials.

Registration includes both Part 1 and Part 2 of the School Board Elections webinar series.

ALSO IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

- **A Conversation with New Board Members** ▪ Nov. 12, 7 pm
- **Leadership Coaching** ▪ Nov. 19, 7 pm
- **Dealing with Conflict** ▪ Dec. 2, 7 pm
- **School Finance 101: 10 Things Every Board Member Should Know** ▪ Dec. 9, 7 pm
- **Strategic Planning: What Does Quality Planning Look Like and Why Should You Do It Now?** ▪ Dec. 17, 7 pm

The complete 2020 WASB Workshop and Webinar schedule is available at WASB.org. WASB members can purchase any webinar and watch when their schedule allows. Upcoming live and pre-recorded webinars are listed on the webinar catalog page at WASB.org. In addition, links to past webinars are available in the Policy Resource Guide.

2020 REPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP

Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc. Condensed Statement of Activities for the Year Ending June 30, 2020

REVENUE	
Membership Dues	\$ 1,980,376
Program Revenue	\$ 2,104,130
Interest and Investment-Related Income	\$ 79,782
Other Income	\$ 36,475
Total Revenue	\$ 4,200,763
EXPENSES	
Program Expense	\$ 2,918,861
Management and General	\$ 1,160,244
Total Expenses	\$ 4,079,105
Change in Unrestricted Net Assets-Operating	\$ 121,657

Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc. Condensed Statement of Financial Position, June 30, 2020

ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Investments, Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 3,310,039
Accounts Receivable	\$ 97,059
Deferred Costs and Prepaid Expenses	\$ 353,979
Accrued Interest Receivable	\$ 2,470
Total Current Assets	\$ 3,763,546
Long-Term Investments	\$ -
Property and Equipment, Net	\$ 108,899
Total Assets	\$ 3,872,445
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	
Current Liabilities	
Deferred Revenue	\$ 971,507
Accounts Payable, Payroll Taxes and Benefits Payable	\$ 283,527
Short-Term Portion of Capital Lease	\$ 9,748
Total Current Liabilities	\$ 1,264,783
Long Term Liabilities	
Long-Term Portion of Capital Lease	\$ 26,084
Total Liabilities	\$ 1,290,866
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	\$ 2,552,024
Temporarily Restricted	\$ 29,554
Total Net Assets	\$ 2,581,579
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 3,872,445



Training for New TITLE IX Rules Available

New federal Title IX rules require specific training for each Title IX coordinator as well as for the individuals who are assigned designated roles in the process that schools adopt for resolving formal complaints of Title IX sexual harassment (i.e., investigators, decision-makers and facilitators of informal resolutions).

Based on the Title IX training mandates, WASB staff are working with the law firm of Boardman & Clark to provide training packages, which include webinars and training materials that school districts can purchase to satisfy the requirements.

Visit WASB.org to learn more.

2020 Online Fall Regional Meetings

SEPTEMBER 29 – OCTOBER 29

It's been an unprecedented year. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn about association initiatives and ask questions.

Visit WASB.org for meeting dates and details. No registration required.

- **The WASB Regional Directors** look forward to connecting with members and hearing your thoughts and suggestions on how the association can best meet your needs.
- **The WASB Government Relations staff** will update you on what's happening at the state and federal levels regarding school funding and flexibility measures needed in response to the pandemic.
- **Executive Director John Ashley** will report on how the WASB has been responding to district needs and the association's ongoing initiatives.



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

Publication Title: Wisconsin School News Publication No.: 688-560 Filing Date: October 2020 Issue Frequency: 10 issues/year No. of Issues Published Annually: 10 Annual Subscription Price: \$85 non-member / \$8 member Mailing Address: 122 West Washington Avenue, Suite 400, Madison, WI 53703-2178 Publisher: Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc. 122 West Washington Avenue, Suite 400, Madison, WI 53703-2178 Executive Editor: John Ashley 122 West Washington Avenue, Suite 400, Madison, WI 53703-2178 Editor: Sheri Krause 122 West Washington Avenue, Suite 400, Madison, WI 53703-2178 Owner: Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc. 122 West Washington Avenue, Suite 400, Madison, WI 53703-2178 The purpose, function and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. Sheri Krause, editor.	Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies Published in September
	Total No. Copies (Net press run)	4,514	4,367
	Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	4,032	4,192
	Paid/Requested In-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	144	99
	Other Classes Mailed through USPS	0	0
	Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	4,167	4,291
	Free Distribution by Mail- Other Classes Mailed through USPS	9	8
	Free Distribution Outside the Mail	120	0
	Total Free Distribution	129	8
	Total Distribution	4,305	4,299
	Copies not Distributed	208	68
	Total	4,513	4,367
	Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	97	99.8

100 YEARS



OF SERVICE

Celebrating 100

In recognition of the upcoming centennial anniversary, the WASB is featuring a decade of highlights from the association's past in each issue of the *Wisconsin School News* through early 2021.

In this issue, we go back to the 1980s ...

1980s

Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980. In many ways, the decade belonged to him. Reagan oversaw a huge tax cut and then a rise in unemployment to 10% — the highest rate since the Great Depression — and a quadrupling of the national debt to \$2.7 trillion. Reagan's K-12 education reform focused on the 1983 "A Nation At Risk" report, contending, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

The Cold War with the Soviet Union moved into a deep freeze as the United States dramatically increased defense spending while advancing policy initiatives to keep the Soviets off balance. In a 1987 West Berlin speech, Reagan challenged, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Two years later, joyful Berliners from both sides did just that. Tiananmen Square, AIDS, glasnost and perestroika, Lt. Col. Oliver North and Iran-Contra, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Chernobyl, Exxon Valdez, crack cocaine, the Strategic Defense Initiative, dubbed "Star Wars," and big hair defined the decade. □



The April 1988 *Wisconsin School News* focused on technology that was emerging as tools and curriculum during the decade.



Lunch in the Clinton High School cafeteria, 1988.

In 1981, the federal lunch program made headlines after proposed changes to nutrition guidelines classified ketchup as a vegetable in a budget-cutting effort. President Reagan personally canceled the proposed rules following backlash.



Wausau East High School Chess Club, 1986.

■ THE WASB

1980. The new WASB Insurance Plan offers member districts a variety of insurance coverages often difficult to attain in the open market.

1981. For the first time in the association's 60-year history, all Wisconsin school districts and CESAs are WASB members.

1982. The Apple III computer installed in the WASB Winneconne office allows staff to send more timely legislative updates, memos and transcripts.

1983. The WASB FOCUS begins publication, providing an in-depth analysis of a specific policy topic and sample policies.

1985. Delegates recommend every school board establish a plan for board member continuing education.

1988. Executive director George Tipler, who was initially elected to the WASB Board of Directors in 1950, hands the reins to the association's lead negotiator, Ken Cole.

■ OUR STATE

1980. Eric Heiden of Madison wins five speed skating Olympic gold medals in Lake Placid.

1981. Joseph H. Schlitz Brewing Co., "the beer that made Milwaukee famous," taps its last keg.

1982. While signing the nation's first law banning discrimination against gays and lesbians regarding housing and jobs, Republican Gov. Lee S. Dreyfus says, "There are some questions the government has no business asking."

1984. An F5 tornado rips through Barneveld in southwestern Wisconsin, devastating the small community.

1985. Federal courts rule in favor of six Chippewa bands

seeking off-reservation hunting, fishing and food-gathering rights based on provisions contained in 19th-century treaties ceding millions of acres to the federal government.

1987. Voters approve pari-mutuel betting and the lottery.

1988. The Chrysler auto plant in Kenosha — the nation's oldest car factory — closes.

■ OUR NATION

1980. Ted Turner launches CNN, the first 24-hour news channel; Mt. St. Helens erupts; and Pac-Man shows up in arcades.

1981. Reagan and Pope John Paul II survive assassination attempts; and "Video Killed the Radio Star" launches MTV.

1982. Visiting from outer space, "ET: The Extra-Terrestrial" captivates us while Dustin Hoffman entertains us in "Tootsie."

1983. Sally Ride makes history as the first American woman astronaut in space; and the finale of M*A*S*H set a ratings record that would stand until 2010.

1984. A major party puts a woman, Rep. Geraldine Ferraro from New York, on the ticket for vice president for the first time.

1986. High school teacher Christa McAuliffe and her six fellow astronauts perish when the NASA space shuttle Challenger explodes shortly after lift-off.

1987. The publishing of Toni Morrison's "Beloved" brings renewed attention to the horrors of slavery; and the U.S. Supreme Court rules Rotary Clubs must admit women.

1988. George H.W. Bush is elected president, becoming the first sitting vice president elected to the higher office since Martin Van Buren in 1836.

School Boards Submit Resolutions to the WASB

Resolution process begins with vetting by the Policy & Resolutions Committee



The start of a new school year means it is that time of year to prepare once again for the WASB Delegate Assembly. This year, our member boards have submitted 17 resolutions to potentially become official positions of the association.

Thank you to the school boards that approved resolutions and submitted them to the WASB by the September 15 deadline! They include Beloit, Durand-Arkansaw, Green Bay, Hudson, Ladysmith, Menomonie, Neenah and Wausau.

Not surprisingly, a number of resolutions we received address issues caused by the public health pandemic, which has fundamentally impacted schools as well as society as a whole.

These include resolutions calling for: pausing student assessments and school and district report cards for the 2020-21 school year; holding district revenue limits and per-pupil aid harmless from pandemic-impacted fluctuations in 2020-21 student enrollment counts; and providing schools with temporary and targeted flexibilities related to special education services disrupted by the closure of schools in the spring of 2020.

Other issues addressed by submitted resolutions include:

- **Seeking changes and clarifications to the federal Affordable Care Act:** Such changes would more easily enable school districts to rehire teachers and staff who have retired or resigned without incurring a penalty for noncompliance with the ACA.
- **Seeking to increase broadband accessibility by:** Recommending legislation to expand affordable, quality broadband in Wisconsin and to provide districts with funding for broadband to ensure equity in student learning.
- **Recommending measures to ensure compliance with Act 31 requirements to provide instruction about Wisconsin's Indigenous tribes, including:** Funding and other measures to assist and encourage districts to provide this required instruction as well as measures of compliance.
- **Calling for ending the use of Native American mascots by school districts:** The resolution calls for supporting legislation requiring school districts to retire Native American mascots, symbols, images, logos and nicknames.
- **Calling for a one-cent state sales tax increase for schools:** Such an increase would be used to fund school infrastructure and technology and to lower dependence on the property tax.
- **Calling for comprehensive school safety legislation:** Such legislation would include new, consistent and permanent funding for school safety enhancements and ongoing safety costs, including the hiring of school resource officers, coordinating with community agencies, and training students and staff. It would impose penalties for those who make threats or convey false information about killing or injuring persons on school property, at school-sanctioned events or on school-provided transportation.
- **Allowing district administrator evaluations to be kept confidential.**

As described below, the submitted resolutions will be vetted by the Policy and Resolutions Committee over the course of the next couple of months. The committee may also formulate its own resolutions for consideration at the Delegate Assembly.

Not surprisingly, a number of resolutions we received address issues caused by the public health pandemic, which has fundamentally impacted schools as well as society as a whole.

THE ROLE OF STAFF IS TO FACILITATE DISCUSSION and debate — first by the Policy and Resolutions Committee and then by our membership. It is the membership who will decide the fate of each resolution.

■ Resolution process

The WASB positions on policy issues are determined by resolutions adopted by the WASB Delegate Assembly, which meets annually at the time of the State Education Convention in January. The resolutions adopted by school boards at the Delegate Assembly become official positions of the WASB and remain in force until amended or repealed.

Individual boards initiate the process months earlier by adopting resolutions on various education-related topics and submitting them to the WASB by the September 15 deadline.

Once these resolution ideas are submitted, the WASB Policy and Resolutions Committee, comprised of about 25 school board members appointed each year from across the state and from within each of the 15 WASB Regions, determines which ones will advance to the Delegate Assembly. (In addition to geographical diversity, board members from every type of school district — common, unified, K-8, union high school and first-class city districts — are represented on this committee.)

Three things can happen. The committee may advance the resolution as submitted, modify a resolution and advance it, or opt to not advance a submitted resolution.

If a resolution is advanced to the Delegate Assembly, delegates have the opportunity to also propose and adopt amendments. Resolutions are often amended on the floor of the

Delegate Assembly.

Under the WASB Bylaws, resolutions turned down by the Policy and Resolutions Committee are still afforded an opportunity to be brought to the Delegate Assembly floor. If two-thirds of the delegates vote in favor of the motion for consideration, the turned-down resolution may be considered by the delegates.

This is a member-driven process. The WASB staff does not advocate for or against submitted resolutions. The role of staff is to facilitate discussion and debate — first by the Policy and Resolutions Committee and then by our membership. It is the membership who will decide the fate of each resolution.

■ Update on flexibilities for schools

In last month's column, we reported on a variety of statutory flexibilities the WASB is seeking from lawmakers on topics which the DPI is unable to grant waivers. One of those flexibilities relates to seeking immunity for schools from civil liability for COVID-19 claims.

We have some good news to report. A bill draft currently being circulated for co-signers in the state Capitol would provide immunity against suits for COVID-19 injuries — along the lines we described last month — to school boards and others. The authors are Sen. Chris Kapenga (R-Pewaukee) and

Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam).

Specifically, the bill draft covers any “owner, lessee, or occupant of a premises or any other individual or entity in control of a premises” who “invites or permits another person onto the premises.” Those individuals and entities would be immune from civil liability for any injury to someone who is exposed to COVID — directly or indirectly — on the premises. In essence, the bill draft creates a new type of immunity that would apply to public and private schools as well as private businesses and many other entities.

However, the bill draft provides specific exceptions under which a school board would not be immune from civil liability. An entity such as a school board would not be protected if it: (1) knowingly violates an emergency public health order; or (2) engages in reckless, wanton or intentional misconduct that results in COVID exposure and causes bodily injury or death.

The bill draft does not appear to impact the existing governmental immunity that public schools already have against tort claims. Instead, the draft appears to create an additional type of immunity that a school district could raise as an affirmative defense if a student contracts COVID-19 and then files a lawsuit against the school. The WASB is still seeking clarification on a few points, but this is an encouraging development as schools seek to reopen safely for in-person or hybrid instruction. ■



Free Speech in the Racial Justice Era

Earlier this year, we published a Legal Comment anticipating speech issues that could arise in connection with the upcoming presidential election, with a focus on student expression related to guns and the Second Amendment.¹ Shortly thereafter, the death of George Floyd sparked a nationwide racial justice movement. This movement has generated significant political traction and controversy as districts head into the new school year. Students are engaging in collective expressive activity on all sides of the issues related to racial equity and justice, which is generating a new series of questions about the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable forms of student expression. This Legal Comment will continue exploring the First Amendment rights of students related to the current issues of racial equity and justice.

Legal Context

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants students the right to free speech in schools under certain conditions. Student speech is not limited to spoken or written words and can include visual means of expression, such as clothing. However, not every form of student expression constitutes protected speech under the First Amendment. First, in order to qualify as “speech,” the expression must be intended to express a message. Furthermore, even if a student is engaged in speech, courts have held that districts may prohibit or limit student speech under certain conditions, in particular: (a) when it is within the context of a district-sponsored and controlled event; (b) when it can reasonably be viewed as promoting illegal drug use; (c) when the speech is a true threat and intimidation, communicating an intent to

inflict harm to a person or loss with respect to another’s property; and (d) when it is obscene, vulgar, lewd, indecent or plainly offensive.² In addition, even when student speech is protected by the First Amendment, districts can generally regulate student conduct that violates the district’s code of conduct, even if the impetus for the conduct arises from protected student speech.

When student speech does not fall into one of the specific exceptions to First Amendment protections listed above, districts must justify restricting a student’s public expression by demonstrating that the expression would either substantially disrupt or materially interfere with the district’s work and the requirements of appropriate discipline in the district’s operation, or that it would impinge upon the rights of others to be secure and let alone.³ This standard is referred to as the Tinker test. In order to satisfy the Tinker test, the actual disruption need not occur before a district can restrict a student’s speech. However, bare allegations that disruption will occur, without identifying specific facts and circumstances upon which districts made that determination, are not enough to support a forecast of substantial disruption of or material interference with school activities.⁴

In addition, districts may not discriminate against students’ speech on the basis of its viewpoint.⁵ Thus, the Supreme Court has held that a blanket ban on racial epithets by “proponents of all views” is permissible, while a ban on the use of such epithets by one group of speakers but not “those speakers’ opponents” constitutes prohibited viewpoint discrimination.⁶ As will be seen below, the exclusion of all racially divisive symbols in a school that has experienced intense racial tensions is

a permissible, content-based restriction; however, the school must also show that such a facially neutral policy has been applied in a non-discriminatory, consistent manner.⁷

Regulating Speech — Apparel

The interaction of these First Amendment principles is reflected in the context of issues that could occur when students return to school. For example, students could wear COVID-19 masks that contain messages supportive of racial equity, for example, those that state “Black Lives Matter” or “I Can’t Breathe.” The current racial justice movement across the country has been met with counter-reactions, including the wearing of clothing supporting law enforcement (e.g. “Blue Lives Matter”) or depicting the Confederate flag, which is a symbol of racism for some and depiction of history and southern pride to others. These types of apparel are a form of visual expression potentially invoking the protection of the First Amendment and likely do not bring into play any of the specific exceptions to First Amendment protection. Thus, districts in which such expression occurs must utilize the Tinker test to determine whether clothing, including face masks, with those expressions can be banned.

Under this analysis, the key inquiry is whether the content on the apparel has materially interfered with or substantially disrupted a school activity or is reasonably likely to do so. If a large portion of the student body is wearing identical or similar apparel (apparel that is either in opposition to or in support of racial justice) and no disruption has occurred, it is unlikely that the wearing of this apparel constitutes the type of Tinker disruption that would justify regulating it. However,

if a district can show that messages related to the racial justice movement, such as those contained on face masks, has resulted or will result in students constantly arguing about the movement at the expense of focusing on their class work, that evidence of disruptions is likely sufficient to remove the wearing of such expressive clothing from First Amendment protection.

It is difficult, however, to forecast whether expressive apparel will create a substantial disruption because if the prohibition on wearing it occurs before any disruption can occur, there obviously is no history of disruption to point to in support of the prohibition. Under the Tinker analysis, districts can look to how a district's students have reacted with respect to other forms of expressive apparel or what has occurred in similar districts or communities in reaction to similar apparel. Past evidence of interference or disruption arising due to similar forms of expressive clothing or because of racial speech can be proof that the current form of expression will similarly be disruptive. Therefore, districts should review past incidents of dress code violations before taking action against students who wear such expressive clothing.

Additionally, districts must be cautious that their actions in response to such clothing, such as asking the student to take off the face mask or face disciplinary consequences, do not cause a greater disruption than simply allowing the student to wear such apparel. Districts cannot rely on any disruptions caused by their actions as evidence of a substantial disruption caused by a student's speech.

Because of the newness of the

movement and clothing generated in support of it, there are no guiding court cases specifically applying the First Amendment to this form of expressive speech. However, there are a number of court cases involving the wearing of apparel containing Confederate flags, which are illustrative of the application of the Tinker test in this type of setting. Courts have held that districts cannot always prohibit depictions of the Confederate flag. Instead, courts have required additional evidence supporting a potential for material interference or substantial disruption under the Tinker test.

If a district can identify a history of racial tensions or specific past incidents where the Confederate flag caused a substantial disruption, that district is more likely able to prohibit clothing in school that depicts the Confederate flag. For example, in one case, *Hardwick v. Heyward*,⁸ a student had a history of wearing shirts that contained depictions of the Confederate flag and statements such as "Daddy's Little Redneck," "Dixie Angels," and "Southern Girls," and a shirt with a picture of the South Carolina Statehouse flying the Confederate flag. The district's dress code prohibited clothing that distracted from the educational setting and, based on this policy, it banned the student from wearing clothing depicting the Confederate flag.

In the federal court action challenging this ban, the district was able to show a significant history of racial tension in the district — including disruptive incidents at prom, in a school parking lot, and in school — centering on the Confederate flag. The district was also able to show that there were racial incidents in the area not directly related to the

display of the Confederate flag. Based upon this type of evidence, the court concluded that these incidents "provide overwhelming support for the conclusion that the Confederate flag shirts 'would materially and substantially disrupt the work and discipline of the school.'" The court therefore upheld the district's ban on apparel depicting the Confederate flag. Absent such a history, courts have held that a district is prohibited from banning depictions of the Confederate flag.⁹

Given the fact-specific nature of any First Amendment student speech issue, particularly with respect to an issue as polarizing as the Confederate flag, districts should proceed cautiously and carefully weigh the public's potential reaction to either permitting or prohibiting depictions of the Confederate flag. Clothing bans, particularly with respect to the racial justice movement and opposing viewpoints, are public relations flash points, and districts may inadvertently cause a greater disruption by taking action than by not taking action.¹⁰

This is particularly true if a district decides to ban one form of expressive speech while treating other forms differently — e.g., by allowing "Black Lives Matter" apparel, but not Confederate flag apparel. As discussed above, districts cannot engage in such form of viewpoint discrimination in which they regulate certain perspectives on an issue more aggressively than others. For example, if a district allows a student to wear a "Blue Lives Matter" T-shirt and no disruption occurred at school, it would be challenging for the district to defend prohibiting an "I Can't Breathe" face mask. More importantly, the district has likely engaged in imper-

Districts cannot rely on any disruptions caused by their actions as evidence of a substantial disruption caused by a student's speech.

missible viewpoint discrimination. However, if a district is able to identify evidence of a history of racial tensions or past incidents of the Confederate flag causing a substantial disruption, a district does not engage in viewpoint discrimination by prohibiting depictions of the Confederate flag while allowing the depiction of racially inclusive symbols.¹¹ For example, an administrator could permit a student to wear a T-shirt that reads, “Diversity Matters,” even if the administrator prohibits depictions of the Confederate flag based on past racial incidents at the school.

■ Regulating Speech — Walkouts

As students have organized in support of racial equity and justice or other matters, their forms of expression include not only expression on clothing, but also rallies and protests. In the school setting, this has also included student walkouts, which are a form of expressive activity within the ambit of the First Amendment. In general, a court is likely to rule that student walkouts cause a material interference with or substantial disruption to school activities. By its very nature, a student walkout during class time will completely disrupt the class for both participating students and students who are not participating and are therefore left waiting in their classrooms. The potential disruption that a walkout would create is likely greater given the health protocols, such as social distancing, that many districts have implemented to limit the potential spread of COVID-19. Therefore, in general, districts can prohibit student walkouts and discipline students involved in such walkouts.

In light of the upcoming election, students might be motivated to walk out in support of or in opposition to certain political candidates or political issues, such as support of racial

justice or support of law enforcement. Districts have to be especially careful regarding viewpoint discrimination in these situations. If the district allows students to walk out to protest one presidential candidate, the district will face legal risk under the First Amendment if it subsequently prohibits students from walking out to protest another presidential candidate. Similarly, a district that permitted students to walk out in support of the racial justice movement, likely will have to permit students to walk out in support of law enforcement officers.

Allowing students to walk out in protest creates a precedent that risks future claims of differential treatment and potentially limits a district’s ability to regulate such walkouts going forward. A district that adopts a “no walkout” policy without being aware of plans for a future walkout, will likely be on solid legal ground. If a district has a history of permitting student walkouts and wants to change that policy going forward, it should work with legal counsel to do so. Ultimately, districts facing significant student walkout activity will need to balance the legal risk in prohibiting walkouts against the need to limit the continued disruptions caused by the walkouts and the potential public relations issues involved in changing positions on walkouts.

■ Conclusion

Districts can expect that students will be engaged in various forms of expression on political and social issues this school year and should begin planning regarding actions they can take, if any, in response to such expressions if they present the risk of disruption to the school environment. This involves application of the First Amendment *Tinker* test, and legal counsel should be consulted before any decisions are made whether to restrict such expression. In addition, any district

action must consider the likely public relations impact such actions may generate. ■

■ Endnotes

1. Wisconsin School News, “Student Speech and Clothing” (April 2020).
2. See *Hazelwood Sch. Dist. v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988); *Morse v. Frederick*, 551 U.S. 393 (2007); *Virginia v. Black*, 538 U.S. 343 (2003); *Bethel Sch. Dist. No. 403 v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675 (1986).
3. *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).
4. See *Defoe v. Spiva*, 625 F.3d 324, 333 (6th Cir. 2010).
5. *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the Univ. of Va.*, 515 U.S. 819, 828–29 (1995).
6. *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul*, 505 U.S. 377 (1992).
7. *Barr v. Lafon*, 538 F.3d 554, 573 (6th Cir. 2008).
8. 711 F.3d 426 (4th Cir. 2013).
9. See, e.g., *Bragg v. Swanson*, 371 F. Supp. 2d 814 (S.D.W. Va. 2005).
10. See, e.g., Shannon Keith, Bedford County Administrators Propose Dress Code Policy Revisions; Meeting Draws Standing Room-Only Crowd, *The News & Advance* (Apr. 11, 2019), https://newsadvance.com/news/local/bedford-county-administrators-propose-dress-code-policy-revisions-meeting-draws-standing-room-only-crowd/article_3136ab7a-5cd0-11e9-a525-9b79b6da8638.html.
11. See *Barr*, 538 F.3d 554; *Castorina v. Madison Cty. Sch. Bd.*, 246 F.3d 536 (6th Cir. 2001).

This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka; Steven C. Zach; and Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel.

For additional information related to this topic, see Wisconsin School News, “Student Speech and Clothing” (April 2020), “The First Amendment and Regulation of Students’ Social Media Use” (January 2016), “Student Threats and the First Amendment” (April 2014), “Student Clothing, Social Causes, and Free Speech” (December 2013), “Student Free Speech Rights” (May 2011), “Limiting Student Speech That Promotes Illegal Drug Use” (September 2007), and “District Regulation of Student Speech” (September 2002), and WASB Legal Notes “Student Dress Codes” (Fall 2003).



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► Buelow Vetter Buikema Olson & Vliet LLC

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

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

► Strang, Patteson, Renning, Lewis & Lacy, s.c.

844-626-0901
kstrang@strangpatteson.com
strangpatteson.com

We provide legal counsel on a full range of issues that school and higher education institution clients confront on a regular basis.

► von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

414-287-1122
aphillips@vonbriesen.com
vonbriesen.com

We're dedicated to ingenuity and creativity in helping schools solve their most complex legal and organizational problems. Challenge us to help you challenge the status quo.

► Weld Riley, s.c.

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

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

School/Community Research

► School Perceptions, LLC

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

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

Transportation

► Dairyland Buses, Inc.

262-544-8181
mjordan@ridesta.com
ridesta.com

School bus contracting provider, managed contracts, training, maintenance.



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