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## 4 Schools Honored With Green Ribbon Award

Four Wisconsin schools and one district have been recognized with a prestigious federal award for their work in sustainability education, energy efficiency and environmental health and wellness.

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education recognized 26 schools and 11 districts around the country as Green Ribbon Schools. The following Wisconsin schools and districts were recognized for a variety of practices, including:

- Browning Elementary School, Milwaukee: Revitalized greenhouse and promoted walking and bicycling to schools through “Safe Routes to School” and “Walking School Bus” programs.
- Eagleville Elementary Charter School, Mukwonago: Reduced waste by eliminating plastic and paper in the cafeteria and weaving environmental literacy throughout the curriculum.
- Forest Edge Elementary School, Oregon: Installed more than 1,700 solar panels and 90 geothermal wells to become the first “net zero” public school in Wisconsin, meaning it meets its own energy needs.
- Tamarack Waldorf School, Milwaukee: Planted and cared for a school garden and used the harvested vegetables to create nutritious snacks and meals.
- Unified School District of De Pere: Added geothermal and solar energy as part of recent heating and cooling upgrade. Its outdoor learning centers provide hands-on lessons.

Look for more information about these award winners in the October issue of Wisconsin School News. □

## POLL: TWO-THIRDS SATISFIED WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Sixty-six percent of Wisconsin residents are either satisfied or very satisfied with public schools in their community, according to a Marquette Law School Poll conducted in June.

The last time this question was polled, 62% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied. That percentage has fluctuated from a high of 75%, in 2015, to a low of 59% in early 2020, before the pandemic.

The poll also found that 54% of residents statewide favor the use of publicly funded vouchers to attend private or religious schools. That percentage in favor was highest around (but not including) Mil-

waukee County (62%) and lowest in the Madison area (36%).

Finally, respondents were asked which is more important: reducing property taxes or increasing public school spending. For the first time since 2013, the percentage favoring reducing property taxes (50%) was higher than the percentage favoring increased spending on public schools (47%), though the difference was within the margin of error.

The poll interviewed 913 Wisconsin registered voters from June 8 to 13. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.4 percentage points. The partisan makeup of the sample is 29% Republican and 28% Democratic. □

### STAT OF THE MONTH

66%

**The percentage of Wisconsin residents** who are either satisfied or very satisfied with public schools in their community. *Source: Marquette Law School Poll*

## Wisconsin Policy Forum Accepting Salute to Local Government Nominations

The Wisconsin Policy Forum is accepting nominations for its 31st annual Salute to Local Government awards.

The awards recognize outstanding performance by local governments, including school districts. The categories include effective problem-solving, advancement of racial equity, inter-governmental cooperation and private-public cooperation.

Two awards — the Norman N. Gill and Jean B. Tyler Leader of the

Future awards — recognize individual excellence.

They are also announcing a new awards category for state government employees or initiatives in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s La Follette School of Public Affairs.

The deadline for nominations is Aug. 31. To nominate a school district or employee, visit [wispolicyforum.org/salute-nomination-form](http://wispolicyforum.org/salute-nomination-form). □

## School IT Leaders Rethink Cybersecurity

School information technology leaders are struggling to defend their districts from an increasing number of cyber threats, Axios reported in June.

Through mid-June, at least 120 schools nationwide have publicly acknowledged a ransomware attack, compared to

188 in all of 2022. A ransomware attack occurs when a hacker locks down an organization’s data and charges a ransom to restore access to that data.

The real number of such attacks is higher, as many are not publicly reported.

The Cedarburg School District

reported spending the summer installing a new firewall, among other IT improvements, according to the article.

Elsewhere in the nation, school IT leaders reported difficulty getting approval for cybersecurity spending. □



## To Our Traditions and New Beginnings

From its founding in 1921 to the present, the WASB has benefited from excellent leadership. Since 1954, the association's Board of Directors has appointed an executive director to guide the association. The three previous executive directors — George Tipler, who served from 1954-1988; Ken Cole, who served from 1988-2005; and John Ashley, who served from 2005 until July 1 of this year — left an indelible mark on the association.

On July 1, I became the fourth and latest executive director.

Some of you may know me but many others probably don't, so I'll use this month's column to introduce myself to WASB members.

I am Wisconsin born, raised and educated — a proud product of Wisconsin's public schools and public university system. For the past 16 years, I have worked to advance the cause of preK-12 public education in our state as the WASB's government relations director.

During that time, I have passionately advocated for public schools and for the governance of public school districts by locally elected school boards. I want to continue that work in the role of executive director.

I grew up in a household where public education was valued and respected. My mom and dad were the valedictorians of their respective

high school graduating classes. Conversations about public education were commonplace around our dinner table.

Engagement with public education is a proud tradition in my family. My father's mother was very proud to have been a teacher and a graduate of Milwaukee State Normal School — one of the first teacher preparation programs in the state. That school was later to become the Wisconsin State Teachers College-Milwaukee and eventually UW-Milwaukee.

My father began his career as a vocational agriculture teacher and later served as both a principal and superintendent.

For 32 years, he was a professor of educational administration at UW-Madison and helped educate a generation of Wisconsin school administrators. During that time, he worked on many projects with the WASB, including writing multiple editions of a guide for Wisconsin school board members entitled, "Opportunities Unlimited." My middle brother is a former school board member, serving for five years. My wife is a former elementary school counselor.

I have always enjoyed representing the WASB to our members and other school leaders, and I enjoy travelling our beautiful state. Many of you have met me on those travels.

Each fall, I have visited schools and new district administrators throughout the state and provided legislative updates during the WASB Fall Regional Meetings.

Perhaps you have watched a webinar or attended a training session or presentation I've given at CESA offices throughout the state. Others of you may have met me at WASB conferences and at the annual State Education Convention.

I'm delighted to have had the chance to meet a few of you during the recent WASB Summer Leadership Institute in Green Bay.

I look forward to meeting and becoming acquainted with as many of you as possible during this fall's Regional Meetings, the January convention and other meetings.

One of my goals is to do a better job of ensuring that school leaders and boards are aware of the products and services the WASB provides its members and make sure they are second to none.

I also want to maintain a focus on student learning. I believe education provides opportunities to change lives for the better.

I hope you will feel free to reach out to me with your questions, comments and suggestions. The WASB is your association and I want to make sure it is meeting your needs and expectations. ■

... I have passionately advocated for public schools and for the governance of public school districts by locally elected school boards. I want to continue that work in the role of executive director.

Research Links School Boards' Actions With

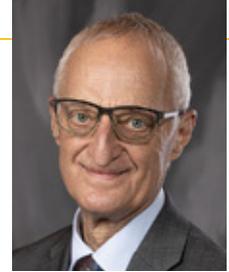
# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

**THE STUDIES ARE CLEAR:** School boards can make a difference in student learning, but do they have the knowledge and training to understand how?





by Daniel Nerad, search and governance consultant, WASB



**W**hen studying how children learn, education researchers don't limit themselves to the classroom. They also study the role school boards play in raising student achievement.

Effective school boards, they've found, tend to have certain mindsets, beliefs and practices in common.

For example, does your school board dedicate itself to setting goals and allocating the resources necessary to make them happen? According to "Great on Their Behalf," a 2023 book by governance expert A.J. Crabill, a school board should spend at least half its time monitoring progress toward goals.

By running for the school board, you've already committed to doing what you can to boost student achievement. So, what does the research say about what makes effective school boards special?

The answers, drawn from a diverse body of education research, are complex, but they tend to share common themes.

#### WHAT YOU BELIEVE MATTERS.

##### Board beliefs matter

The beliefs of school board members matter.

A landmark research effort conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards, called the Lighthouse Study, investigated how school boards can boost student achievement.

This study highlighted the importance of having elevated beliefs about the ability of all students to reach their potential. These school boards remain unwavering in this belief and make decisions based on how strongly they feel about the

potential of children as learners.

As part of defining its governance mindset, has the school board agreed upon its beliefs about the potential of learners to meet academic standards? Furthermore, has the board helped staff to believe similarly?

To address this, a board retreat might focus on developing these beliefs and committing to them.

#### HOW YOU SUPPORT QUALITY INSTRUCTION MATTERS.

##### Support staff, help them improve

Does your board understand the need to support staff in their work with improvement goals? Does the board understand the important elements of an improvement plan?

In "The Relationship Between School Board Governance Behaviors and Student Achievement," a 2013 dissertation by Ivan J. Lorentzen, the following findings exist relative to school boards and student achievement:

- Hold the district accountable for meeting student learning expectations by having written goals for the superintendent to focus on specific outcomes for student learning.
- Set high expectations for student learning with clear goals and plans for meeting those expectations.
- Commit to continuous improvement in student achievement at each school and throughout the district.



It is crucial that when the board does educate the public  
**about how children are doing that it does so with a unified voice.**

- Provide responsible school district governance by conducting board and district business in a fair, respectful and responsible manner.
- Engage the local community by soliciting input from staff and a wide spectrum of the community so that a diverse range of interests on issues is considered.
- Provide responsible school district governance by working as an effective and collaborative team.
- Create conditions district-wide for student and staff success by providing for learning essentials, including rigorous curriculum, technology and high-quality facilities.

#### MONITORING PROGRESS MATTERS.

##### Monitor students' progress

Are you studying how students are progressing? What do classrooms, schools and districts need to improve achievement and overall development?

Progress monitoring requires a school board to study student data and restructure its work to prioritize it. Find ways to ensure that staff and the board are working together to make the continuous review of data possible and to establish and monitor learning improvement goals.

In his book, Crabill describes five steps school boards must engage in for continuous improvement:

1. There is a need for viewing the world that inspires an effective governance mindset. This requires that the school board leads from a stance that school systems only exist to improve student outcomes, that student outcomes don't change until adult behaviors change, starting with the school board, and that school boards exist to represent the vision and values of the community.
2. Clarifying priorities requires that the school board listen for the community's vision for what students should know and be able to do.

3. To monitor progress requires that the school board work collaboratively with the superintendent to develop a multiyear calendar that describes which data will be discussed during which months.

4. To align resources requires that the school board minimize its time focused on anything that is not related to the goals. If the school board has not redesigned its meetings to focus at least 50% of its time on monitoring progress toward its goals, then it is not doing the work to align resources.

5. To communicate results requires that the school board make school system operations transparent and observable, and that the school board regularly arranges time for two-way conversations with the community about its vision and values.

Crabill believes that the only focus of school boards is to improve student outcomes and the above five steps are key in having a process toward these better outcomes for all students.

## COMMUNICATING AND ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS MATTERS.

### Community engagement helps students

To what extent are we regularly communicating and engaging with our public regarding student progress and student results and the overall vision and values of the school district? Have a plan to intentionally engage with the community on the progress of district students.

Provide understandable student data and a process for these meetings that would provide the community with opportunities for input.

Researchers Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan stated that the board and superintendent must not only work together but also have rapport with community needs. They further

state that the ultimate test is what happens in the classroom, but the public's understanding will be enhanced by open, authentic communication from the board.

It is crucial that when the board does educate the public about how children are doing that it does so with a unified voice.

To incorporate these research findings in your school board's work, consider the following steps as a starting point for the board/superintendent team:

- Examine in a public way what you believe about the potential of your students as learners and work to ensure your beliefs have an elevated view about what will happen in support of your students. Commit to and adopt these beliefs.
- Adopt a set of learning goals that can be monitored on a

regular basis and hold a continuous improvement mindset when discussing these goals.

- Make sure you have defined a way through board meetings to monitor the data on student achievement. This should consume a fair amount of time, which means you may want to make changes in the overall way board meetings are conducted.
- Develop and implement a plan where you can positively communicate and engage with your community on how well your students are doing and what are doing in way of improvements. Seek stakeholder input. ■

*Daniel Nera is a search and governance consultant with the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. In his 45-year career as a public educator, Dan has served as superintendent in Green Bay, Madison and Birmingham, Michigan. He was Wisconsin's 2006 Superintendent of the Year.*



## Legislative Update

**Stay up-to-date on the latest state and national legislative news** by following the WASB Legislative Update blog. The mobile-friendly site is regularly updated by WASB staff and includes a "Follow" tool that allows you to receive email updates when a new item is posted.

**Visit the WASB Legislative Update blog by visiting [wasb.org](http://wasb.org).** Select "Advocacy & Government Relations" and then "Legislative Update."



# Putting OPERATIONAL DATA to Work



Your district collects information about running your schools that helps you make better decisions

by Roger Price, finance and operational consultant, WASB

**D**ata helps school boards make better decisions. It allows for a better understanding of the district.

As you have likely learned, there's no shortage of data. School finance, academics, facilities, food service, student transportation or other support services create a great deal of information. The challenge lies in understanding this data, its sources and how it can help you continuously improve.

Most of this data is in the hands of highly capable staff who use it daily in the performance of their duties. Shared data facilitates a deeper trust among a district and the public.

As we outline the different types and sources of data, please keep in mind how it is collected and shared.

From surveys to observation to interviews, there are plenty of ways to collect information, and it's often worth asking how a given piece of data was collected.

This article concerns the data collected about how your district operates its services. There is plenty of data collected about student academic performance, but I'll focus on what we call "operational" data. This helps you understand how your schools do their work in a day-to-day way.

Even for an experienced board member, seeing all this data can be overwhelming. To help get you started, we'll also provide some questions that are worth asking. (See questions on page 10.)

This list of data sources is intended to get you started, but it is

not exhaustive. If you'd like to go deeper, talk to your superintendent.

## ■ Enrollment data

Student enrollment data and the unique needs of students are the basis for determining educational programs, program staffing levels and facility decisions.

Enrollment counts also play a major role in the revenue side of developing the budget. They are a determining factor in calculating revenue limits, general aid and many other areas.

Enrollment projections are key factors in school budget and plan development. They determine or influence many of the financial estimates and decisions that affect the budget, particularly in the space



needs and instructional area. Most estimates of personnel requirements are derived directly or indirectly from the estimates of the number of students to be served.

The open enrollment program, which allows parents to apply for their children to attend public school in a school district other than the one in which they reside, also creates worthwhile data.

#### ■ Staff data

Salaries and benefits comprise approximately 80% of a typical district's total budget.

Competition for staff, particularly in hard to fill positions, has become a new reality. Understanding the costs of recruiting and retaining quality staff requires continued assessment of the market for newly graduated teachers and those available to move with the market.

#### ■ Business data

The operation of the food service program is considered an “enterprise” or business function.

It's worth understanding the balance between revenues and expenditures every year. The bottom line is impacted by free and reduced meal programs, requirements of the federal school lunch program and costs associated with labor and food.

The board should understand the local data and any expected subsidy from operational funds.

The activity of transporting students is impacted by state requirements, local expectations, school schedules and size and demographics of the district. Monitoring costs and the data associated is prudent whether through contracted transportation or by district-run operations.

#### ■ Finance data

The state budget affects the amount of aid that a district will receive and, through revenue limits, how much it can increase its revenue over time.

Estimating what the school district will receive in the way of federal, state and local revenues is a complex but necessary part of preparing a budget. An equally important consideration for budget planning is the financial restriction placed on school districts by the state-imposed revenue limit.

Resource allocation is the process of assigning and managing assets in a manner that supports a school district's strategic planning goals. Historical data can inform and highlight the use of resources.

#### ■ Planning data

As every board member would agree, it's critical to understand the

# QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING...

## Enrollment questions:

- ▶ What is the district's current enrollment, history over the past five years and projections?
- ▶ What has been the district's policy and experience with incoming and outgoing open enrollment?
- ▶ What, if any, is the local impact (finances, facilities, etc.) of the district's enrollment trends?

## Staffing questions:

- ▶ What is your salary and benefits for each group's current staffing assignments, including substitutes?
- ▶ How does the district compare to neighbors? Your athletic conference? Others like you?

## Business questions:

- ▶ What is the expected profit or subsidy of operational funds for food service operations?
- ▶ What is the current cost to transport students in the district and what are the major local influences on costs?

## Finance questions:

- ▶ What are the financial restrictions placed on school districts by the state-imposed revenue limit?
- ▶ What are the district's data reflect related to revenues?
- ▶ What changes and additional initiatives are being considered?
- ▶ Does the board receive monthly status reports on the district's finances?

## Planning questions:

- ▶ Is the district now paying the full cost of operating, or is it postponing costs to a future period when revenues may not be available to pay these costs (especially for retirement and long-term borrowing)?
- ▶ What is the commitment in capital maintenance and improvement expenditures?
- ▶ What is the history and status of cash flow and changes in short-term borrowing at the lowest point in the operational year?
- ▶ What is the history and current bond rating of the district?
- ▶ Does the board receive an annual presentation from the auditors of the final audit?

## Facilities questions:

- ▶ What are the current relationships/commitments with planners, engineers, architects, contractors and other vendors?
- ▶ What involvement do internal and external stakeholders have in facility needs assessment?
- ▶ What data is available on:
  - Current condition of facilities
  - District efforts in health and safety
  - Efficiencies
  - Maintenance
  - Future of education

long-term costs of today's fiscal decisions. And there are several ways to understand your district's financial position, including in:

- **Cash solvency:** The ability to pay bills and meet payroll without short-term borrowing at any time during the year.
- **Credit ratings:** Credit agencies routinely examine a local government's debt load in setting a bond rating.
- **Audit findings:** The final report presented to the school board by the auditor contains the auditor's report on internal control and compliance. This report also identifies any deficiencies in a district's financial procedures.
- **Service-level solvency:** Capital-related expenditures provide an indication of whether capital needs are being addressed. Solvency is the ability to meet long-term debts and financial obligations.

Your district will also have data regarding health and safety and the efficiency of operations, such as for utility costs.

## Facilities data

Much of your planning concerns your future needs for facilities. You may start by understanding the present condition and capabilities of your current facilities.

Current literature and ideas related to the future of education provide a shared vision of the future that would impact decisions in the use and expansion of the district's facilities and sites.

Functional data of your district's facilities could be seen using the follow categories:

- **Environmental scan:** Understanding how the users experience the facilities and sites. Identify what works well, issues that impact the effective delivery of the educational programs and the perceptions that exist.

Assuring that data is available and utilized in short- and long-term planning is an **essential function of district governance and leadership.**



- Academic planning: Academic planning is the driver to determine future resource allocation. Current literature and ideas related to the future of education provide a shared vision of the future that would impact facilities decisions.
- Community vision: Assure processes are in place to understand what the community believes related to the future of education.

Assuring that data is available and utilized in short- and long-term planning is an essential function of district governance and leadership. Data shared with the broader internal and external communities builds a knowledge bridge of understanding which can contribute to a positive culture and trust. This article presents an overview of operational data. To fully understand

the history, status and future, a deeper dive would be required in any of the relevant areas. ■

*Roger Price's 40-year career has spanned all aspects of educational operations and business management in K-12 and higher education. As a WASB consultant, he specializes in operational effectiveness and all facets of budgetary planning and Wisconsin school finance. Contact him at [rprice@wasb.org](mailto:rprice@wasb.org).*

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*Clintonville Public School District. Districts experiencing enrollment decline are taking the necessary steps — such as fortifying their staff or creating new or enhanced facilities — to reverse the trend.*



**SECURING  
A FUTURE**  
**for Rural Schools**

# Facing dilemmas caused by enrollment decline, rural schools are finding innovative solutions to modern challenges

by Jody Andres, senior project architect, AIA LEED AP, Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, Inc.



Teacher shortages, supply chain issues and mental health trials are just a few of the challenges that nearly every school district faces today.

Furthermore, rural Wisconsin school districts face unique obstacles that aren't pervasive in suburban and urban environments.

Many rural school administrators and boards find themselves in a dilemma.

After years of declining enrollment, they find it necessary to strengthen their staff and upgrade facilities to remain viable and attract families contemplating moving into their districts. However, dwindling enrollments often result in reduced funding.

While there's some indication of a post-pandemic migration to rural areas, most rural districts have yet to see evidence of an enrollment increase. What's a district administrator and board to do?

The following strategies and success stories can help districts eliminate or mitigate these challenges.

## ■ Creative financial solutions

Without necessary funds, schools are clearly handcuffed. So, districts must first look at their financial data. It's time to ask difficult questions and seek out-of-the-ordinary solutions.

What grants can we obtain? What expenses can we reduce? Where do we have redundancies?

It's crucial to examine ways to reduce ongoing operational costs as funding declines. Seek out opportuni-

ties to minimize the duplication of services, especially on the support side.

At Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, we've seen many districts consolidate facilities to shrink the cost of maintenance, food service, administration and more. For example, some communities use one building for K-12 education.

Districts must also consider how they generate and capture their own power. On-site, solar photovoltaic and battery energy storage systems are a worthy consideration to save money.

When a school generates more power than required, battery systems are charged from surplus solar production. This stored power can later be used overnight, during high-cost periods or at other times.

Meanwhile, the batteries can be charged from the electrical grid in low-cost, non-peak hours. Solar and battery energy storage technologies are highly feasible options for school districts.

Integrating battery systems with solar photovoltaic adds significant flexibility to a building's energy management system. By adding micro-grids, battery storage can connect multiple buildings and be used for emergency power during electrical grid outages on the electrical grid.

Overall costs of solar installations dropped significantly in recent years, and the market continues to expand. The fundamental economic advantage of on-site solar photovoltaic is a lower cost of power. This financial advantage includes ongoing lower

maintenance and operational costs, along with a competitive guaranteed cost rate for future electricity.

Third-party investors have enthusiastically participated in various recent solar projects for school districts, while Wisconsin school solar projects have benefitted from grant programs like:

- The Wisconsin Focus on Energy Program.
- The Energy Innovation Grant Program, using Department of Energy funds administered by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin.
- The Wisconsin Solar on Schools Program, managed by the Midwest Renewable Energy Association with the support of the Couillard Solar Foundation.

The benefits aren't all financial. Rural school districts are realizing the interactive educational platform and STEM benefits that solar photovoltaic and battery systems provide.

In numerous communities, school districts are the first organization to utilize significant solar power. This raises the awareness of businesses, nonprofits and government entities.

With renewable energy jobs rapidly rising in many parts of the United States, exposing students to these emerging systems expands their minds to new concepts and gives them an advantage in their career considerations — if the curriculum provides for it.



*Generating or capturing their own power through the installation of solar panels and/or battery storage systems is proving financially beneficial to numerous school districts, including Northland Pines School District.*

### Find your partners

Districts should focus on their area’s assets and offer programs that can be employed, supported and encouraged by local industries. These businesses have likely never experienced the staffing challenges they currently face.

When listened to and partnered with, local industries often support programs by donating materials, time, machinery and employment. They are often eager to engage with students and families — their potential employees.

Additionally, school districts must be conscious of the future and aware of the demographics impacting their region. If civic and business leaders focus on attracting a specific category of industry, it’s important to align the school curriculum to match the human resource needs of that industry.

Seek opportunities to partner with incoming businesses and consistently communicate with the area business community to ensure awareness of specific needs.

### Endear yourself to the community

Schools are often the backbone of a community, bringing people together and providing prospects for culture, entertainment and lifelong learning. Sports and the arts regularly provide a solid point of connection, offering social interaction and a shared bond among various demographics.

Opening campuses for civic uses — particularly in areas that may not have suitable commercial facilities

— connects the school to residents and expands possibilities for interaction. Computer labs, technical education spaces, gymnasiums, theaters, libraries, athletic fields and cafeterias are all remarkable resources for an entire community.

These facilities are already in place. Why not leverage them to serve the community? Non-educational uses of facilities include athletic competitions, summer camps, fundraisers, trade shows and community theater. If possible, provide a separate, secure entrance for after-hours use so the community can benefit without opening the entire school to the public.

School libraries can be a source of hope for the community by allowing access to technology, meeting space and GED or career training courses. Adult education classes like English as a second language, and technology for senior citizens can provide value for disadvantaged or underserved members of the community.

Partnering with universities and technical colleges for site-based learning opportunities can expand the interests and career paths of area residents. In addition to providing a great service, these offerings can positively impact the district’s brand and reputation.

### Listen for needs, address them

There is an abundance of needs school districts in rural communities can seek to address. Some districts have provided:

1. Family services, including daycare and after-school programs. In several instances, this has not only proven to be helpful, but altered a community’s potential decline.
2. Access to reliable information technology and broadband, which is often lacking outside of urban and suburban areas. Can your district offer secure access to high-speed internet?
3. Updated career and technical education facilities to connect with local businesses and prepare students for immediate positions.
4. Co-op programs in conjunction with neighboring school districts. Grants are often more available when funders see partnerships and cooperation.

### Examples to follow

When Wisconsin’s Clintonville Public School District was contemplating a referendum to advance their career and technology education spaces, the district held a morning meeting with local industry leaders. They discussed how to work together, pool resources and collaboratively offer local residents enhanced education and training. This resulted in informed decisions and offerings that would not have existed if not for the open exchange of ideas.

Clintonville proceeded to work

## Many school districts in farming communities are expanding their agriculture programs **by including courses like hydroponics, aquaponics and live animal production.**

with local manufacturers and the technical school to develop welding and metal fabrication facilities to be used by the district, the local technical college and the community. In addition, they expanded their community fitness facilities and created new child-care facilities.

From its high in 2015, enrollment at Clintonville dropped by 22% five years later. However, by adapting to the changing community environment, the district has now increased enrollment over the past two years.

The Wittenberg-Birnamwood School District expanded their agriculture program in cooperation with the local farming community, which directly impacted an increase in enrollment in the 2022-23 school year. Many school districts in farming communities are expanding their agriculture programs by including courses like hydroponics, aquaponics and live animal production.

Darlington, which serves about 800 students in rural southwest Wisconsin, provides another example in one of Wisconsin's most prolific agricultural areas. The business community concentrates on food production-related trades, while there is a focus on nature-based tourism, recreation and learning opportunities.

Being conscious of these unique regional resources, the school district emphasizes preparing students for jobs in these niches. The educational facilities are updated to accommodate these specific tracks and provide a stream of prepared students who will have the skills to become innovative contributors to the area workforce.

Northland Pines School District in Vilas County recently held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the photovoltaic system and battery power support installed at St. Germain Elementary School. The district had previously installed 430 kW-dc of solar at North-

land Pines High School/Middle School, Land O' Lakes Elementary School and Eagle River Elementary School.

Due to the previous solar projects' productive outcomes, such as financial savings and renewable energy education, the district added a solar system to their only school lacking solar. The previous solar projects reaped benefits including financial savings while also offering students on-site platforms for renewable energy education.

The School District of Shiocton saw a steady reduction in enrollment from 2013 to 2019. However, since 2020, they have seen a steady increase in the number of students. One of the reasons for the turnaround was the successful implementation of child-care services for their staff and community. A recent study we completed recommended an increase in childcare facilities to address a substantial waiting list for this program.

### ■ Reflect and apply

If we watch what's occurring on a global, national, state and regional level that can be adapted in our own communities, we can make a positive impact. Investigating and implementing creative solutions can be the difference between a failing and a thriving community. Reflect on the strategies and examples provided here and determine which ones make sense for your district. They can make a difference — for today and tomorrow. ■

*Jody Andres, AIA LEED AP, is a senior project architect and the K-12 market leader at Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, Inc. Andres is a LEED AP, past president of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Wisconsin and the former regional representative for the North Central States to the AIA Strategic Council. He has worked with more than 60 school districts on PreK-12 educational facilities, providing needs assessment, planning, programming and design services. Jody can be reached at [jandres@hoffman.net](mailto:jandres@hoffman.net).*



Many school districts in rural farming communities, such as **Wittenberg-Birnamwood**, are adding facilities to support their expanded agricultural programs.

# Principles for PRINCIPAL EVALUATION

**A study into how Wisconsin districts are growing leaders and improving schools**

*by Steven M. Kimball, Ph.D., and Jessica Arrigoni, Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative,  
Wisconsin Center for Education Research, UW-Madison*

Since 2014, Wisconsin school districts have been required to develop an evaluation system to measure the performance of teachers and principals.

Districts are increasingly tailoring their local practices to support teachers. However, principal evaluation and support have garnered less attention among school and district leaders.

To address this knowledge gap, researchers with UW-Madison's Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative initiated the Wisconsin Principal Evaluation and Professional Learning study. Two questions framed the two-phase study:

- 1:** To what extent are districts focusing on principal evaluation to support school leader development?
- 2:** How are schools and districts leveraging principal evaluation to enact improvement goals?



Steven M. Kimball



Jessica Arrigoni

In phase one of the study, principals from 18 districts shared their evaluation experiences. These principals were from districts using either the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's state model for Educator Effectiveness or the equivalent Effectiveness Project approach supported by Cooperative Educational Service Agency 6.

The second phase followed up with four districts to explore the issues deeper.

## Principal evaluation system process

The DPI state model and CESA 6 model for principal evaluation have minor variations, primarily the use of different leadership standards and rubrics. Both approaches, however, encourage individual reflection, goal setting, observations, coaching and feedback from supervisors or peers. Figure 1 (facing page) highlights the main aspects of the principal evaluation process.

Each model also emphasizes the five principles of taking a learning-centered approach to teacher and principal evaluation:

- A context of trust that encourages risk-taking and learning from mistakes.
- A model of effective practice (represented by leadership standards and rubrics) to center conversations about school

leadership and inform professional learning.

- Educator-developed goals that are regularly referenced to frame the evaluation process.
- Cycles of continuous improvement guided by specific and timely feedback to drive practice.
- Coherence through leveraging the process to support school and district improvement strategies.

Study findings include promising practices related to how districts support principal professional learning and purposefully align the process to support school and district improvement priorities. The study also uncovered missed opportunities to strategically leverage the principal evaluation process.

### Principal evaluation for leadership development

The study revealed few examples of intentional connections between evaluation results and formal principal professional development opportunities. Principals noted a range of experiences as to how the

evaluation process impacts professional growth, with the primary influences being goal setting, formative feedback and self-reflection.

While some principals participating in the initial study phase described rich, ongoing conversations with their supervisors, others received little evaluation and feedback from district leaders. As one principal stated, “The stuff we are doing [with teachers] is solid. There is merit to the educator effectiveness piece. We just have to have a superintendent or district office personnel who is bought into it, understands it and gives feedback.”

In contrast, one principal shared that the amount of paperwork has decreased significantly since the Educator Effectiveness System launched.

“Now it’s truly about having the conversations with the supervisor, whether that’s the teachers and I or my superintendent and myself. It’s the process and the conversations that are much more meaningful.”

“It’s nice to get feedback from your evaluator, especially for me as a relatively new principal,” another principal added. “I don’t know

everything, [and I] have areas of growth that I target. I’m self-reflective. It’s helpful to have evaluators who were former principals.”

Each district in the second study phase valued principal professional learning, evidenced by opportunities made available, encouragement given and feedback offered. Professional learning occurred during regular district leadership meetings, through opportunities connected to district priorities and via external workshops or conferences. Yet, the results of the evaluation process did not typically lead to identification of future formalized professional learning, and few districts leveraged the principal competencies within the evaluation models to inform their development and selection of new principals. One district leader summed up this common finding:

Our professional learning has been very much universal ... we have not developed systems or processes at this point to individualize or personalize professional learning for principals based on their evaluation. We don’t have a formalized process. Right now, professional learning for principals [stems from the principal supervisors] sharing what they think of a need for a group of principals.

Similarly, principal pipeline development was not systematic among participating districts.

One district leader shared: [We are] maybe not as intentional as we should be. I’ll speak ... just for myself, when I was a campus principal, I would look for staff in my building, whether they saw it within themselves or not, that had leadership potential, and I would engage in conversations and encourage them to explore those opportunities. I do that somewhat informally ... now in my position, because I don’t interact as directly with teachers.

In another district, where several teachers had become principals, one stated that, “... administrators are always supportive of going back to school.” However, they were informal about the process of identifying potential school leaders.

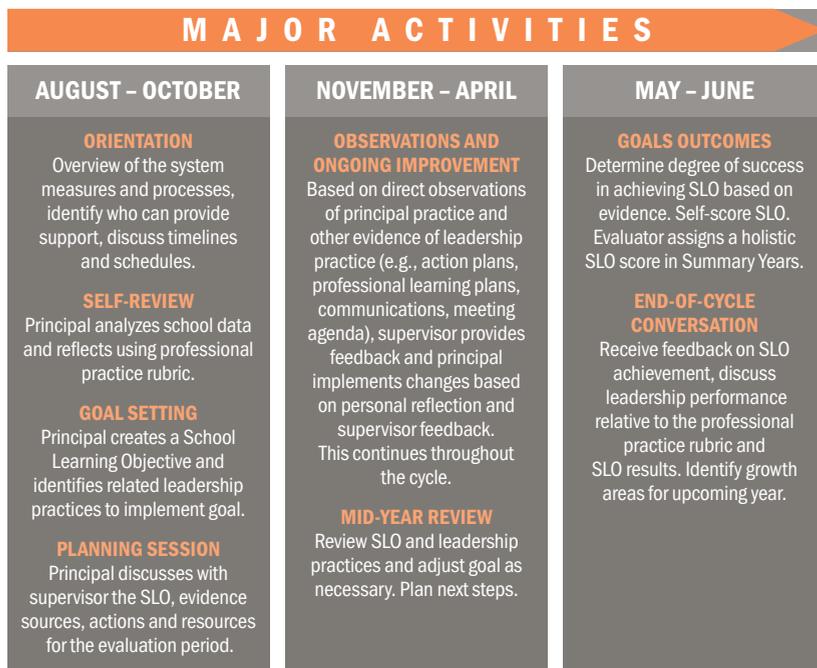


Fig. 1

Source: Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System User Guide for Principals, Principal Supervisors, and Coaches (available at: [tinyurl.com/2p9h2pyk](http://tinyurl.com/2p9h2pyk))

Rather than checking a box to complete personnel evaluation, **the point is to maximize the process for larger school and system goals.**

**Principal evaluation and strategic alignment**

As one of the five learning-centered evaluation principles, integration leverages the Educator Effectiveness System to support school and district priorities. Rather than checking a box to complete personnel evaluation, the point is to maximize the process for larger school and system goals. The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative found multiple examples of the evaluation processes and measures reinforcing local leadership priorities.

These examples primarily involved aligning school (principals’) and student (teachers’) learning objectives and overlapping school improvement processes with principal evaluation implementation. Goal setting and engagement through the learning objectives represent the most frequently cited aspect of the Educator Effectiveness System supporting school and district priorities while aligning the work of teachers and principals.

Principals often set their learning objectives to help address district and school priorities. For example, one principal shared, “My building goal is aligned to my [learning objective] and to the district improvement plan... [and] teacher learning objectives need to be aligned with building goals, including the [school improvement plan]. I review and approve all teacher learning objectives and professional practice goals. We make sure they’re aligned.”

Each of the four phase two districts tied aspects of the Educator Effectiveness System to their strategic planning process.

“Everything is interwoven. If our strategic plan is school culture and certain components of the accountability report card, then that’s where [principals’] learning objectives should be driven, same with

teachers,” says one principal, noting that district and school administrators collaboratively review data during the summer as part of their strategic planning. In the process, they develop aligned school learning objectives and professional practice goals that support their learning objectives. Principals also encouraged teachers to set learning objectives that inform their classroom practice, student learning results and school priorities.

Another district reported leveraging the continuous improvement process adapted after participating in the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators’ School Administrators Institute for Leadership. This process is the primary way the district engages in improvement planning and implementation around priority areas. District leaders and school teams annually engage in this process for improvement planning and leadership team development. Principals develop annual Educator Effective-

ness goals related to their School Administrators Institute for Leadership improvement plan, and supervisors and leadership coaches support them with feedback linked to the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership, which is the state model leadership competency standards and rubric.

In this district, a building benchmark template (see figure 2 below for an example) allows principals to identify key activities, data sources, target dates, change stages and related practices from the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership. This approach helps them identify relevant evidence sources and frames individual reflection and dialog with supervisors.

**Strengthening professional learning, alignment and integration**

With the emphasis on teacher evaluation and time constraints pressing on district and school leaders, districts may be missing opportunities to leverage the principal Educator

**BUILDING BENCHMARK WITH ALIGNED WFPL STANDARD**

DATA AND KEY RESULTS – COHERENCE	
<p>Literacy goal aligned to a School Administrators Institute for Leadership or an Advancement Via Individual Determination Coaching and Certification Instrument indicator. Show us progress in reaching our goal of 80% of teachers will meet/impact/institutionalizing expectations in the identified indicator by June.</p> <p>What are your lead and lag measures saying? What are the key results you are seeing so far in student achievement, redefining ready indicators or teacher practice results? What is your scoreboard?</p>	
TARGET DATE	CHANGE STAGE
December and March Reviews	Initiation, Implementation, or Institutionalization
PRINCIPAL PRACTICE FRAMEWORK (Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership)	
1.2.2 Student Achievement Focus 1.2.4 Schoolwide Use of Data 2.2.2 Communication	

Fig. 2

Effectiveness System to support principal learning and strategic alignment. The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative identified how districts are using principal evaluation to support school and district priorities, while uncovering additional opportunities for districts to create coherence between principal evaluation, development and organizational improvement goals.

One such strategy is strengthening the use of the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership in pipeline development. This framework supports on-the-job school leadership learning and helps to “build the bench” when considering what skills to look for in new and developing leaders. Improving connections between professional learning opportunities and the principal leadership competency models supports current and future school leader development by providing a tool to center conversations and feedback and identify personalized and group principal professional learning.

Other ways to purposefully use the principal evaluation system to support principal, school and district improvement include:

- Examine how the Educator Effectiveness System can support local principal identification, selection, induction, professional education and advancement across the career continuum.
- Identify areas of professional learning informed by leadership standards and district and school priorities.
- Consider ways to extend aligned learning opportunities outside of the formal evaluation process that allows for peer collaboration and ongoing learning.
- Align principal goal setting with school and district improvement priorities, then conduct observations and provide feedback on



both leadership and organizational priorities.

- Build district leader feedback skills so they can support leader improvement and enhance principals’ ability to provide teachers with support and effective feedback.

Principal leadership is key to school performance. Research demonstrates the important role principals play in creating conditions that enhance teacher job satisfaction, teacher retention and student learning outcomes. While some districts have made strides toward leveraging principal evaluation to support leadership effectiveness and improvement priorities, others have not yet tapped the full potential of the principal Educator Effectiveness System to meet these dual goals. Opportunities exist to build upon the principal evaluation and development process to identify, support and grow the leaders needed for Wisconsin’s schools. ■

**Note:** The study summarized in this article was supported through a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the DPI.

**Link to study, Part 1:** [tinyurl.com/5n929w55](https://tinyurl.com/5n929w55)

**Link to study, Part 2:** [tinyurl.com/mr35r57d](https://tinyurl.com/mr35r57d)

**The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative, or WEC,** is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation and organizational improvement. Learn more at [wec.wceruw.org](https://wec.wceruw.org).

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Mount Horeb Area School District Superintendent Steve Salerno addresses the audience and media at the legislative forum.

# LET'S GET Together

## Events offer opportunity to build lawmaker relationships, educate public

by Dan Linehan, communications director, WASB

Several months before last fall's election, when the future of many public schools would run through the ballot box, a handful of districts southeast of Madison saw an opportunity.

Seven candidates were running to replace longtime state Rep. Sony Pope. The public needed to learn about their views on education, and the prospective lawmakers could surely learn about their local schools.

Meanwhile, the Mount Horeb Area School District was planning a referendum and wanted to explain the request to the community.

A Mount Horeb board member, Carleen Fisher, and the district administrator, Steve Salerno, thought a candidate forum could educate both candidates and community.

There were challenges, including finding the candidates and persuading them to participate. But the event was successful; more than 50 people attended the forum, held in late July 2022 with four candidates and covered by the media.

Connecting decisions made by the

Legislature with your community's classrooms is at the core of legislative advocacy.

Events, whether one-time or held regularly, can build relationships with lawmakers while educating them and informing your community.

While these events are often organized by staff, the school board can play an important role.

For Fisher, a Mt. Horeb board member elected in spring 2022, the community forum was a way to put her legislative advocacy background to work for the district.

### Community conversation

Fisher ran for school board in part to improve communication with the community.

"We put information out there, but it's hard to get people to see and pay attention to it," she says.

So when the Wisconsin School News ran a story in June about holding candidate forums, she read with interest.

The purpose of such a forum in her mind was twofold. First, the

community could learn about what the candidates believed about education. At the same time, the community could learn more about education topics.

The primary, which was to winnow the field of candidates, was barely two months away. So, they got to work.

On June 22, the superintendent sent a letter to each candidate inviting them to the July 25 event. Community members suggested questions, which were then reviewed by a legislative engagement committee composed of board members, students and community members.

The nine questions covered wide ground, including school safety and the impact of revenue limits on schools.

"The kinds of questions we asked led people to understand these were issues hitting close to home in Mount Horeb," Salerno said.

The questions were given to the candidates ahead of time to help them feel comfortable about attending.



**Four legislative candidates attend the July 2022 legislative forum organized by the Mount Horeb Area School District.**



**Mount Horeb students moderate the legislative panel. The students “set up a really nice dynamic to emphasize that these are the people directly impacted,” board member Carleen Fisher said.**

“We wanted it to be as comfortable for them as possible,” Salerno said. “We tried to bend over backwards to make certain they (attended).”

Of course, there were challenges.

“The biggest worry for me was not having anyone show up,” he said. “The other challenge is just time.”

Trying to find contact information for the candidates and reaching them took effort.

The event, held in the cafeteria, was moderated by a panel of students who asked the questions.

Fisher said the students’ involvement “set up a really nice dynamic to emphasize that these are the people directly impacted.”

For her, stepping into the political arena came with some anxiety.

“It’s a charged environment out there,” she notes, and anytime you hold such a forum you run the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

At the same time, to avoid the conversation would be sidestepping the duty to advocate for students, she says.

“Decisions made in the Legislature directly impact us and our students, and we should make sure the community recognizes that,” she says. “Our state Legislature needs to hear from us. They need to hear from people on the ground and people impacted by the decisions they make.”

Her advice to other districts is to start early; “you never think you have enough time.” She also recommends reaching out to neighboring districts, as they did with Verona.

Upcoming elections are not the only opportunity for events. The Howard-Suamico School District, for example, regularly holds community connection events, called “linkages.” Two of them each year are focused on legislative matters.

For Supt. Damien LaCroix, the linkages are a chance to not only inform, but to tell the district’s story. Facts are easily forgotten, but a tale that includes real people and places may be stickier in the mind.

### ■ Telling your story

In 1856, a school board and elected officers first met in Pittsfield, a small town northwest of Green Bay, to take a vote. They agreed to collect \$50 to pay their local teachers.

“They recognized the key to prosperity is investing in public schools,” he said. “The point is, what are people going to say about us 150 years from now?”

Every district, LaCroix says, has a fantastic story to tell, whether about its history or the exploits of a recent graduate.

The simple tale reminds LaCroix about the power of stories to bring people together and remind them of shared interests.

“It’s easy to get into long monologues focused on facts and, while you need to sprinkle some, it’s important to articulate your story in ways that are easily understood,” he says.

Howard-Suamico linkage events, typically held in the district office,

get excellent attendance from representatives, LaCroix says.

The events build relationships, but the district doesn’t shy away from pointed questions.

“Our first question is, “What is your response to the (proposed budget)? What aspects of it do you support?”

Respect and gratitude are important, too.

“We say thank you because too often we overlook the power of those two simple words,” LaCroix says.

At the end, the district states its budget priorities, such as special education aid and an inflationary increase in general revenues. Keeping it simple is important.

“If everything is important, nothing is important, so we try to be intentional around what matters most,” he says. “If we can’t distill a message to its essence, it’s hard to expect them to go away from meetings with focus.”

It helps to have realistic expectations.

“We probably won’t get everything we ask for, but we’re not dramatic in terms of how we present those needs,” he says.

Finally, human stories work better than facts and figures.

“How do you connect it to outcomes? If you can’t connect resources to outcomes, then what’s the point?” ■

*Dan Linehan is communications director at the WASB.*



# MAKING *'Life Ready'* A REALITY

How Beloit Turner arms itself with data to help students graduate ready for life's challenges, opportunities



Dennis McCarthy Christopher Koeppen Mike Sindahl

by Dennis McCarthy, superintendent; Christopher Koeppen, director of teaching and learning; and Mike Sindahl, director of technology, Beloit Turner School District

High school prepares students for their plans after getting their diploma, whether that's college, career or the armed forces.

But most of us would agree there's more to living a fulfilling life than academic knowledge or technical skills. Beloit Turner has built this philosophy into its core mission and calls it being "life ready."

Being "life ready" means students possess the self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills necessary to be successful in both school and in their next stages of life.

For example, can a graduate stay calm during a period of stress? Can they recognize and name their emotions, like frustration? Can they understand and empathize with the people around them?

Life readiness is one element of Beloit Turner's continuing implementation of Redefining Ready!, a national movement launched by the School Superintendents Association.

### Figuring out 'life readiness'

Redefining Ready! reviews data after graduation and conducts an analysis of high school attributes and how those attributes impact post-graduation outcomes. As a result, Redefining Ready! has identified metrics for student achievement.

These metrics expand beyond the typical academic readiness indicators for the purpose of identifying which high school experiences and outcomes are most likely to lead to postsecondary graduation and success in the

workforce. Redefining Ready! changes the approach to readiness and sees "students as more than a score."

Expanding the definition of success to include experiences, rigor, attendance and industry certifications respects the diversity of our students and their skills.

Redefining Ready! has clearly identified measurable indicators for college and career readiness, but the definition of what it means to be "life ready" was not as clear.

Two years ago, Beloit Turner adopted the lofty goal of ensuring that there were systems in place to purposefully prepare all students to

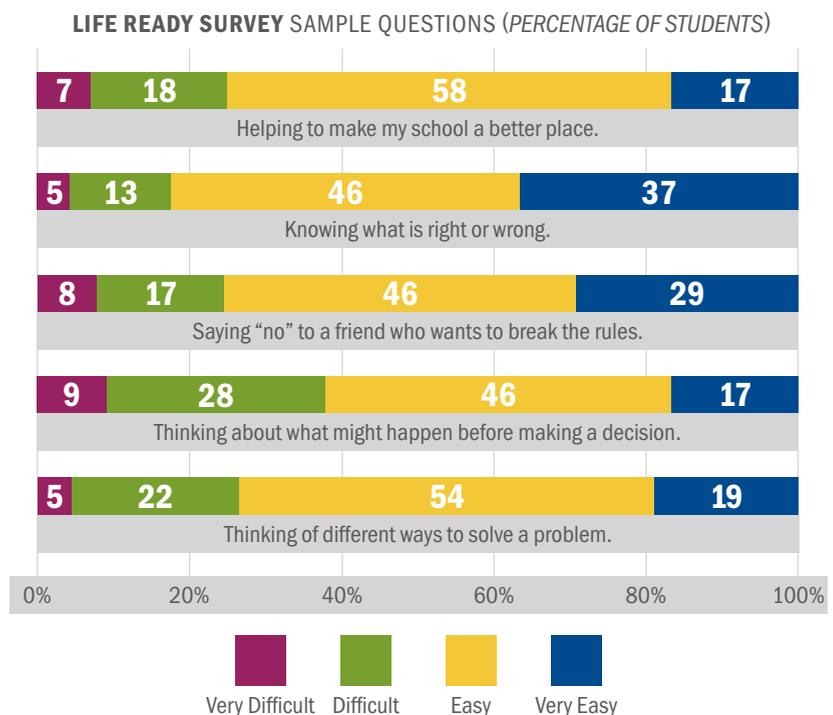
be "life ready."

A "life ready" team asked themselves how they could measure something as complex as self management or self awareness?

Answering that question led the team to find the Washoe County School District's SEL Competency Survey Items.

### Are you life ready?

This Life Ready Survey, as it has become known in the district, is aligned to the five areas of competence — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible deci-





**COLLEGE READY • CAREER READY • LIFE READY**

**SELF-AWARENESS**

**SELF-MANAGEMENT**

**RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING**

**RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

**SOCIAL AWARENESS**

*Beloit Turner School District takes measure of their students in **five areas of competence** so that they will be college ready, career ready and life ready.*

sion-making — as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

The district’s experience with adult-centered summaries of performance in these areas proved to be inaccurate, inauthentic and didn’t result in student growth. In this survey, students respond to either a 16- or 40-question survey about how easy or difficult they find specific situations, such as:

- Knowing how to get help when I’m having trouble with a classmate.
- Staying calm when I feel stressed.
- Talking to an adult when I have problems at school.

Staff analyze the results on the Life Ready Dashboard, available within WISEdash Local, Wisconsin’s data warehouse consortium. They use this data to take the pulse on the

building or classroom climate. They also respond to equity gaps, evaluate the effectiveness of programming, identify growth opportunities and coach individual students through personal goal setting.

The results of the surveys are also available to the students and their families in a format that can be easily understood through individual dashboards on a “My Goals” page that was created with collaboration between the district and WISEdash Local. Additionally, the district uses its communication protocols to share specific results and resources with families.

■ **Strategic plan is ‘more than words’**

The district’s vision of providing quality and personalized communications aligned to a child’s growth towards being college and career ready has been extended to include “life ready.”

The district regularly sends emails with information about what it means to be life ready, where their student is in relation to being life ready, and what they can do to help their student become life ready.

The addition of life ready data processes and curriculum efforts rounds out the framework for the School District of Beloit Turner’s Redefining Ready! implementation.

In 2019, Beloit Turner Supt. Dennis McCarthy engaged his leadership team in developing their 2020-2025 strategic plan. Their mission, “All students Life, College, and Career Ready,” has clearly driven their work.

“Our strategic plan is more than words,” McCarthy said. “We now have a framework in place that we continually measure and act on. Our board has agreed to clear criteria allowing for a consistent focus that drives our decision-making processes at Beloit Turner.”

**“Redefining Ready! helps the board focus on what is important to total student achievement. A board can easily be distracted with issues not related to total student achievement.”** – Norm Jacobs, school board member

**Life readiness data key**

What has helped bring Beloit Turner’s mission and strategic plan to life has been their alignment of data and use of data systems to clearly identify their students’ progress toward college, career and life readiness.

Beloit Turner’s director of technology, Mike Sindahl, said staff need quick access to actionable, relevant data that have some control over.

“The data already exists in district systems, so rather than making them enter data into spreadsheets or having students fill out surveys, we have seen more impact when teachers and administrators spend that time analyzing data, identifying problems, generating solutions, closing gaps and doing what they do best, teach kids,” Sindahl says.

Making relevant data easy to understand is easier said than done, which is where they lean on Wisconsin’s data warehouse consortium, WISEdash Local. All the district’s data relevant to their mission is accessible and made usable to appropriate staff in WISEdash Local, including GPA, standardized tests, attendance, industry credentials, and most recently, their life ready data.

**A continuous improvement mindset**

The other area that has propelled Beloit Turner’s Strategic Plan forward has been their mission driven continuous improvement process. Administrators and teachers are all required to align their goals and plans directly to the strategic plan.

Principals are responsible for creating and report their School Improvement Plan that is directly aligned to the strategic plan. Teachers are responsible for student learning objectives that are directly aligned with the school improvement plan. All school improvement plan data are tracked, visualized and made accessible to staff.

All directors are responsible for a professional goal that is directly aligned with the strategic plan and readiness goals.

Beloit Turner Director of Teaching and Learning Christopher Koeppen says, “We’re proud to be in a place to have moved beyond simply being able to report on readiness in these areas. We are focused on continuing to improve our practices to improve outcomes for students.”

This focus and alignment of goals, combined with Beloit Turner’s ability to see the data that demonstrates how they are doing in comparison to their goals, makes it easy for them to be transparent with their school board and community.

Their monthly board meetings all include School Improvement Plan updates and ties to Redefining Ready! metrics.

School Board Member Norm Jacobs says, “Redefining Ready! helps the board focus on what is important to total student achievement. A board can easily be distracted with issues not related to

total student achievement.”

Another board member, Kristie Pettitt, adds that, “Academically it allows for full transparency of how we are doing as a district (aside from state testing). More importantly, it allows our educators and administration to help pinpoint specific areas of need and where we are excelling. From the data collected, our team of educators and administration work together to create solutions to close gaps.”

As a result of these combined efforts, families in the School District of Beloit Turner are better able to know how their children are performing not only in academic achievement but also in how their habits, dispositions and skills are preparing them to achieve a happy, healthy and productive future. ■

*Dennis McCarthy is Beloit Turner’s superintendent.*

*Christopher Koeppen is Beloit Turner’s director of teaching and learning.*

*Mike Sindahl is Beloit Turner’s director of technology.*

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## 2023 FALL REGIONAL MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS

### September-November

Dates and Locations Vary by Region



**Connect with education leaders** from your region during WASB Regional Meetings this fall. We'll gather to celebrate our accomplishments, get an update on WASB activities and, in select regions, elect directors.

- **Prior to your Regional Meeting**, take part in an optional workshop, led by an experienced WASB attorney, on school board responsibilities under public records law. An online version of the pre-regional meeting workshop will be held Dec. 6. Registration is required.
- **A statewide online regional meeting** with the same program and agenda will be offered on the evening of Wednesday, Nov. 1. There is no fee to attend the online regional meeting (although registration is recommended). No voting will occur at the online Regional Meeting for any regional directors.

**Visit WASB.org** for more information and to register online. Registration fees for the Regional Meetings vary based on location. The workshop registration fee is \$75. Register for both events and receive a \$10 discount.

## REGIONAL MEETINGS PROGRAM

### ■ REGIONAL DIRECTOR WELCOME

### ■ MEMBER RECOGNITION AWARDS

At each Regional Meeting, the WASB recognizes school board members who have reached a new achievement level in the WASB Member Recognition Program by attending and participating in activities and events sponsored by the WASB.

### ■ ELECTIONS (Regions 3, 6, 8, 12 and 14)

Each member school board and CESA board has one vote to elect a WASB regional director, who serves a three-year term.

### ■ FEATURE PRESENTATION:

#### SCHOOL BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES

An experienced WASB consultant will kick off this activity by reviewing the concept of school board accountability. School board members will then share accountability practices with each other in a round-table discussion format. Board members will broaden their understanding of their stakeholders' expectations for accountability and leave with new ideas to demonstrate their responsible stewardship for students, parents and citizens.

### ■ LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

WASB government relations staff will report on what was included in the budget, including fiscal and policy provisions, and other key pieces of preK-12-related legislation that have passed or are under consideration.

### ■ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dan Rossmiller, WASB executive director, will conclude the evening with a report to members about the activities and direction of the WASB.

## FALL 2023 REGIONAL MEETINGS SCHEDULE

**Region 1** | Oct. 18 – Ashland, Best Western/The Hotel Chequamegon  
Oct. 19 – Rice Lake, Lehman's Supper Club

**Region 2** | Oct 17 – Minocqua, Norwood Pines Supper Club

**Region 3\*** | Oct. 25 – Green Bay, Rock Garden/Comfort Suites

**Region 4** | Oct. 4 – Menomonie, Off Broadway Banquet Center  
(by Stout Craft Co.)

**Region 5** | Oct. 3 – Rothschild, Holiday Inn & Suites  
Wausau-Rothschild

**Region 6\*** | Oct. 5 – Galesville, Gale-Etrick-Trempealeau High School

**Region 7** | Oct. 26 – Neenah, Bridgewood Resort Hotel & Conf. Center

**Region 8\*** | Oct. 24 – Kiel, Millhome Supper Club

**Region 9** | Sept. 27 – Fennimore, Southwest Tech

**Region 10** | Oct. 11 – Wisconsin Dells, Trappers Turn

**Regions 11 & 15** | Oct. 10 – Brookfield, Embassy Suites

**Region 12\*** | Oct. 12 – Sun Prairie, Sun Prairie West High School

**Region 13** | Sept. 26 – Burlington, Veterans Terrace

**Region 14\*** | TBD – Milwaukee, Milwaukee Public Schools  
Administration Building

**Online** | Nov. 1 – Open and complimentary to all members

\* Denotes regions with elections for WASB Board of Directors

## UPCOMING ONLINE WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS

### ■ PUPIL EXPULSION (TWO-PART SERIES)

**SEPT. 14 AND 27** | 12-1 p.m.

This two-part webinar presentation covers state and federal laws relating to pupil expulsions.

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

This webinar will be held in two parts and registrants receive access to both parts with one registration fee.

**Part 1** (Expulsion Roadmap): Sept. 14 at noon

**Part 2** (Expulsion Procedures): Sept. 27 at noon

### ■ RECURRING WEBINAR:

#### WASB LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE VIDEO UPDATE

**AUGUST 16** | **SEPTEMBER 13** | 12 p.m.

WASB attorneys and government relations staff provide a complimentary monthly update on recent legal and legislative issues to answer members' most pressing questions.

*No registration required. Visit [WASB.org](https://www.wasb.org) for the link.*

*Please note: These webinars, and all previous ones, are recorded and available on demand. WASB members can purchase any webinar and watch when their schedule allows. Upcoming live and pre-recorded webinars are listed on the WASB Webinars page at [WASB.org](https://www.wasb.org). In addition, links to past webinars are available in the Policy Resource Guide.*



## WASB Connection Podcast

**In this episode of the WASB Connection Podcast, we talk about how Wisconsin students are joining a challenge to help their schools use less energy.**

We hear from a teacher and students in Oconomowoc who took top honors in the Renew Our Schools Energy Challenge.

We also talk to a program manager from Focus on Energy, which runs the program along with the Wisconsin K-12 Energy Education Program, about how it works and how your schools can join in.

.....

“They are doing school energy actions to integrate energy into their lesson planning and in addition to that we’re really seeing real energy savings coming out of this.”

— Heather Feigum, Program Manager, Focus on Energy

.....

**Find the episode on the WASB website or wherever you find podcasts.**

# SAVE THE DATE

## WASB FALL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

Saturday, Nov. 4 | Heidel House, Green Lake

## State Budget Is Mixed Bag for Public Schools



*Hike in spendable resources falls short of inflationary increase*

On July 5, Governor Tony Evers signed into law the 2023-25 state budget (covering fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25) as 2023 Wisconsin Act 19. It was a budget he labelled “imperfect and incomplete” while using more than 50 partial vetoes to improve the budget from his perspective.

Arguably the governor’s most high-profile veto rolled back an income tax cut proposed by the Legislature for the highest two (out of four) tax brackets. This action created a projected \$4 billion surplus in state coffers that Gov. Evers called on the Legislature to use to “complete work” on the budget to “meaningfully address the state’s ongoing workforce challenges, including an impending fiscal cliff for the state’s childcare industry.” As of this writing, GOP leaders in the Legislature, including Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, have signaled they are not willing to spend those dollars and will instead try to re-pass the tax cuts vetoed in the budget as stand-alone legislation.

At a close second, the governor used his powerful partial veto authority along with some “creativity” to extend increases in per-pupil revenue limits for public schools for 400 years. This veto

gathered national attention and was denounced by GOP legislative leaders as exceeding the governor’s authority. GOP leaders have expressed their plan to challenge this veto in court and possibly propose a constitutional amendment to reign in the power of the governor’s veto pen.

The future of this “400-year veto” is unclear. The governor has long had an incredibly powerful partial veto authority that has been upheld by the courts while the voters have approved two constitutional amendments that limited certain aspects of this authority. The state Supreme Court last ruled on vetoes in 2020 when they found unconstitutional several Evers vetoes from the 2019-21 budget. However, it was a fractured decision without clear guidelines moving forward.

For public schools, this budget will probably be looked at by most of you as a mixed bag. There are certainly significant investments made in public schools, but with the background of a historic \$7 billion state surplus to fund state priorities many are disappointed that public schools were not as high a priority as they hoped.

Overall, the budget provides over \$1 billion in spendable resources to public schools. It also provides his-

toric per-pupil payment increases to private voucher schools and independent charter schools (charters not authorized by a school board). The budget provides a \$97 million increase in Special Education Aid to reach an estimated reimbursement rate of 33.3% in both years of the biennium. In both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school year, there will be a one-time \$15 million increase for school-based mental health. This funding will be provided as per-pupil payments to school districts (estimated at \$31 per pupil) rather than through a competitive grant model. Unless further action is taken by the next Legislature, funding for mental health aid will revert to the current lower amount.

Early literacy efforts were funded to the tune of \$50 million. That money is set aside in a reserve to be released upon approval of the Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee.

Per-pupil revenue limits were increased by \$325 in each year of the budget and for the next 400 years (until 2425) via the partial veto. This increase is the largest per-pupil increase in revenue limits since revenue limits were adopted in 1993-94. It provides permanent base-building revenue limit authority in spendable resources with the

It is also important to note that the revenue limit increase likely falls short of an inflationary increase, which one Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimate put at about a \$400 per-pupil increase in each year of the budget.

flexibility to be allocated at the local level. By his veto, the governor intends to provide a level of budgeting certainty for schools going forward; however, that level of certainty is in question as the veto will have to survive court challenges and the language created by the veto could be changed by a future legislature and governor.

It is also important to note that the revenue limit increase likely falls short of an inflationary increase, which one Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimate put at about a \$400 per-pupil increase in each year of the budget. It also falls short of what Gov. Evers originally proposed in his budget (\$350/\$650).

Many, although not all, of the state's lowest-spending districts will benefit from an increase in the low revenue ceiling from \$10,000 to \$11,000 per pupil. Districts are

allowed to raise their spending to this amount without going to referendum if they have not had a failed operating referendum in the previous three years. Under current law, a failed referendum institutes a three-year freeze on a district's ability to raise its per pupil spending to the low revenue ceiling amount. The interaction between the increase in the low revenue ceiling and the annual adjustment (increase) in revenue limits interact is shown in the following statement:

For revenue limits, all districts will get an additional \$325 per pupil, and districts that are still below \$11,000 per pupil after that — and that are not subject to a freeze on their low revenue ceiling threshold — will be able to raise their revenue limit to \$11,000.

There was no increase in per-pupil categorical aid, meaning it

remains at \$742 per pupil for all school districts. This is no doubt a disappointment for those districts that do not receive much state aid through the funding formula.

#### ■ **Advocacy is key**

Regardless of your thoughts on the resources provided in this budget cycle, what public schools did receive was because of school board member advocacy. Many of you took the time to attend WASB Day at the Capitol to meet with your legislators, testify at public hearings on the budget held by the Joint Finance Committee, and/or kept in correspondence with your lawmakers throughout the process. For this, we are all in your debt. Thank you!

For detailed information on the state budget and K-12-related provisions, see our State Budget page on [WASB.org](http://WASB.org). ■



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## Answering 4 Important Questions About Board Policy

One of a school board's roles is to adopt school board policies to govern the district's operations. Through policy, school boards establish broad objectives for the district which administrators and other employees then implement. Board policies also establish general guidelines and/or rules that set forth expectations for employees, students, vendors and the community as a whole. Importantly, school boards are required to have certain policies by law, whereas other policies are at the discretion of the school board. This Legal Comment will address some commonly asked questions about board policies.

### 1. What is the legal framework for board policy development?

Essentially, board policies constitute the "laws" that govern the operation of a school district. For example, a court has held that a district's failure to comply with its own policy regarding the nonrenewal of a teacher's contract invalidated that nonrenewal. Against this legal framework, board policies essentially constitute "local laws."

Board policies are adopted based on requirements established by the board itself. For example, some

boards require two readings of a board policy before the policy takes effect. Other boards approve policies after a single reading.

Some board policies are mandated by law. Certain federal and state laws require boards to adopt board policies consistent with specified legal obligations. For example, state law requires boards to adopt a policy on student corporal punishment that reflects the use of reasonable and necessary force only in the limited circumstances set forth in the statute. Other policies are necessary to comply with legal principles established by regulations and guidance from administrative agencies. For example, Title IX regulations require boards to adopt a grievance procedure for sexual harassment complaints. The Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights is established as the agency in charge of ensuring compliance with Title IX, and this agency issues regulations, guidance and decisions that might warrant periodic revision of the board's policy containing Title IX grievance procedures.

Judicial case law also provides a legal foundation for boards to adopt certain policies. For example, a line of judicial cases necessitates that school boards adopt a sexual harass-

ment in employment policy that encourages employees to report complaints of sexual harassment internally for resolution at the district level.

Outside of these mandatory legal policies, school boards have significant discretion to adopt policies that reflect local district values. School boards may generally do all things reasonable to promote the cause of education, limited, of course, by legal obligations. In general, when a school board exercises its discretion to create policies, the board is protected by state immunity laws. However, if the board fails to comply with ministerial legal requirements, such as by failing to have a legally required policy, immunity might not apply.

### 2. How do board policies intersect with administrative guidelines and handbooks?

Another way that boards might exercise their discretion is by delegating certain authority to administrators. However, there are certain powers that must be exercised by the board. For example, only a majority of the full membership of the board can non-renew teacher contracts. A board cannot delegate that power to the district administrator.

“Essentially, board policies constitute the ‘laws’ that govern the operation of a school district.”

With respect to certain other matters, board policies are often drafted broadly, leaving the detailed processes of implementation up to administration. Some districts codify these processes and procedures in the form of administrative guidelines. Additionally, board policies might specify that the administration must create administrative guidelines to implement certain policies.

Administrative guidelines are generally created and approved by the administration to essentially operationalize board policies. Administrative guidelines do not inherently have to be approved by the board; the district administrator can be authorized by the board to approve administrative guidelines. In many situations, the district administrator will still share the final administrative guidelines with the board so the board is informed, even if the board has no role in approving the guidelines.

However, in some districts, administrative guidelines are approved by the board (although there may be a different board approval process for administrative guidelines as compared to board policies). School districts must comply with all approval processes applicable to administrative guidelines for those guidelines to be legally enforceable. Additionally, administrative guidelines cannot contradict any aspect of the board policy to which the administrative guideline relates. Finally, if a board is the approving authority of administrative guidelines, absent delegation of modification authority to the administration, the board must approve amendment, modification, suspension or rescission of the guidelines.

Handbooks for employees and for students are another type of document that may elaborate on aspects of board policies. Handbooks, policies and administrative guidelines must always be consistent with each other. In addition, these

documents should be consistent with employee contracts, letters of employment, student registration forms, student information handouts and similar documents. Some documents might say “in the event of a conflict between documents, this document will control.” However, these statements might contradict the district’s preferred hierarchy regarding documents. For example, it might make sense in many situations for board policy to be the highest source of authority. However, an individual employment contract might need to contain a provision that is unique to a specific employee, even though it might be inconsistent with standard board policy language. If that contract says, “in the event of any conflict between this document and board policy, board policy controls,” then, legally, that unique provision will arguably be subordinate to the board policy and have no effect. To avoid such confusion, it is imperative that all such documents are reviewed and accurately reflect the hierarchy among board policy, administrative guidelines, handbooks, contracts and other employment documents.

Whoever has the responsibility for drafting and approving administrative guidelines and handbooks should be monitoring these documents and modifying, amending, and rescinding these documents to ensure consistency with board policy and between each other.

### ■ 3. Why is regular review of board policies so important, and what does that process look like?

The law is constantly changing. This means that corresponding board policies must change. Additionally, policies might need to change periodically to reflect the current values and objectives of a school board.

Therefore, all districts should have a process in place to regularly review board policies. Some boards handle this at the board level. Other boards create policy committees that review and modify policies before sending them to the board for final approval.

Typically, boards do not draft policies themselves. District staff might draft policies in conjunction with legal counsel, or the district might use a policy service that provides continuous updates to policies (and sometimes administrative guidelines as well). However, regardless of who does the initial drafting and review of a policy, boards approve final board policies. Therefore, board members should carefully review proposed policy changes and ask any necessary questions of the district administrator prior to approving a given policy. If board policy approval becomes a rote act, board members might find themselves surprised at the language in a policy after they already voted to approve the policy.

Even when a board policy is approved, it isn’t carved in stone. Boards have the authority to amend, modify, or rescind existing policies. Additionally, a board can temporarily suspend a given policy. For example, if a board needs to pass a new policy but doesn’t have time to do two readings of the policy, the board might temporarily suspend its policy that requires two readings of a policy. The board can then approve the policy with a single reading, and the standard two-readings policy can then take effect again after that specific action. In this situation, sometimes the board will still place the policy on the subsequent meeting’s agenda so there are essentially still two readings of the policy, even though, by necessity, the board chose to have the policy take effect after the first reading.

#### 4. Why is compliance with board policies so important?

Policy compliance is essential for a variety of reasons. Courts can review a district's actions for compliance with the district's own policies and procedures. Even if a court doesn't second-guess the board's ultimate decision, it might reverse that decision for failing to comply with the district's own policies and procedures.

Additionally, a variety of regulatory agencies will review compliance with board policies. For example, the Department of Public Instruction may overturn a district's determination that a student did not experience harassment based on protected class if the district's investigation and determination process did not

comply with board policy (regardless of the district's determination of the merits of that harassment complaint). Similarly, the Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights will review a district's discrimination and harassment policies to ensure compliance with legal requirements. These agencies might conduct this review on their own, but more commonly these reviews are triggered following the filing of a complaint with one of these agencies.

Finally, legal principles aside, compliance with a board's own policies is essential for the board's credibility with the public, employees, and students.

#### Conclusion

There are a variety of legal aspects

to drafting and reviewing board policies. Board members should be sure that they understand their role in board policy development processes. As legal mandates on school districts continue to grow, the breadth and complexity of district policies continue to grow as well. However, board members should review and understand both new policies and changes to existing policies because board policies are the primary "local" governing objectives and guidelines for the entire school district. ■

*This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka and Brian P. Goodman of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel. For related articles, see Wisconsin School News: "Delegation of School Board Authority" (Oct. 2012); and "The Legal Significance of School Board Policies" (Nov. 2007).*

*Legal Comment is designed to provide authoritative general information, with commentary, as a service to WASB members. It should not be relied upon as legal advice. If required, legal advice regarding this topic should be obtained from district legal counsel.*



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## **2023 FALL REGIONAL MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS**

**September - November**  
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