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Explorer's MINDSET

Oconto Falls teacher Kelly Koller learns valuable lessons on her recent Arctic expedition



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John H. Ashley
Executive Editor

Sheri Krause
Editor
Director of Communications

■ REGIONAL OFFICES ■

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

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

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Research Links ADHD and Sept. 1 Kindergarten Cutoff Date

According to a study published in November by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, there is a correlation between the number of children diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and state-mandated Sept. cutoff dates for 5-year-old kindergarten. In states with a Sept. 1 cutoff, there were 34 percent more ADHD diagnoses for children born in August than those born in September. No other pair of months included this disparity and it did not exist in states without a Sept. 1 cutoff, nor were there disparities in diagnosis rates of asthma, diabetes or obesity. The ADHD study looked at 407,846 children born in 2007 through 2009 and followed them through December 2015.

Researchers theorize that because the children born in August would be among the youngest in their class — nearly one full year younger than some of their peers — they may be receiving an ADHD diagnosis for behaviors that would otherwise be considered normal for their age. Wisconsin is among the 21 states that has a Sept. 1 cutoff date. The remaining 29 states have a range of enrollment cutoff dates, with Vermont having one of the latest at Jan. 1. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “In 2016, approximately 9.4 percent of U.S. children — 6.1 million — between the ages of 2 and 17 had been diagnosed with ADHD at one point in their lives.” □

PBS Profile Highlights Widespread Rural School Closures

An online PBS *NewsHour* in November featured the River Valley School District in southwestern Wisconsin. The “Making the Grade” video examined how “rural schools are being forced to shut down or consolidate as people move away.” The River Valley district, comprised of 13 townships and four villages (Arena, Lone Rock, Plain and Spring Green) across four counties (Sauk, Iowa, Richland and Dane), has closed two elementary schools in recent years. The closing of the elementary school in Arena was the focus of a June 2018 *New York Times* article titled, “School’s Closed. Forever.” □



More Children Physically Active

The Aspen Institute recently released *State of Play 2018: Trends and Developments*, its fifth annual report on how many children ages 6-12 are participating in one of the 120 sports and fitness activities that are tracked by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA). These statistics are quoted from the report’s five key developments:

1. More kids are physically active.

The latest data shows that 17 percent of children engaged in no physical activities in 2017.

That figure has now fallen for three consecutive years since it was at 19.5 percent in 2014. That’s roughly 700,000 more kids doing something, even if it’s just one day a year.

2. Sampling of most team sports is up.

In 2017, 56.5 percent of children played a team sport in some form at least one time during the year — more than at any point in the past six years. Over the past three years, the percentage of children

participating on a baseball, basketball, ice hockey, field hockey, wrestling, flag football, gymnastics or swimming team have all grown although there has been a major drop in soccer participation. Volleyball and track and field participation numbers have also rebounded in the past year. However, only 37 percent of kids played a team sport on a regular basis in 2017 — well below the 41.5 percent who did in 2011.

3. Multisport play is making a comeback.

In 2017, children played an average of 1.85 team sports. While slight, it’s the first improvement in four years, but remains well below the level of 2011, when the average child played at least 2.11 sports throughout the year.

4. Most youth coaches are still winging it.

The percentage of adults trained in key competencies to engage kids remains stubbornly low, even as the value of having a trained

coach has generally grown in the broader culture. Less than four in 10 youth coaches say that they are trained in sport skills and tactics, effective motivational techniques, or safety needs such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, basic first aid and concussion management.

5. Kids from lower-income homes face increasing barriers to participation.

While inactivity rates for the overall population are down, most of the participation gains are among kids from upper-income homes who can better afford the growing fees associated with youth sports.

The *State of Play* report includes eight strategies for improving children’s participation: ask kids what they want, reintroduce free play, encourage sport sampling, revitalize in-town leagues, think small, design for development, train all coaches and emphasize prevention. The full report can be found at <https://bit.ly/2QvDyKc>. □



New Year, New Challenges

Happy New Year! I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at the 98th State Education Convention in Milwaukee in a few weeks. Despite the unpredictability of the weather, this is a great time to hold the convention — in the middle of the school year and at the start of the calendar year — to help us all get rejuvenated and renew our commitment to helping every child reach his or her potential.

As you attend convention sessions, learn from colleagues and get inspired, my challenge for you is to ask yourself — what's next? Using what you and your fellow board members learn, what will you do to boost student learning and create actionable results for your students? And what will you do to advance the cause of public schools in your community and the state? It's not enough to gain knowledge, you have to take action to continue improving.

School district governance is complex. District policies, finances, curriculum and staffing all require your board's attention as well as community engagement and other board responsibilities. To help with your work, we often talk about the need to plan for the convention and make the most of your time in Milwaukee — to think about which

sessions you want to attend and which exhibitors you want to visit. But we don't talk as much about what to do after the convention — about how to use the district's investment in your professional development to benefit your students.

If your priority is to understand school finance at a deeper level, there is a pre-convention workshop on school finance and a "deep dive" session as well as standard breakout sessions on school finance that you can plan to attend. Perhaps your focus is on equity, effective board governance, staff retention or any number of other priorities that will be covered in multiple sessions from diverse perspectives at the convention. It's relatively easy to set up a schedule of sessions that works best for you and your interests.

While you are at the convention and taking advantage of all the learning and networking opportunities that it provides, you can challenge yourself to identify how that experience and professional development will help your board meet its goals and what specific steps you'll be taking when you return home.

Attendees often make a point of briefing their colleagues and providing a post-convention report

about what they learned. But the professional development shouldn't end there. With the goals of your board in mind, are there policy or budget discussions that you want to initiate? Should you recommend that the board do a book study on a specific topic? Is there a new resource that you want to start using? Challenge yourself to arrive with a plan and go home with a plan.

If you can't be in Milwaukee in person, I encourage you to sign up to be a virtual attendee and get access to recordings of select breakout sessions and a keynote speaker. We're all in this together and should learn and share together.

Visit the convention website at wasb.org/convention for session details and to register.

After the convention, your next opportunities for professional development will be the WASB/WsAA Legal and Human Resources Conference on Feb. 21 (with a pre-meeting workshop the evening before focused on governance) and the Day at the Capitol on March 13. I hope to see you at those events as well as the State Education Convention.

Your students are counting on you! ■

As you attend convention sessions, learn from colleagues and get inspired, my challenge for you is to ask yourself — what's next?



Polar bear on pack ice in Lancaster Sound.

Polar bears need sea ice to hunt from; their scientific name is *Ursus maritimus* (maritimus meaning of/near/by the sea). Arctic waters are rich in life and prey for polar bears while the land is barren with few species to prey on.

TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH AN

Explorer's MINDSET

Oconto Falls teacher Kelly Koller learns valuable lessons on her recent Arctic expedition

At about 5 a.m. in the far reaches of the Arctic, just above the 74th parallel north, I awoke to the sound of a long, low scrape immediately outside the closed porthole of my cozy bunk. Bang! A crash and a jolt of the ship jerked me as I sat up, followed by the moan of another long scrape. In the belly of the National Geographic Explorer, a ship designed for polar expedition travel, my heart jumped with the giddy excitement of a 5-year-old on Christmas morning as the realization of what we were hitting sunk in. Pack ice! Not wanting to miss a second, I quietly fumbled with throwing on my jacket and slipping on my shoes in the dark, stumbling around while trying not to wake my shipmate Kate, another Grosvenor Teacher Fellow.

I slipped out of the room, scurried down the hall of the staff quarters and bounded up the stairs of the ship's bow, opening the heavy steel doors to the outside. I was greeted by bright sun, crisp Arctic air and beautiful, glorious ice. Standing on the tip of the bow, I planted my feet

and let my spirit soar as I drank it all in. Not one moment of the experience was lost on me.

I took in the importance of pack ice to the whole Arctic ecosystem, the significance of the Arctic to our global climate, and the precariousness and preciousness of the ice as it is melting at catastrophic rates. I took in the jaw-dropping beauty of

The 24-day experience

I had this past summer in the Arctic improved my geographic awareness — not only in the environmental or physical sense but also in a human context.

the ice, the mountainous landscapes of Bylot Island to the south and Devon Island to the north, the adventure of exploration and the value of learning through experience. This was all before breakfast.

The Grosvenor Teacher Fellow Program, a partnership between National Geographic Education and Lindblad Expeditions, brings teachers to some of the world's most

remote places for professional development. The program empowers teachers to broaden students' understanding of the planet and generate solutions for a healthier and more sustainable future. The 24-day experience I had this past summer in the Arctic improved my geographic awareness — not only in the environmental or physical sense but also in a human context. We visited towns in Iceland and Greenland to learn about the many similarities and differences

between those nations and our own.

In Greenland, we learned about the Inuit culture, visited the towns of Sisimiut, Illulusat, Kangaamiut, and Qeqertarsuaq, and saw archaeological sites of Thule and Dorset cultures. On the other side of Baffin Bay, in Nunavut, Canada, our expedition team made a new discovery — the remnants of an ancient Thule home and fire ring, never before documented by modern historians, though likely well known by local Inuit. On board the ship, we were joined by an archaeologist, National Geographic photographers, deep sea divers, a National Geographic

As I saw the icebergs and pack ice and took in the profoundly beautiful environment of the Arctic, I also became more aware of the delicate, interconnected web we all are a part of regardless of where we are on Earth.

explorer and several scientists specializing in Arctic mammals, plants and marine life, as well as NASA astronaut Kathy Sullivan, who has served as the head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). These experts enhanced the learning opportunity by providing lectures and sparking discussion throughout the expedition.

In preparation for the expedition, I educated myself about the Arctic as much as possible in my spare time. I joked with friends and family that my goal was to become knowledgeable enough to be able to not only ask Kathy a question about climate but to understand her answer as well. I became acutely aware that the Arctic is changing at rates that are beyond initial scientific models and that the melting of the sea ice that used to cap our planet year-round

impacts a lot more than just polar bears. Increased levels of carbon dioxide have led to higher air temperatures and the melting of sea ice in the Arctic. Therefore, heat is no longer reflected back. Rather, it gets absorbed into the dark blue ocean, causing more water vapor to be released. This further increases the heat and contributes to even more melting. The amplified melting of Arctic sea ice impacts us globally through the changing ocean temperatures and currents, influencing weather patterns. As I saw the icebergs and pack ice and took in the profoundly beautiful environment of the Arctic, I also became more aware of the delicate, interconnected web we all are a part of regardless of where we are on Earth.

On the expedition, aside from learning and absorbing, I had two

side projects that sprang up from a combination of natural curiosity and enthusiasm for the unique opportunity. One was testing for microplastics — taking samples, logging data, etc. When I get the results, students will be able to interact with and graph that data. The other project sprang from enthusiasm for National Geographic Education’s “Explorer Mindset,” a framework of attitudes and skills for learning inspired by what explorers need to be successful in their fields.

I had done some work using similar concepts, but that was tied to the idea of adventure versus exploration, born one summer from an inspired ride on the lawn mower as my mind wandered and thought of how I could improve what I was doing as an educator. I liked the Explorer Mindset better and

Icebergs break off of glaciers coming from the Greenland Ice Sheet and ice caps in Nunavut, Canada.



believed that the National Geographic Learning Framework communicated what I was trying to do more effectively.

My goal was to try to build a positive culture for learning in my classroom, and I was curious to see how the opportunity of going to the Arctic and diving into the Explorer Mindset could improve and add to those ideas. With a light, foggy notion of wanting to use the Explorer Mindset more, a bold openness to absorb and a passion to adapt and create, I started the expedition with an internal challenge, a calling: “Change me. Change my perspective.” I felt that I was at the precipice of the unknown and it was glorious.

Using my phone as a tool for collecting and curating, I took

Our expedition reached its farthest northern position at 78.5 degrees north latitude in Nares Strait. Nares Strait, known as the “Last Ice Area,” where the last of the Arctic Sea ice is predicted to hold on until, ultimately, it is completely gone if current warming continues.



I felt that I was at the precipice of the unknown and it was glorious.



Greenlandic towns show influences from Denmark and Inuit culture. Greenlandic people rely heavily on the sea for resources; harvesting fish, seal and whale. While there are some streets and cars, most people have a snowmobile in front of their home and also use dog sleds.

Our student-signed expedition flag from Oconto Falls is in two continents at once! In Iceland, we visited the mid-continental rift, which is where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates meet and are separating at a rate of about 3 mm per year.



photos and videos of receding glaciers, icebergs and amazing wildlife, including polar bears, musk oxen, walrus and whales. But I also used my phone to interview people. Amazing people. I asked them about education. What helped them as

learners? How did they think like an explorer in their personal or professional lives? Did it help them?

Inspired and armed with an iMovie app, I put together videos for students on the Explorer Mindset as well as attitudes of curiosity, respon-

sibility and empowerment and published them to YouTube when we got back into cellular range at the end of the expedition.

Since then, the idea of thinking like an explorer as a tool for learning has grown in my classroom and in our sixth-grade team at Oconto Falls. First, I combined the Explorers Mindset with an existing school initiative. Under the direction of our lead teacher, we made a goal of recognizing students for their curiosity, responsibility, empowerment, observation, communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills. Two other teachers on the team created a way to log the attitudes and skills of the Learning Framework using Quick Response (QR) codes so that we can keep a record of the positive learning attributes we are encouraging.

We have also been partnering with National Geographic Explorer Jenny Kingsley, a journalist and storyteller who created the Meet the North project. Jenny interviewed people that live above the Arctic

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GCHJUJUDEN 1017

It's ok for you to try something. Do something, ask something, be something.

Circle and challenged herself to tell their stories from their perspective. We met in the Arctic and it has been so enriching for our students to have this connection. They researched Jenny's work and wrote her letters and she has sent video responses back as she continues to travel and share her experience and expertise as an explorer and a writer.

Throughout this school year, we will continue to connect with her as

we model a project in our literary nonfiction unit after her work.

Students have also been impacted by my participation in the Grosvenor Teacher Fellow program through increased geographic awareness fostered by the photos and firsthand accounts I have been able to share. Before going on the expedition, I raised funds to purchase a 360-degree camera. I am still going through the footage and getting it posted, but

eventually students will have an Arctic virtual reality experience.

Learning becomes more exciting, personal and meaningful when students imagine themselves as explorers. When teachers imagine themselves as explorers, they feel creative, empowered and engaged. Professional development with the National Geographic Education Certification Program and the Grosvenor Teacher Fellow program has empowered and inspired



We saw several different species of whales — narwhal, beluga, sperm, humpback and fin. We were also fortunate to witness a small group of killer whales that were very comfortable and social swimming around our ship.



Almost daily, we would leave the ship to go exploring on hikes led by naturalists. During the hikes, we learned about the geology, wildlife and history of the area.

me to expand my interests as an educator. The National Geographic Society's Committee for Research and Exploration has funded me to launch a project on "Developing the Explorers Mindset as a Tool to Increase Student Engagement in the Learning Process." I will lead a team in creating a website with resources to help make learning with an Explorer's Mindset adaptable and culturally responsive to local initiatives in formal and informal educational settings.

First, I was a teacher. Then,

National Geographic Education helped me view myself as an educator-explorer. Now, with this latest project, I am a National Geographic Explorer — an explorer of learning. It still blows my mind and fills me with gratitude, humility and the thrill of what could be next. When you follow your interests and are flexible with your path along the way, the options are brilliantly, sensationally unknown. There is a quote from Kathy Sullivan that students and educators should take to heart — "Don't ever doubt

that you belong where you are, don't ever doubt that you're allowed to be interested in something, don't ever doubt it's legitimate. It's ok for you to try something, do something, ask something, be something. So anytime, if any voice in your head says, 'well I can't ask that ... well I can't ...' yes you can, and you should. You belong here, and the world needs your talents." ■

Kelly Koller is a 6th grade ELA and social studies teacher at Washington Middle School in the Oconto Falls School District.

Promoting Excellence for All

RESOURCES FOR WISCONSIN DISTRICTS

Addressing inequitable education outcomes is at the core of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) vision of every child graduating college and career ready. We know developing the knowledge, skills and habits to succeed after graduation is imperative, but we also know that there are numerous factors we must consider inside and outside of the school day for students to feel safe, supported and engaged.

Under the leadership of outgoing State Superintendent Tony Evers, the DPI has strived to build upon the important work of equity advocates and their efforts to close achievement and opportunity gaps in the state. From statewide partnerships to staff training, these efforts aim to foster teaching and learning opportunities that lead to more equitable outcomes for every student.

■ Starting from Within

In collaboration with the Aspen Institute Education and Society Program, members of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) published *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Chiefs*, which was developed during Dr. Evers' year as president of the CCSSO. Their work is organized around 10 commitments for chief state

school officers to build more equitable education systems:

- 1. Prioritize equity** — set and communicate an equity vision and measurable targets.
- 2. Start from within** — focus on the state education agency.
- 3. Measure what matters** — create accountability for equity.
- 4. Go local** — engage local education agencies and provide tailored and differentiated support.
- 5. Follow the money** — allocate resources to achieve fiscal equity.
- 6. Start early** — invest in the youngest learners.
- 7. Engage more deeply** — monitor equitable implementation of standards and assessments.
- 8. Value people** — focus on teachers and leaders.
- 9. Improve conditions for learning** — focus on school culture, climate and social-emotional development.

- 10. Empower student options** — ensure families have access to high-quality educational options that align to community needs.

The DPI adopted their definition of educational equity as every student having “access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income.”¹

Internal equity efforts at the department align with the second commitment — starting from within. A major focus of the DPI's work surrounds Wisconsin's persistent graduation and achievement gaps, with the academic achievement gap for African American and American Indian students being among the worst in the nation. To understand and grow the department's commitment to educational equity, the DPI provides required equity training and optional organized events to support open dialogue about racial, cultural, gender-based and physical inequities that exist.

■ Engaging Local Education Leaders

The fourth commitment from CCSSO's *Leading for Equity* establishes the importance of creating networks to provide targeted



A major focus of the DPI's work surrounds Wisconsin's persistent graduation and achievement gaps, with the academic achievement gap for African American and American Indian students being among the worst in the nation.

supports and highlight successful practices from local education agencies. The external equity efforts from the department subscribe to this commitment through partnerships with other organizations and groups.

■ Promoting Excellence for All

The State Superintendent's Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap was created in 2014 with the explicit goal of addressing the racial achievement gap. The task force identified strategies that have been implemented within schools that are finding success closing their achievement gaps.

With the understanding that the work must be situated within culturally responsive practices — paying particular attention to race — the task force organized findings into four research-based school improvement areas and strategies in its Promoting Excellence for All (PEFA) report:

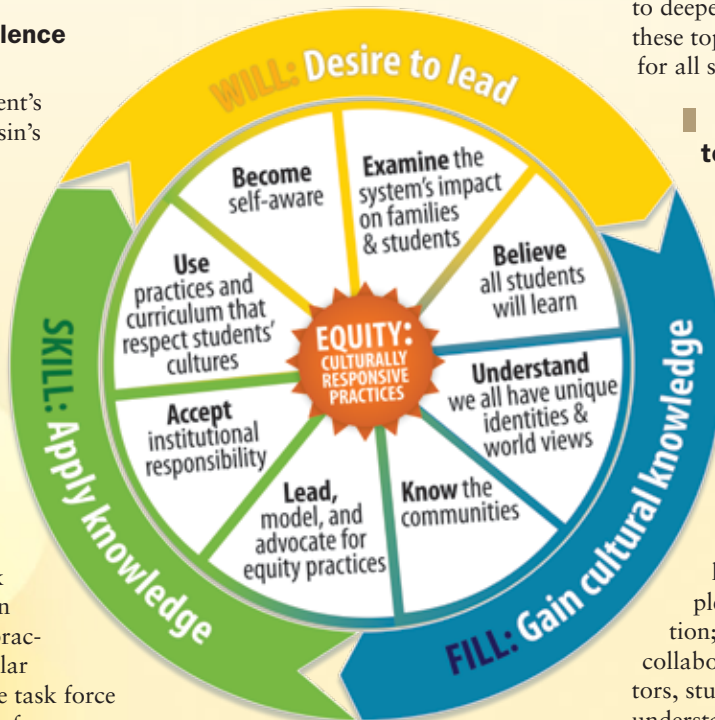
- Effective instruction;
- Student-teacher relationships;
- Family and community engagement; and
- School and instructional leadership.²

The strategies include examples from Wisconsin educators and schools that are using the necessary beliefs required for the strategies to truly make a difference.

Part of the PEFA work included the State Superintendent's Parent

Advisory Council. Their work culminated with the Family and Community Engagement in Promoting Excellence for All report, which identifies family and community

tion, Exploring the Data and Using the Strategies — based on findings from the PEFA report, and organized by the improvement areas and strategies. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to take the eCourse to deepen their understanding about these topics and promote excellence for all students.



engagement strategies as ways to bolster schools' efforts to close opportunity gaps.

After the PEFA report was released, the work continued with the creation of the Promoting Excellence for All eCourse. The eCourse encourages educators at all levels to explore their beliefs, data and instructional strategies to build the skills necessary to be a “race-conscious educator, competent data user and agile instructor responsive to the reality of Wisconsin's achievement gaps.”³ The eCourse consists of three modules — Understanding Race in Educa-

■ Wisconsin's Approach to Academic Standards

The Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning articulate expectations and attitudes that coincide with the implementation of academic standards and programs, thus situating teaching and learning in the context of equity and cultural responsiveness.

The principles begin with every student's right to learn and encompass principles about rigorous instruction; purposeful assessment; collaborative efforts among educators, students and communities; understanding students' strengths; and creating responsive learning environments.⁴

■ Wisconsin RtI Center

The DPI, in collaboration with the Wisconsin Response to Intervention (RtI) Center, the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Center and the Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) State-wide Network strive to build the capacity of Wisconsin districts and schools to develop, implement and sustain equitable multi-level systems of support.

Major efforts of this collaboration center on bolstering educators' capacity to improve their systems

— holding equity at the center. In 2015, the Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practice was created to outline the beliefs, knowledge and practices Wisconsin educators, schools and districts need to reach and teach diverse students. In an effort to expand ways of knowing and building skills to achieve equitable results, many within the DPI use Wisconsin’s Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practices as the cornerstone of their work.

The RtI Center has provided professional learning or technical assistance in the areas of reading, math and behavior to more than 80 percent of schools in the state and has found success through focusing on local needs and assets of the communities within each district.⁵

The Wisconsin RtI Center Annual Report highlights stories from several districts across the state that

have focused on their continuum of supports and found success. Most districts have implemented equitable multi-level systems of support for reading, math and behavior while stories reflected in the report include elements of the importance of building relationships with students to foster academic and behavioral success.

■ The Network

Founded in 2011, the Disproportionality Technical Assistance Network (The Network) addresses racial disproportionality in special education in order to meet federal requirements. This collaboration among the DPI, CESAs, local education agencies, higher education institutions and community members provides free and low-cost training and support throughout Wisconsin for identified and invited school districts.

■ REL Midwest

The DPI is collaborating on the Midwest Achievement Gap Research Alliance to address educational outcomes of black students in the state. The priority is to improve outcomes through research. Members of the alliance include representation from more than a dozen education agencies and school districts.

■ Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Agreements

There are 11 federally recognized American Indian nations in the state of Wisconsin. The DPI is negotiating memoranda of understanding (MOU) agreements with each sovereign nation to ensure that Wisconsin’s American Indian students have the necessary educational resources. The first MOU agreement was signed May 18, 2018, with the Lac

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Family and Community Engagement In Promoting Excellence for All Report:

bit.ly/dpi-family-report

Wisconsin's Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practices:

bit.ly/model-to-inform

The Disproportionality Technical Assistance Network:

thenetworkwi.com

Midwest Achievement Gap Research Alliance (MAGRA):

bit.ly/midwest-gap

Wisconsin's reauthorization of the ESEA:

bit.ly/dpi-esea

Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. These MOUs will strengthen the relationships between American Indian nations and the DPI.

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): The Every Student Succeeds Act

The State Superintendent's Equity Stakeholder Council was created in 2016 to provide input on Wisconsin's reauthorization of the ESEA with the expressed focus on equity. Council members included educators and non-educators. The U.S. Department of Education approved the plan in January 2018.

Looking Ahead

The use of an equity decision and policy tool was introduced by the DPI to examine decision-making processes with an explicit focus on equity. Decisions about policies, programs, practices and budgets affect Wisconsin students, families, communities and educators. This tool brings questions about equity to the forefront of decision-making processes. Questions relate to accelerating growth while increasing opportunities for students, thinking through which learners will access our work, examining how all stakeholders are engaged and impacted, and assessing the intentional and unintentional consequences from these decisions.

The efforts outlined here provide a broad overview of the necessary work

done in the name of closing opportunity gaps in the state. They are neither all-inclusive nor are they static in their implementation. Divisions and teams within the DPI continue to build knowledge and capacity to conduct their work through an equity lens with a commitment to continued learning and growth. ■

Marci Glauz, PhD, is a strategic communications consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

End Notes

1. The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017; Leading for Equity: Opportunities for

State Education Chiefs, Washington, DC. bit.ly/ccsso-resources



2. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014; Promoting Excellence for All. dpi.wi.gov/excforall
3. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014; Promoting Excellence for All: A Report from the State Superintendent's Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap. bit.ly/task-force-report
4. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2011; Wisconsin's Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning. bit.ly/dpi-principles
5. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin RtI Center and Wisconsin PBIS Network, 2018; Wisconsin RtI Center Annual Report. bit.ly/rti-report

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TEN WAYS School Boards Can Champion Racial Equity

By Pat Savage-Williams

[Editor's note: The following article specifically addresses racial equity. However, many of the suggestions for board action could apply to other disparities impacting subsets of students based on socioeconomic status, gender, disability, English language proficiency and/or other factors. Board members are encouraged to consider how these suggestions may be applicable to the inequities in their districts.]

School board members are expected to understand board structure, board functioning and the board's role. They are responsible for approving policy decisions that affect the educational environment in many ways. These decisions include how students learn, how students are taught, how learning is measured, how teachers are supported with professional development, how funds are allocated based on district priorities, and how effectively the community at large is engaged around student learning.

If we consider these roles using an equity lens, we quickly understand that unless board members are “on board” with the implementation of racial equity within their school district, there are many opportunities for failure.

All students should have equal access to a high-quality education. As long as race, class and ethnicity continue to be strong predictors of student achievement, college success and successful life experiences, school board members must work within their school systems to iden-

tify barriers and obstacles to opportunity, interrupt their negative impact, and eliminate persistent disparities in student outcomes. When we look at racial achievement data in our nation, we see disparities in education pervasively across all areas. We must never make excuses for those disparities in our schools or lower our expectations for any students.

Our purpose is to successfully educate all the students who attend our schools — all the children in our community — and implement

improvements to address racial disparities. It is essential that we, as school board members, focus our work on racial equity in schools and identify all forms of racial inequity for two reasons:

- **To increase awareness** of systemic barriers that disadvantage students of color.
- **To encourage and support** educators as they seek to adapt instructional and leadership practices to respond more effectively to the needs and aspirations of all the children they serve.

Many school districts and communities across our state and in the country are experiencing a move to raising awareness of equity issues with a particular emphasis on racial equity. The long-term impact of race and racism on student achievement, how instruction is delivered, discipline, resource allocation, etc. is discussed and debated at many different levels. Getting school boards to commit to implementing racial equity work within a school district requires more than finding people with assumed good hearts to serve on the board. Most school board members want to provide opportunities for students and community members. However, securing a real impact on student achievement requires skills, courage, strength and determination.

Moving the equity work from theory to practice at the board level means that school board members must be willing to craft policies that encompass equity and empower the district to undertake the work of racial equity.

Here are 10 ways school board members can move their respective districts toward racial equity:

1 The school board must have a strong commitment to racial equity.

Members of the school board must be willing to commit to creating a school culture that embraces and implements racial equity practices, with board members holding themselves accountable in the progression toward equity.

A key example is Evanston Township High School (ETHS) in Evanston, Ill. In 2010, ETHS dramatically changed its curriculum for incoming freshmen students. ETHS de-tracked freshman humanities classes (English and history) and biology. The goal of this dramatic change was to remove barriers that historically caused the under-representation of students of color in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The district believed that students who have access to, and are successful in, highly rigorous courses have greater opportunities to be accepted to, and be successful in, colleges and universities. Moreover, they will have a greater likelihood of successful life experiences in general. Since there was so much dialogue regarding these changes, the school board's public commitment empowered the superintendent to move forward. In the last five years at ETHS, there has been a 61 percent increase in the number of African American students taking AP courses, with 91 percent of them earning a 3 or higher on the AP exams. There has been a 48 percent increase in the number of Latinx

students taking AP courses, with 51 percent earning a 3 or higher on AP exams.

The ETHS example shows that without the clear commitment of the school board, the superintendent will be unable to make large-scale, systemic changes that will impact the district. The board will need to be solid in its commitment to the importance of racial equity work and endorse the efforts of the superintendent to move forward.

2 Adopt an Equity Statement.

The Equity Statement will serve as a guidepost for the equity work of the district and provide the framework to focus on racial equity at every level. This statement is meant to guide the equity work and is not an actual policy. Samples of the statements ETHS has developed can be found at eths.k12.il.us/Page/978 and eths.k12.il.us/Page/955.

3 Know your district demographics.

School board members should know the racial demographics of the district — both staff and students. It is necessary for the board to have a level of understanding about the intersection of race and education to make decisions about important districtwide equity initiatives in order to approve the expenditures for the large-scale changes. Data must be disaggregated by race.

School board members should also understand the community and relevant demographic data, including housing patterns and the history of these housing patterns. They should be able to discern where most people of color live in the community and which schools

The long-term impact

of race and racism on student achievement, how instruction is delivered, discipline, resource allocation, etc. is discussed and debated at many different levels.



Unconscious biases

influence institutional and structural racism and impact student learning in school systems.



the students of color attend. Data can help school board members discuss and ask questions about achievement patterns: which student groups participate in various programs; the racial make-up of classes; who is in special education; who participates in extracurricular activities and clubs; attendance patterns; graduation rates; and which students are being disciplined most and why. Identify trends that run through the school district and community. Be aware of classes and activities that tend to be comprised of racially homogeneous students.

At this level, try to avoid explaining or excusing why you believe these disparities exist. There are many theories and opinions that you will review, debate and consider. What truly matters is the board

having the determination to address the disparities. Consequently, it is important to have a clear understanding of your district and the breakdown of the experiences of racial groups in your community.

4 School board members must be willing to engage in their own personal journey to expand their knowledge and understanding of issues of race.

The first critical step of this journey is expanding your racial consciousness. Unconscious biases influence institutional and structural racism and impact student learning in school systems. As school board members become aware of their own individual biases, they will reflect upon their personal life experiences. This will equip them to determine

how these experiences have shaped those biases and how they have affected interactions with others. They will develop a better ability to weigh and consider the perspectives of others. Be ready to share your perspectives and listen thoughtfully and responsibly to colleagues and community members.

Engage in formal board trainings as a group with facilitator-led discussions to debrief and follow-up. School board members should be encouraged to challenge the internal and external systems that have been in place for decades in the district and in the community and have helped maintain the disparities between students of color and white students. The trainings should develop the capacity to systematically change and challenge insensi-

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tive policies that serve to impede the success of students of color. It is essential that school board members take the time to engage in ongoing training and courageous conversations about race to deepen their understanding of how the district's governing body can create a more welcoming and culturally conscious school district.

In addition, consider a book study to help further the school board's learning about racial impact. A list of suggested titles is below, but it is not an exhaustive list. It is essential to make a point to review relevant literature on institutional racism and class bias in public schools. Furthermore, attend lectures and find articles that are written about your community, various

cultures and topics around equity to read as a board and discuss at board meetings. It is important for the staff and community to see the board engage in this learning process.

5 Be able to initiate and create structural changes that challenge the status quo and support equity for all.

Look at the areas of disparities within your district with the goal of identifying the structures that hold them together. Finding these disparities will lead you to determine the structures that support these disparities. Because you are considering the history of the district and community, you may be learning about the long trends and decades of patterns set. In addition, some of these patterns have been in place for a long time; there-

fore, it is difficult for many to see them as problematic. Tradition and customs are often named as "reasons" for patterns that usually support racial inequities. In collaboration with the superintendent and within your role as school board member, dream and create a different narrative, a counter-narrative with different outcomes. For example, if your district is separating students by "ability level" in classes, look at the traditions and the outcomes of this. Challenge the policies and practices that maintain and uphold this. Look at where students are separated by race and talk to your superintendent and board colleagues about the impact and outcome of these separations. Consider how to work backward to dismantle the structures that hold this together.



Breaking the Iron Cage of Poverty

Catch Dr. Donna Beegle at the pre-convention workshops on January 22

Want to learn more about what you can do to help break the iron cage of poverty for your students? Attend

the pre-convention workshop on Jan. 22 with Dr. Donna Beegle, president of Communication Across Barriers, a consulting firm dedicated to building poverty-informed communities that are armed with tools to break barriers. She works directly with children and adults currently in poverty as well as professionals who want to make a difference for those living in poverty. Dr. Beegle is also the founder of the Opportunity Community movement, which provides the foundation for a contemporary war on poverty.

In her engaging workshop, Dr. Beegle will provide a poverty knowledge base that is necessary for improving educational success and a shared understanding of what students need to

develop to their full potential. Participants will gain tools for recognizing how the many different life experiences of poverty have an impact on education and what can be done to improve outcomes.

Born into migrant labor poverty, Dr. Beegle grew up not knowing the words her teachers used or understanding the examples provided to explain them. Education was an additional stress on an already overstressed life, so she dropped out of high school in her freshman year and got married. After continuing to live in extreme poverty and homelessness, Dr. Beegle returned to school at age 26 to get her GED, and — within 10 short years — achieved her doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Like Dr. Beegle, many students living in poverty have received strong messages that they are not smart and have internalized the poverty impacts

as personal deficiencies. She will explore policy choices that are (and are not) making an impact on the lives of students in poverty.

Dr. Beegle will also share examples of schools that are implementing her strategies and having success in removing poverty-related obstacles. Action steps for creating a vision for the district, formulating a professional development plan for teachers, and producing the types of policies that improve the educational outcomes for all students will be explored. In addition, Dr. Beegle will discuss what administrators and board members can do to become community leaders in developing the systems and partnerships necessary for assisting students and families who live in the crisis of poverty. ■

Visit the WI State Education Convention website at WASB.org for more information.

Recognize and understand

the intersection of race, socioeconomics, mobility, gender and sexual orientation/identity through district data. Determine how you will gain evidence of success and be willing to make changes or tweaks if the data indicates the need to do so.



6 As a board, commit to develop goals and policies with a strong equity lens, and identify and dismantle the policies that support the disparities.

Because every student in your district deserves the right to excel, be compelled to assure that all students have an opportunity to achieve. As school board members, we must ensure that students are on track to graduate and attend college and/or pursue successful careers. This accountability to all learners means that we promote high academic standards and outcomes for all — embracing and accommodating differing characteristics of the students and always having high expectations for all students, not just for some. Thus, an equitable education that will increase each student's academic and functional trajectory to realize college/career readiness and independence should be included in the goals. Striving to eliminate the predictability of academic achievement based upon race should be embedded within the mission, goals and vision of the district.

7 Fiscal accountability: Change the school budget options to prevent disparities.

Every district is facing challenges and threats that could impact its financial stability. School board members should partner with the superintendent and collaborate with the chief financial officer to assure that equitable resources are allotted for all students. Be certain that all funds, staff, materials, equipment, facilities, space, school trips and all other resources are carefully established with an equi-

ty-based lens. Highly qualified staff and facilities — including learning environments, technology and instructional support — should be dispersed with racial equity considerations. The distribution of resources in an equitable and fair manner assures that all learners have equal opportunity to achieve high academic standards. The equitable allocation of resources is paramount to equity in a school district.

8 Be data informed.

Require the superintendent to develop inclusion practices and methods to measure, report, interpret and analyze data regularly for the purpose of improvement and transparency. Examine data on student academic performance, discipline, attendance, dropout and graduation rates, involvement in extracurricular activities, special education classification, and access to student services. Identify areas of inequity in student success and participation, disaggregating data by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability and English language proficiency. Develop statistical measures to assess equity in these areas. Remember, the patterns established have been in place for decades if not hundreds of years. It is unlikely that disparities will disappear within a few years.

Recognize and understand the intersection of race, socioeconomics, mobility, gender and sexual orientation/identity through district data. Determine how you will gain evidence of success and be willing to make changes or tweaks if the data indicates the need to do so.

9 Develop partnerships and allies to achieve equity.

Communicate clearly throughout the community the district's strategies and efforts to promote equity, diversity and a safe environment. Acknowledge challenges and problems where they exist within the district and the history behind the patterns of disparities. Elicit community support for racial equity. Celebrate successes and accomplishments of all students and staff, particularly those who don't often get the spotlight.

Find a way to focus specifically on programs for parents and guardians of children who are struggling in school or who are experiencing lower rates of success and participation in school. Reach out to parents who do not typically come to school or speak at meetings. Ask parents how they feel most comfortable connecting with your school and be willing to make changes to meet their needs. It could be that joining the Parent Teacher Association, for example, does not work for all parents. Identify what does work for them. Work with staff to make sure that these parents feel they are welcome in school and see the school as working on behalf of their students' best interests. Promote parent involvement as the cornerstone of student success in all facets of school life.

Develop allies by partnering with community organizations such as local universities, faith-based institutions and city government to promote racial equity in the district. Invite members of these groups to the school for training and other professional development activities in order to model this work and encourage

other agencies and organizations to implement similar goals and strategies in their organizations.

10 Expect opposition.

Change is difficult and not always welcomed by everyone. Many will engage in vocal discussions and conversations about racial disparities, but proposals for structural and policy changes toward dismantling what has been in place for decades are not often met with universal approval. This can divide a community, as there is significant controversy surrounding racial equity work. This does not help the equity-centered school board members or superintendents gain confidence. Board members are elected officials and members of the community. The fact that this controversy is almost exclusively generated by white parents, educators, policymakers and other community stakeholders, most of whom have never personally engaged in racial equity training,

presents another significant challenge.

While it is important to continue engaging with them as community members, employ careful and thoughtful responses and strategies. Listening to their concerns, providing opportunities to share and hear other perspectives, and working to incorporate their thoughts into the plan may transform these critics into supporters.

Most importantly, do not lose your focus or your resolve to do what is right for all students. Every student deserves to have access to the best opportunities and the best education we can provide in our schools. When our schools are lacking equity, we are obligated to address inequities or we are failing to do our jobs properly. Our students are relying on us to assure equity for them in our schools. That is the purpose of public education. ■

“Ethics and equity and the principles of justice do not change with the calendar.” — D. H. Lawrence

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Between the World and Me,
by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools, by Glenn Singleton

Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools, by John Diamond and Amanda Lewis

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, by Michelle Alexander

Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving

What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy, by Robin DiAngelo

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?, by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Beyond Diversity two-day seminar trainings by the Pacific Education Group

Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) training sessions

Reprinted, with permission of the author, from the March/April 2018 issue of The Illinois Association of School Boards Journal. Pat Savage-Williams is the president of the Evanston Township High School District 202 Board of Education in Evanston, Ill. and special education coordinator, SEED facilitator, equity team co-chair and Pacific Educational Group affiliate at New Trier Township High School District 203 in Northfield, Ill.



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My Last Step Backward

by Tasha Schuh: Excerpt from Chapter 1, "A Step Backward"

I remember it being so dark that I struggled to follow the progress of the stage crew. The houselights were out since we needed to mimic what would happen on opening night. The cast and crew had to adapt to complete darkness — the blackness of a choreographed scene change. *"Places everyone."*

One cast member told me later that someone said to her, "Rachel, be more careful. You almost fell through the trapdoor last night, remember?"

Why hadn't I heard that warning? Why did it seem that everyone knew this revised scene change but me — as if everyone but Tasha Schuh got the memo?

I stood in the dark, waiting for the bridge that carried the prop assigned to me, when I heard someone say, "Tasha, move out of the way."

I took one step backward, and my body went through ... nothing.

One moment I was standing there waiting to grab my prop. The next moment, the stage was gone.

I was falling, flipping. Seconds later, the back of my head crashed onto a concrete floor — a crash like Dorothy's house, with one ruby slipper still on the stage. I had stepped right out of my Reebok athletic slide, which stood neatly in front of the trapdoor, while the other shoe remained on my foot after the fall. I slid backward out of my shoe

and dropped sixteen feet to the hard cement floor. My head hit first; my body weight came next, falling on top of me. I heard the crunch, and then I just laid there.

Confusion took over. Screams flew through the air above me...

"Oh, my God."

"Tasha! Tasha!" I heard my name a hundred times.

More Oz magic. I had no idea how everyone got to the theater's basement as fast as they did. I found out later that one music teacher, the pit-band director, was down there and saw me hit.

Immediately, I was surrounded by friends and teachers. Rachel and Stevie told me later I was lying as if sleeping in the fetal position. Imagine this six-foot baby rolled up on the concrete floor.

I remember pausing, looking up, staring at the trapdoor from the cold basement floor, wondering how it all happened. My fall took seconds, but I can replay it in slow motion in my mind, like it took days to land in this uncomfortable position. I felt like Land of Oz royalty. *Relax everyone; I've landed. Now, don't touch me!*

Ms. Huber, another music teacher, yelled, "Someone call 911! No one touch her! We're not going to move you, Tasha. Try to stay still, all right?"

What saved me from complete panic was the delusion that I would be okay. I never lost consciousness, which kept my delusion alive.

Fear began to overtake me as the word *paralyzed* drifted in and out of the crowd who surrounded me on the basement floor. This word carried hidden fears. Self-doubt threatened to swallow me up.

As the paramedics prepared me for a ride to the local hospital, where airlift arrangements were already being made, I fought my greatest fear — a foresight I had revealed to a friend just three days before my accident.

For some reason, my friend had asked, "What would be the worst thing that could happen to you? What scares you the most, Tasha?"

Without hesitation, I answered, "Being paralyzed.

In a wheelchair for the rest of my life — like Christopher Reeve. I could never do that."

As the paramedics took every precaution, I recalled all the times accident-prone Tasha Schuh had bounced back from a close call with only minor injuries. My delusion was strongest when I needed it most. *I'll be fine.*

But doubts crept back with one

recurring question: *Am I paralyzed?* I would ask this question so many times within the next few hours. All would answer with the one thing I did not want to hear: "I don't know."

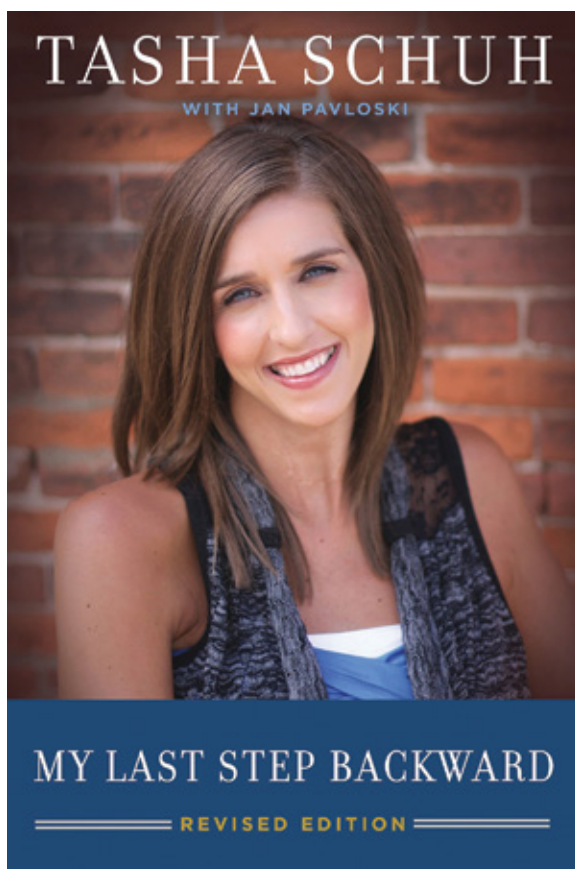
By now, the EMTs had secured my neck in a brace and clamped all of me onto a body board. People were trying to manage my escape from the lower level since the normal exit would not work.

Someone came up with the idea to lower the orchestra pit as far as it would go. Kids scurried to clear out all of the instruments. Strapped onto a gurney, I was raised from the orchestra pit onto the stage. Once on the stage, I was wheeled out of the building via the Sheldon's traditional theater ramp.

Everyone called out to me as I was loaded into the ambulance. "Tasha. You'll be okay." My name echoed in the theater over and over as the ambulance door closed.

"Okay, I have IV access," one of the EMTs announced. "Let's drive."

The paramedics were definitely in trauma mode. My head was throbbing, and they were rightfully obsessed with the potential for brain hemorrhage. No one cared to shield my feelings. No one spoke in code. I don't recall precise words after the IV went in, but I do recall the



See Tasha Thursday at the Convention!

 THE Insurance CENTER

She'll be the keynote speaker at the WASB Breakfast on Thursday, Jan. 24, sponsored by The Insurance Center. Tasha's books, *My Last Step Backward* and *My Next Move Forward*, will be available for sale at the convention bookstore and at her book signing immediately after her keynote outside the Crystal Ballroom at the Hilton Hotel.

feeling that I was now a medical science project. The goal: to save me, and with some luck, stabilize me for an airlift to Rochester Mayo.

The doors of the ambulance opened and I read the sign: *EMERGENCY*. Cautiously, I was moved to an x-ray table, and then my family appeared. Mom told me later that as she entered, it broke her heart to see me quietly crying.

“Mom, I can’t feel my legs!” I finally said in a panicked whisper.

“It’s going to be okay,” she whispered back, her tears flowing, too.

A helicopter ride — every kid’s dream, right? Be careful what thrill rides you wish for. I was getting an experience I had always wanted on family vacations. Every time we

encountered a helicopter excursion ad, I begged for a ride. I imagined that Mom or Dad would ride with me. But there was no room for my family on this airlift to Rochester.



I imagined that Mom or Dad would ride with me. But there was no room for my family on this airlift to Rochester ...

“Please, Mom, don’t let me go alone.” I would not get my way. The flight nurse closed the helicopter door, and once in the air, basic physiology stole what remained of my free will. I vomited while the flight nurse, unable to roll me over, did her best to wipe away the mess. Days

later, doctors deduced that I had aspirated. This would prove life-threatening to lungs destined for a hospital traction bed.

The next few hours are a jumbled memory of pain meds and worried whispers. Inventory of my injuries led to a laundry list of complications. I quit listening.

My world succumbed to dreams. I lived in the past, gaining consciousness long enough to see family and friends rotating to and from my bed — some crying, some cheering me on, all worried beyond my understanding. I drifted away from the pain and dreamed of my life before the trapdoor ... ■

Tasha Schuh is a motivational speaker and a graduate of Ellsworth High School in the Ellsworth Community School District.



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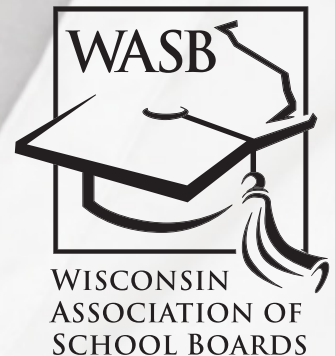
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Influence of Leadership

by Salome Thomas-EL: Excerpt
from *"The Immortality of Influence:
We Can Build the Best Minds of
the Next Generation"*

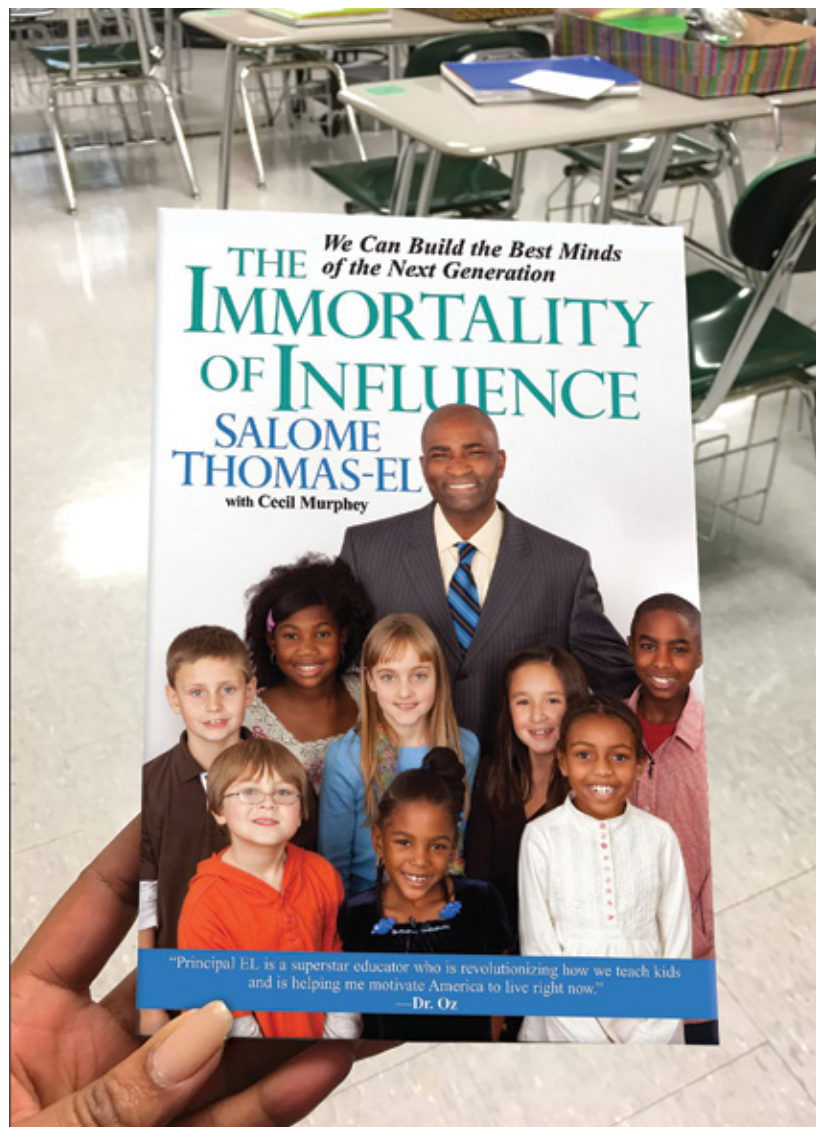
People draw strength from leaders, especially in times of crisis. We need only to think of Sept. 11, 2001, and the leadership of the then mayor of New York City. Many called him a hero. He wasn't a hero, but he did exactly what a good leader does — he inspired and encouraged. New Yorkers and people around him felt stronger because of his stance.

As a school principal and administrator, I often find myself in the same leadership positions. I have a role to play when we encounter death — the death of employees, parents, students and former students. Parents of our teachers have died, or sometimes their siblings. On many of those occasions, I've had to deliver the sad news.

My leadership comes into action when the media negatively portrays the school and I have to respond to the public as well as explain it to the staff.

Sometimes the situations become so bad that I don't know what to do. I hurt and I have to help others as they struggle with their own pain. A few times when I've had to deliver a death message, I've gone into my office, closed the door, sat at my desk and let the tears fall.

I'm not ashamed of my tears — I used to be, but I've gotten past



that. I feel that I have to project an image of strength in the midst of crisis. When people see me in public during those difficult times, they say, "I feel confident because you're always confident."

They need strength and encouragement during those times. Part of my role as leader is to project that strength. They don't realize there are times when I'm weak, when I weep and grieve, but I can't show that side. It's not that I'm trying to hide, but leaders need to lead. I lead by showing my strength. I want them to know that even in the midst of the worst tragedies, we can still stand tall.

Sometimes I talk to the staff and

deliver the bad news that our school didn't achieve the test scores we felt we should have. I won't lie to them, but I will encourage them. "We still have a chance," I say, and I mean those words, because as long as those children are alive and we can teach them, we have the opportunity to help them improve.

Because of the teachers' dedication and commitment, our students have often improved. They've worked hard and I believe that part of the reason is because I've encouraged them to believe they can do it. If I inspire the teachers, my influence moves on to the students.

When I talk with the students I

sometimes say, “Maybe you failed today, but because you fail once it does not make you a failure. What it should do is teach you to say, ‘I need to try another way.’ Let’s continue and not give up.”

All good leaders have that kind of influence. Their attitude, their words and sometimes their pressure makes people say, “I can do that. I can’t quit now.”

For that to happen, however, people need to trust their leaders. Those in positions of authority have to prove themselves, to show they care, to demonstrate that they know what they’re doing. When people trust leaders, they’ll follow them.

The difficulty for us leaders — and I think particularly of charismatic types that pull people toward them — is that personality alone isn’t enough. Followers need to know that we have morals, ethical values and a high-level belief system. If we lack those qualities, people may follow for a while, but not for long. Eventually, we’ll show who we truly are.

As leaders who want to influence others, we have to go in a direction that propels the organization forward. That’s not always an easy task. Some-

times we have to make decisions that may not be in the best interest of some. Faithful leaders factor in the cost and put the greater good ahead of the desires or needs of a few, even when those few are good friends.

As proof of our leadership, we

More than once I’ve had to say

“This isn’t personal. It’s not a decision about you. It’s about what is best for the children, the community and for the school.”



get results — perhaps not what we wanted or all that we wanted — and we motivate others to hold on, to expect good things and to make changes. We encourage them to know that they can improve and lead richer lives.

For those of us who want to influence others, one of the obstacles we face is that when we make decisions, some people take it personally if they don’t get what they wanted. They simply can’t move into the concept of deciding by principle or moral values. When they don’t get what they want, they cry out that we’ve attacked them or rejected them.

More than once I’ve had to say to teachers, students, community leaders

and parents, “This isn’t personal. It’s not a decision about you. It’s about what is best for the children, the community and for the school.”

We have to learn that we can never please everyone no matter how hard we try or how charismatic we are. We do the best we can. That’s all God asks of us and that’s all we can ask of ourselves. If we focus on doing our best, we will exert the right kind of influence.

As leaders, we also develop leadership. Our goal isn’t just to have many disciples, but to teach and enable others to reach the highest levels possible. We help develop teachers, administrators, pastors, doctors, attorneys and industry CEOs.

Our message and influence will impact them so they may influence others to become leaders. That’s why I call this the immortality of influence. If we motivate and guide future leaders positively, who knows what they can do with their influence? My goal is to produce leaders who will have more influence on others than I will. ■

An excerpt from The Immortality of Influence: We Can Build the Best Minds of the Next Generation by Salome Thomas-EL who is also the author of I Choose to Stay: A Black Teacher Refuses to Desert the Inner City.



See Principal EL Friday at the Convention!

Salome Thomas-EL is an award-winning teacher and principal, and an internationally recognized speaker and educator. Principal EL believes that every child can succeed and achieve their dreams. This shapes his life-long commitment to supporting the teachers, principals, school staff and parents that work with students every day. For nearly 30 years, Principal EL has taken on this challenge with the absolute belief that every child can and will learn, as long as adults in their world care enough not to give up!

Principal EL will be the keynote speaker at the 2019 State Education Convention on Friday, Jan. 25, sponsored by Go 365 by Humana.



Another Resolution for 2019

Resolve this New Year to advocate for your students and schools



Many of us make New Year's resolutions to do things like lose weight, exercise more, spend more time with family and friends, or floss regularly.

For 2019, we'd like to suggest another resolution for you and your board: to make legislative advocacy a habit — one that you will stick to throughout the new year.

With a new governor and a new Legislature taking office in Wisconsin, your advocacy for public schools in general, and your district specifically, is more important than ever.

Now is the time to get started on your advocacy efforts with your state legislators before the 2019-20 legislative session begins on Jan. 7. As your WASB lobbyists are fond of saying, "Make a friend before you need a friend!"

It's never too soon to begin building relationships with the lawmakers who represent your school district.

To get you started on the path to making advocacy a habit, you'll find tips and advice from the WASB in our newly updated **Legislative Advocacy Toolkit**, available on the WASB Legislative Update blog: wasblegupdate.wasb.org (click on WASB Resources then Advocacy Toolkit).

Here are some things to consider for laying the groundwork for your advocacy:

- Think about and identify what your district's most critical needs are. These are the issues that you will want to ask your legislators to help you address. Identifying and agreeing upon your district's priorities will help focus and guide your advocacy. (You'll find suggestions below about how to communicate these needs to your legislators.)
- If you haven't already done so, adopt or review your board advocacy plan whether by a motion, a general consensus, a written plan or an official board policy. (Note: Policy Resource Guide subscribers can access a sample advocacy policy). Set your plan and assign duties. (*See Toolkit p. 5*)
- Few boards plan to fail, but many fail to plan. Having a plan will help guide your actions, assign responsibilities and ensure that advocacy is front and center in your thinking. Putting together a plan will help you build consensus around how to conduct your advocacy or highlight areas where you need to

work out differences of opinion.

- Search for your legislators on social media (Facebook and Twitter) and friend/follow them.
- Go to your legislators' websites and sign up for their E-Updates. Send them your district newsletter.
- Make initial contact (*See Toolkit p. 23 for a sample message*). Sample ideas include:
 - "Congratulations on your election/re-election..."
 - "We look forward to working with you..."
 - Invite them to your schools to spend time with your students.
 - Invite them to a board meeting (offer specific dates and be sure to follow up).
- Pass a board resolution compiling a list of your school district's most pressing needs and send it to your legislators and the governor. (*See Toolkit p. 12*)
- Identify any changes in state law or ideas for legislation that would benefit your district.
- Plan on attending the WASB Legislative Update presentation on Thursday, Jan. 24 at the

Now is the time to get started on your advocacy efforts with your state legislators...



State Education Convention in Milwaukee.

- Register for the WASB Day at the Capitol on Wednesday, March 13 in Madison.
- Consider testifying on behalf of your school district at a state budget hearing.

The Wisconsin Legislature’s budget-writing Joint Finance Committee typically schedules four to six hearings at various locations around the state. Not only is this an opportunity to

highlight your most pressing needs to the committee, there is a strong chance that your legislators will be present at the hearing nearest you and you can share your concerns with them at the hearings.

- If your legislator holds “office hours” or “listening sessions” in his or her district, plan to attend at least one to share your board’s concerns and needs. Bring along community members (parents, grandparents, etc.) to reinforce your message.

Typically, lawmakers will announce these meetings in

their E-Updates, through social media (Facebook and Twitter) or in the local newspaper. Be on the lookout for these meetings, especially during the period from March through May when lawmakers are eager to gather their constituents’ input on the state budget.

By following these steps, you can be prepared and set the stage for a successful legislative session for your school district and K-12 public schools in general. As always, please utilize the resources the WASB offers for our members. (See Toolkit p. 3) We know you are busy, so let us do some of the work for you. The more school boards that begin developing a relationship with their state legislators, the more effective we all will be.

Thank you & Happy New Year! ■

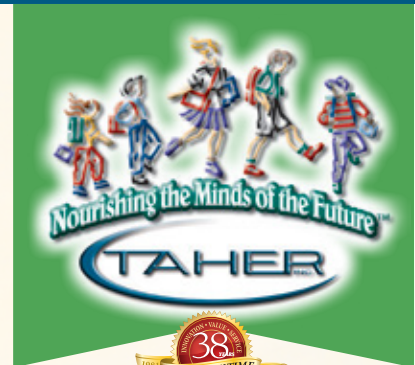
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Upcoming Events

► WASB/WSAA Legal and Human Resources Conference and Workshop

February 20 & 21, 2019
WISCONSIN DELLS

The one-day legal conference, co-sponsored by the WASB and the Wisconsin School Attorneys Association, on Thursday, Feb. 21 will feature sessions on board relationships, online communications, teacher nonrenewal, school safety, special education law, mental health issues in schools and more. There will also be a WASB evening workshop on Wednesday, Feb. 20 focused on policymaking as a core component of governance. Watch your emails for more information.



► WASB Day at the Capitol

Wednesday, March 13, 2019
MADISON

Advocate for your schools. Attend the WASB Day at the Capitol on March 13. In the morning, you will receive legislative and budget briefings from the WASB Government Relations team as well as agency and/or legislative staff. In the afternoon, you'll have the opportunity to meet with your legislators and/or their staff to directly advocate on behalf of your students and your schools. This biennial lobbying day is a critical component of the WASB's advocacy efforts. Make sure your district is represented! Watch your emails for more information.

UPCOMING WEBINARS

The WASB hosts a series of webinars throughout the year. Here is a look at the upcoming webinars from the WASB.

■ INDIVIDUAL CONTRACTS & THE NONRENEWAL PROCESS

March 6, 2019, 12 – 1 pm | Presenter: Bob Butler, Associate Executive Director and Staff Counsel

The elimination of collective bargaining by Act 10 elevates the importance of individual teacher contracts, which may become similar in content to administrator contracts. This presentation will focus on the process of drafting new contractual provisions to transition from traditional contracts to contracts that meet districts' needs in the post-collective bargaining world.

This presentation also will review the basics of nonrenewal of teacher contracts under section 118.22 of the Wisconsin statutes and include guidance on the application of constitutional protections and discrimination laws as well as alternatives to nonrenewal.

■ TITLE IX: SCHOOL DISTRICTS' OBLIGATIONS

April 10, 2019, 12 – 1 pm | Presenter: Bob Butler, Associate Executive Director and Staff Counsel

The federal Office for Civil Rights has been diligent in warning school leaders about the full scope of each district's Title IX obligations. In this webinar, we'll identify how Title IX's focus on sex discrimination and gender equity apply in key areas such as career and

technical education, sex-based harassment, school discipline, employment and athletics. Title IX self-audits and other recommended practices will also be discussed as well as the designation, responsibilities and training of a formal Title IX coordinator.

■ HIRING TEACHERS

May 8, 2019, 1:30 – 2:30 pm | Presenter: Bob Butler, Associate Executive Director and Staff Counsel

This presentation will inform you about the general process of hiring teachers, including following state requirements. It includes information about the purpose of position descriptions, posting vacancy notices, application forms, the interview process and reference checks. You will also learn about state and federal laws as they relate to employment discrimination.

Please note: These and all previous webinars 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. In addition, links to past webinars are available in the Policy Resource Guide.



Legal and Ethical Standards Related to Attendance at the State Education Convention

Many school districts will be sending administrators and school board members to Milwaukee to attend the annual WASB/WASDA/WASBO State Education Convention in January 2019. Administrators and board members are obligated to comply with the legal and ethical standards established for local public officials that affect their participation in convention-related events. This *Legal Comment* will discuss the Open Meetings Law and the Code of Ethics for Local Public Officials as these laws relate to and govern the actions of administrators and board members while in attendance at the convention.¹

Open Meetings Law

Convention participants whose districts send more than one board member to the convention should consider how Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law may impact their ability to participate in convention-related activities.² The Wisconsin attorney general has issued a number of opinions that offer Open Meetings Law guidance to board members with regard to their attendance at conferences, workshops, seminars and conventions, including, but not limited to, the annual State Education Convention.

The fundamental purpose of the Open Meetings Law is to ensure that

the public has access to full and complete information regarding governmental affairs.³ In order to advance this purpose, meetings of state and local governmental bodies, including school boards, must be held in locations reasonably accessible to members of the public and must be open to all citizens at all times unless otherwise expressly provided by law.⁴ The Wisconsin Supreme Court has held that a "meeting" of a governmental body, including a school board, occurs whenever: (1) there is a purpose to engage in governmental business, and (2) the number of members present is sufficient to determine the governmental body's course of action (*i.e.*, a quorum, including a walking quorum, negative quorum, etc.).⁵

The Wisconsin attorney general was asked to issue an opinion as to whether the social nature of many activities offered at the convention makes attendance at the convention outside the scope of the Open Meetings Law.⁶ It is well-established that a "social or chance encounter" of members of a governmental body is not a meeting of the body requiring public notice and accessibility pursuant to the Open Meetings Law.⁷ Any presumption that the members are present to engage in governmental business is rebutted when members meet in a social setting or by chance. However, according to

the attorney general, the attendance of board members and administrators at a conference, convention or seminar does not constitute a chance encounter because such attendance is pre-planned. Moreover, such attendance is not a purely social gathering because such conferences, conventions and seminars are designed for board members to discuss issues related to the responsibilities, authority, power or duties delegated to or vested in the board.

Nevertheless, the attorney general also concluded that attendance at the convention did not necessarily constitute a "meeting" of the board. According to the attorney general, discussions at the convention generally involve concerns common to all school districts, rather than discussions about a particular district's business. As such, even if the number of board members present is sufficient to determine the board's course of action, the purpose of the gathering is not to engage in the business of the particular district, but rather to take advantage of the convention-related activities. Therefore, the attorney general has concluded that attendance of a quorum of a board at the convention, by itself, does not result in a "meeting" of a governmental body, as defined in the Open Meetings Law.

The attorney general warned, however, that when a quorum of a

Administrators and board members are obligated to comply with the legal and ethical standards established for local public officials that affect their participation in convention-related events.

board or any committee or subunit of a board is present during the convention and all related activities, including the ride to and from the convention, board members must not discuss business specifically related to the district.⁸ Moreover, board members should not formally attempt to convene during any of the convention-related activities.

In order to avoid the perception that a board is violating the Open Meetings Law, many districts post a notice, in accordance with board policy, that communicates to the community that a certain number of board members and/or other district officials will be attending the convention. This type of notice should explicitly state that the board will not convene nor conduct any board business during the trip or at the convention.

The Code of Ethics for Local Public Officials

Regardless of the number of board members and/or administrators in attendance at the convention to represent the district's interests, the Code of Ethics for Local Public Officials should be considered in order to determine how this law may restrict the activities and events in which the board members and/or administrators participate during the trip.⁹

The Code of Ethics for Local Public Officials prohibits district officials (board members, district administrators, business managers, etc.) from accepting: (a) items or

services of substantial value for private benefit, or for the benefit of the official's immediate family or associated organizations, if offered because of one's public position; (b) anything of value that could reasonably be expected to influence the official's vote, official action(s) or judgment; and/or (c) anything of value that could reasonably be considered a reward for official action(s). The Code of Ethics for Local Public Officials is enforced by the Wisconsin Ethics Commission.

The Wisconsin Ethics Commission has opined that an official may attend conventions and participate in convention-related activities, by and large, without violating the Code of Ethics.¹⁰ Specifically, while attending a convention authorized by and on behalf of a district, officials may accept meals, refreshments and the like without charge that are provided, sponsored and/or sanctioned by the event organizer. According to the Wisconsin Ethics Commission, when a board authorizes the attendance of its officials at the convention, it is fair to presume that their attendance is in furtherance of a public purpose or benefit and that the board contemplates that they will partake fully in all the convention has to offer, including forums and receptions that are sponsored by the event organizer. Given this interpretation, as long as the board has authorized attendance at the convention, those officials in attendance are not required to pay the cost of meals, refreshments and

the like offered during the convention by its organizers, *i.e.*, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators and/or the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, in order to comply with the Code of Ethics.¹¹

However, during the convention, officials must be cautious about accepting food, drinks and/or entertainment without charge or at less than fair value that are offered at social events sponsored by entities or organizations other than the event organizers when the entities or organizations may be current or prospective district vendors. According to the Wisconsin Ethics Commission, beer, wine, liquor, meals, buffets and the like have more than token value, and a purely social event, such as a hospitality suite, a happy hour or a dinner, provides a primary benefit to the official, rather than to the district that authorized his or her attendance. District officials responsible for making or approving purchasing decisions for the district should not accept food, drinks and/or entertainment without charge or at less than fair value from current or prospective vendors because receipt of such items of value could serve as the basis for an allegation that the items influenced the officials' decisions regarding the purchase of goods or services from the vendor.

Thus, a district official is advised to avoid attending an event that is purely social, sponsored by a current or prospective vendor of the district, and

When a quorum of a board or any committee or subunit of a board is present during the convention and all related activities, including the ride to and from the convention, board members must not discuss business specifically related to the district.

provided to the official without charge or at less than fair value. This is true even if the event is identified in the convention program or in the convention materials. That said, the district official may attend such an event and avoid a Code of Ethics violation by paying the vendor the full cost of the meal, refreshments and entertainment offered at the event.

District officials may accept educational or informational materials, prizes or other giveaway items at the convention for the purpose of conveying the item to the district for the use or benefit of the district. However, if the district official wishes to keep the item for himself or herself, the item must be of nominal or insignificant value, in contrast to an item of merchantable value, in order to remain compliant with the Code of Ethics. The statute does not establish a specific dollar value as a “merchantable” value. The determination of whether an item has more than token or inconsequential value is left to the official’s discretion. That said, the Wisconsin Ethics Commission has opined that some tote bags, caps, t-shirts, mugs, pens, rulers, refrigerator magnets and key chains containing a company logo are likely to be of inconsequential value; while other items, including jackets and watches, are likely to have more than inconsequential value, *i.e.*, merchantable value.

Finally, district policies may address the issue of the receipt of gifts by district officials. Accordingly, before an official accepts a prize or other giveaway item from a vendor exhibiting at the convention, it is important for the official to review and apply the district’s policy on the subject to determine whether he or she may keep the item.

■ Conclusion

The convention offers the opportunity for administrators and board members to obtain new information about the latest products, services and developments in education. However, in doing so, it is important for them to be aware of the rules and requirements of the Open Meetings Law as well as to understand and recognize how the Code of Ethics for Local Public Officials regulates when they may accept food, drink or other items of value, without charge or at less than fair value, and when such acceptance will be problematic. Moreover, under no circumstances should receipt of any such items influence the decisions of the district officials. Finally, it is also important for administrators and board members to review board policies for additional, more restrictive rules about convention attendance and participation, and to direct any additional questions or concerns to the district’s legal counsel. ■

■ End Notes

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

1. For additional information on related topics, see *Wisconsin School News*: “The Government Accountability Board” (March 2008); “Compliance with Wisconsin’s Open Meetings Law, Part I” (September 2004); “Compliance with Wisconsin’s Open Meetings Law, Part II” (October 2004); “Board Duties and Obligations and Potential Ramifications for Non-Compliance” (April 2016); “Recurring Issues for School Board Members: School Board Member Conflicts of Interest, Ethics, and Incompatibility of Offices” (May 2013).
2. Wis. Stat. sec. 19.81 et seq.
3. Wis. Stat. sec. 19.81(1).
4. See, e.g., Office of the Attorney

General, Informal Opinion to Clifford Miller (May 25, 1977).

5. *State ex rel. Newspapers v. Showers*, 135 Wis. 2d 77, 97, 398 N.W.2d 154 (1987).
6. Office of the Attorney General, Informal Opinion to Donald MacTaggart (May 25, 1977).
7. Wis. Stat. sec. 19.82(2); see also *Wisconsin School News*: “Meeting or Chance Encounter? The Wisconsin Supreme Court Interprets the Open Meetings Law” (September 1993).
8. Office of the Attorney General, Informal Opinion to Beatrice Weiss (January 20, 1981); see also *State ex rel. Krueger v. Appleton Area Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 2017 WI 70, 376 Wis. 2d 239, 898 N.W.2d 35 (defining “committee” for purposes of the Open Meetings Law).
9. Wis. Stat. sec. 19.59 et seq.
10. 1992 Wis. Eth. Bd. 31 (November 25, 1992), wherein the Ethics Board concluded that a vendor should not sponsor a river cruise for local public officials if more than an insignificant number of the officials attending are responsible for making or approving purchasing decisions that could involve the vendor’s goods. In January 2009, the Government Accountability Board reaffirmed 1992 Wis. Eth. Bd. 31 (November 25, 1992). Subsequently, 2015 Wis. Act 118 § 266(6) provided that all formal ethics opinions issued by the Government Accountability Board were transferred to the Wisconsin Ethics Commission.
11. 1993 Wis. Eth. Bd. 8 (November 3, 1993). In November 2008, the Government Accountability Board reaffirmed 1993 Wis. Eth. Bd. 8 (November 3, 1993), and the opinion has subsequently been transferred to the Wisconsin Ethics Commission. □

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.

Employee Wellness Programs Bring Results

SERVICE ASSOCIATE Q & A

Q. *What is UHC doing in the area of wellness programs and are those efforts helping employers control health care costs?*

A. A recent UnitedHealthcare report, “Employee Wellness Programs Bring Results,” suggests that companies that strengthen their wellness offerings can yield cost-savings and improve employee health over the long term. Many companies have successfully established a culture of well-being through their wellness programs. While each company’s wellness program may be strongest when tailored to its employees’ needs, successful programs often offer meaningful financial incentives, a mental health focus through offerings like mindfulness classes and relaxation rooms, or a financial well-being component — such as estate-planning seminars. Many employers also find that offering the services of an on-site wellness coordinator or nurse liaison encourages a culture of health.

UnitedHealthcare compared companies that have award-winning wellness programs with a peer group of similar companies. The study found that those that make positive changes to their health offerings over the years may reap the rewards of healthier employees and reduced health care costs down the road. For example, the companies with established wellness programs experienced 14.2 percent per-member, per-month lower costs, even with a 7.5 percent greater claim risk score (based on their employees’ health status) than the peer group, and the employees at the high-performing companies experienced 24 percent fewer emergency room visits. The report also found that it can take time

for employer wellness programs to yield significant benefits.

The report revealed that the companies with the most effective programs had several common characteristics that contribute to their plan’s positive results and encourage a culture of health, including enthusiastic involvement by senior leaders, positive encouragement from internal advocates, strong employee incentives and measurable success barometers. Successful companies also conduct health surveys and challenges, biometric screenings and financial well-being programs while surveying their employees to gather feedback to refine their programs.

The informational benefits meetings that are often part of open enrollment offer companies a good opportunity to collect and analyze employee feedback to further strengthen their wellness offerings. It is also an ideal time for employers who have not yet done so to consider offering a wellness program that supports their employees’ health and may improve their well-being while reducing costs for employees and the company.

Q. *Why should school districts consider offering a Health Savings Account (HSA)?*

A. No matter the stage of your teaching or administrative career, an HSA can be a handy savings option. A young teacher with a new family can use the savings of an HSA plan to cover their insurance deductible. If you don’t have dental or vision coverage, you can use your HSA to pay for qualified vision and dental care. More senior employees such as empty-nesters may find that they



Dustin Hinton, President and CEO
UnitedHealthcare of Wisconsin



need some new tax breaks since the kids can’t be claimed as dependents for tax purposes.

Also, keep in mind that if you have 401(k) plans, you should analyze the benefits of HSA vs. 401(k) contributions. If you have the option of contributing to both your HSA and a 401(k), it can be difficult to decide where to focus. Consider that while both 401(k) pre-tax payroll contributions and HSA payroll contributions are made without deductions for state and federal taxes, HSA contributions are truly pre-tax in that Medicare and Social Security taxes are not withheld. Check with your accountant or tax adviser to find the right approach for you.

To learn more about HSAs, visit HSACenter.com, an educational resource that includes savings and investment calculators. Whether you’re single, have a growing family or are thinking ahead to your post-career life, HSAs can empower you to make the most of your health care spending. ■

The WASB Service Associates Program includes businesses and organizations that have been recognized by the WASB Board of Directors as reputable businesses and partners of public education in Wisconsin. For more information, visit WASB.org and select “Service Associates.”



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