

Taking Care of Business

Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials • August 2025





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ABOUT THE COVER

Wisconsin's 2025-27 state budget provided some gains for K-12 education. However, with revenue limits lagging behind inflation for the 17th and 18th consecutive years and no new general school aids, the fiscal outlook for many school districts remains unfavorable. Turn to page 32 to learn more about these statewide and local impacts.

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A Look Ahead

Taking Care of Business
2025-26 Publication Themes

November 2025: Environmental
Sustainability in Our Schools

February 2026: Employee Pipeline
(Recruitment and Retention)

May 2026: The Local and State
Impact of School Referenda

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4797 Hayes Road, Suite 202

Madison, WI 53704

P 608.249.8588

wasbo@wasbo.com

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Editor: Mike Barry

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Mike Koltes
WASBO President
Director of Business Services
CESA #5

Meeting (and maybe exceeding) last year's records

WASBO Members: I'm incredibly humbled and thankful to serve as your board president for the 2025-2026 fiscal year!

I'm very excited to share with you that the 2025-2026 fiscal year will be another year of growth for WASBO as we continue to enhance our advocacy and professional learning efforts.

I'd like to highlight some of the exciting things WASBO is currently pursuing to maintain our vision of being the most influential Wisconsin organization for state and national school business management and leadership.

Professional Learning

Last year, WASBO rolled out our new [professional standards](#). As a result, you will continue to see efforts to grow the quality, consistency, and organization of the content at our conferences and academies.

In addition, [WASBO University's Fall 2025 Course Catalogue](#) is available now, with many more offerings coming this spring.

Look for those learning opportunities in WASBO's publications and at [WASBO.com/Learn](https://wasbo.com/Learn) throughout this year!

Professional Coaching

On a personal level, we are now offering a Coaching Program for school business and facility professionals at every experience level who are looking to enhance their skills, expand their network, and gain confidence in decision-making.

Over the course of the school year, the Coaching Program will support them every step of the way with personalized opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities while growing their network of professional relationships.

WASBO is looking for members to [sign up as a coach](#) or [request their own coach](#) today! Learn more at [WASBO.com/Coaching](https://wasbo.com/Coaching) or **turn to page 28!**

Advocacy

On a statewide level, WASBO will continue to use data-driven research to advocate for Wisconsin students while building relationships with stakeholders across the nation.

WASBO is dedicated to raising awareness about the excellent work being done in our schools while also advocating for funding that provides outstanding educational opportunities for Wisconsin students.

WASBO's Research Director, Anne Chapman, will continue to present research and analysis that our members can use to advocate for the quality of children's education.

Anne is also willing to speak at your WASBO Regional Meetings or Educational Stakeholder Events. If you would like to request Anne as a speaker, please email Research@wasbo.com.

Service

WASBO is incredibly fortunate to have members who are willing to serve. Whether it's participating in a Regional, on a committee, or on the Board of Directors, WASBO members step up to the plate to serve. Thank you for this!

WASBO couldn't do all of the great work we do without our member volunteers.

If you are interested in serving WASBO in any capacity, reach out

to the WASBO office or me to get connected.

Lastly, I encourage all of you to participate in at least one (or more) WASBO conferences this year.

It goes without saying that WASBO members are some of the friendliest

and helpful people in any business sector. Some of the most impactful conversations I've had as a business manager have taken place at WASBO's conferences and student scholarship fundraisers.

I am grateful for the many discussions with WASBO members that have

fostered my professional growth.

The networking opportunities at WASBO, which cultivate connections and friendships, are the core and lasting strength of the organization.

Thank you for making WASBO such an outstanding organization!

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Mike Barry
WASBO Executive Director

State budget insights & shared expertise

WASBO is all about connecting people and ideas to help public education thrive in Wisconsin, even in the high summer days of early August. With the state budget drama of early summer behind us, this issue of Taking Care of Business connects you with your peers as they share reactions to the state budget and what it might

mean for their school district and yours.

As this issue is being put together, I'm reminded that Taking Care of Business is a labor of love by a statewide network of professionals who generously share their time and expertise.

I'm grateful to our content contributors, advertisers, proof-readers, fact-checkers, and advice-givers who

make this a must-read publication, all under the direction of Ryan Silvola and the mighty WASBO team.

Before the new school year arrives and your calendar fills up, take time to enjoy this publication and appreciate the expertise of your WASBO colleagues. Finally, a special thank you to every WASBO member and reader who help make this publication possible and so worthwhile.

Let us help you make
FINANCIAL WELLNESS
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Seminars are an integral part of the financial literacy resources we offer to school districts. Our Worksite Benefit Consultants offer educational seminars to districts throughout Wisconsin on a variety of financial topics including:

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To connect with a Worksite Benefit Consultant **SCAN HERE**





In memory of Alan R. Wagner

Passed Away on August 10, 2025

Dedicated school business official for
Green Bay Area Public School District

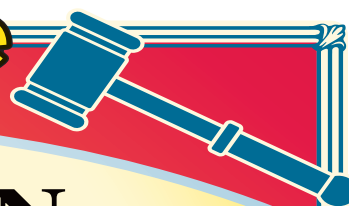
It is with a heavy heart that we share our friend and colleague Alan R. Wagner has passed away. Alan worked for the Green Bay Area Public School District for decades, including as the district's Chief Financial Officer. He retired in 2015.

According to his obituary, Alan passed away peacefully at the age of 65 on August 10 due to complications from Alzheimer's Disease. He was surrounded by his loving family until the very end. Alan was born in Sheboygan, WI, the son of Robert H. and Kathryn M. (Schwinn) Wagner. He grew up in Cleveland, WI, and spent many hours fishing on Lake Michigan with his dad and playing baseball for the Cleveland Wildcats. Alan had a witty sense of humor and enjoyed good jokes and pranks.

After graduating from Sheboygan North High School, he went on to receive a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and a Master's degree in School Business Finance from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Upon earning his CPA license, Alan's first job was with the accounting firm of Jonet, Fountain, Vandelo & Glaser in Green Bay. He spent the remainder of his career working for the Green Bay Area Public Schools. His co-workers became his friends, bowling teammates, and golfing buddies.

Alan married Shari (Davis) Wagner, his wife of 42 years, in Beloit, WI. They had two children and enjoyed many family fishing and hiking vacations. Alan will be remembered for being a loving husband, devoted dad, and passionate Packers fan.

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Impacts of court opinions and executive orders on schools

Not to be outdone by the rapid and significant policy pronouncements emanating from the Trump Administration this year, the most recent term of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has produced several decisions impacting school districts. This article explores the most impactful recent SCOTUS decisions applicable to schools, the status of various executive actions impacting federal funding, and what to watch in the weeks and months ahead.

Dismantling the Department of Education

McMahon v. New York, 606 U.S. ___, No. 24A1203 (July 14, 2025). Marking what many are calling the beginning of the end for the U.S. De-

partment of Education (USED), on July 14, SCOTUS granted an emergency stay (pause) on an injunction issued by the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts, which effectively allows the Trump Administration to proceed with large-scale reductions in the workforce at the USED. Previously, a Massachusetts district court had issued a prelimi-

nary injunction blocking the Trump Administration from carrying out a reduction in force at the USED based on concerns surrounding due process and federal civil service protections.

The decision paves the way for the Trump Administration to reduce the reach of the USED. The implications may prove significant, including



Chrissy Hamiel
Attorney
Attolles Law, s.c.



Andy Phillips
Attorney
Attolles Law, s.c.

Key SCOTUS takeaways

The impacts of recent Supreme Court of the United States decisions include:

- Paving the way for the Trump administration to reduce the reach of the U.S. Department of Education (USED). This could include limiting the ability of USED to carry out its most basic functions, such as the distribution of funding for congressionally approved federal education policymaking.
- Schools can continue to participate in the Federal E-rate Program for now, receiving discounts for broadband connections.
- Parents need only prove that a school district acted with "deliberate indifference" to recover money damages under the ADA and Section 504 instead of a heightened standard of "bad faith or gross misjudgment," which was utilized in several federal appeals courts. However, the appeals court overseeing Wisconsin has not used the "bad faith" standard, which means this standard has NOT changed in Wisconsin.
- While public funds may be used for tuition for religious schools, public schools continue to be secular institutions.

limiting the ability of the USED to carry out its most basic functions, such as carrying out and distributing funding for congressionally approved federal education policy making.

Federal E-Rate Program is alive and well

Federal Communications Commission v. Consumers' Research; Schs., Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition v. Consumers' Research, 606 U.S. __, Nos. 24-354 and 24-422 (June 27, 2025).

A six-justice majority of the Court upheld the federal E-rate program to subsidize schools and libraries for communications services, such as internet connections.

In a case which challenged the funding structure of the E-rate program, the SCOTUS determined that the funding mechanism behind the E-rate program is not an unconstitutional delegation of Congressional authority—meaning the Federal Communications Commission, to which Congress delegated the authority for implementing the program, could retain decision-making authority relative to the universal service program. The Court determined that the Universal Service Fund Program for E-rate does not violate nondelegation principles and that schools' and libraries' reliance on crucial E-rate funds demonstrated the effectiveness of the funding scheme.

The resulting impact of the SCOTUS decision is to provide schools with assurance that they may continue to participate in the E-rate program for now, receiving discounts for broadband connections, which will allow students and families to continue to receive much-needed internet access, especially in rural areas.

“Deliberate Indifference” Standard applies to claims under Section 504 and the ADA as applied to educational disputes

A.J.T. v. Osseo Area Schs., Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 279, 605 U.S. __, No. 24-249 (June 12, 2025).

In a decision that does not directly change the legal landscape for Wisconsin school districts but may ultimately incentivize parents to file federal lawsuits, the SCOTUS clarified the legal standard for a parent to collect money damages for education-related legal challenges under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The case involved a student with a seizure disorder that resulted in the student having a shortened school day, despite the parents' repeated requests for a school day starting at noon and ending at 6:00 pm. Because the parents could not recover money damages under the IDEA, the parents sought relief under the ADA and Section 504.

Ultimately, the SCOTUS held that parents need only prove that a school district acted with “deliberate indifference” to recover money damages under the ADA and Section 504 (and not a heightened standard of “bad faith or gross misjudgment” which was utilized in several federal appeals courts). Because the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals (the appeals court that adjudicates appeals involving Wisconsin school districts) has not applied the “bad faith or gross misjudgment” standard in the past, the legal standard applicable to such claims brought against Wisconsin school districts has not changed.

Nevertheless, any time the SCOTUS issues a decision of this magnitude, the result tends to embolden parent-side attorneys to seek monetary recourse, leading to potentially costly litigation for school districts.

Public charter school must remain secular

Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter Sch. Bd. v. Drummond; St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual Sch. v. Drummond, 605 U.S. __, Nos. 24-394 and 24-396 (May 22, 2025).

In a closely watched case that could have had far-reaching implications for school funding, the SCOTUS declined to decide a case regarding the funding of religious charter schools by the State of Oklahoma. Therein, a charter school known as St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School, sought to become the first religious public school in the country.

Because the SCOTUS justices were split 4-4 (Justice Barrett did not participate), the decision of the Oklahoma Supreme Court, holding that the state should not and cannot fund a religious charter school, stands. The impact of this decision is to curtail the proliferation of religious public schools—at least for now. Another challenge is likely.

Notably, in 2022, the SCOTUS decided the case of *Carson v. Makin*, 596 U.S. 767, 142 S. Ct. 1987, in which the SCOTUS held that states that offer private school tuition vouchers must allow such vouchers to be utilized to pay tuition at religious schools. The decision in *Carson* required that states that fund private education must therefore include religious schools in such funding. Many pundits believed *Carson* would pave

Continued on P. 10

Impacts of court opinions and executive orders on schools

Continued from P. 9

the way for Oklahoma to fund public religious charter schools. However, for now, while funds may be used for tuition for religious schools, the SCOTUS' refusal to review the case results in public schools continuing to be secular institutions.

Executive Orders reducing USED and impoundment of federal funds for schools

2025 has already proved to be a rollercoaster for school districts with various proclamations and Executive Orders by the Trump Administration resulting in uncertainty surrounding the release of federal funds, the reduction in workforce, and the elimination of offices of the Department of Education, and various actions pausing the distribution of federal funding.

Immediately upon taking office, the Administration began reductions in the federal workforce, which resulted in approximately 2,000 employees being laid off and the closing of various USED regional Offices of Civil Rights (OCR), including the OCR Office in Chicago, which previously handled complaints arising in Wisconsin schools. Such complaints are now being routed to the OCR in Denver, CO, for processing.

Recall back in January, the Office of Management and Budget issued a memo pausing federal funds on various programs, only for an indefinite stay to be granted after 22 states (in-

"As the Administration continues to restructure the Department of Education and review all federal expenditures, school districts are wise to closely follow the Administration's actions relative to the allocation of federal funds."

cluding Wisconsin) sued to prevent the federal funding freeze. As well, in February, the USED terminated over \$600 million of grant funds under Teacher Quality Partnership and Supporting Effective Educator Development teacher training programs. In May, the department further cancelled approximately \$1 billion in federal grants aimed at bringing mental health services into schools.

Then, on June 30, the Administration notified states that it was halting the allocation of several Congressionally appropriated critical FY25 funds (funding for selected programs for the 2025-26 school year, including Title I-C, Title II-A, Title III-A, Title IV-A, and Title IV-B) until further review. The Title funds at issue equated to nearly \$7 billion in funds withheld from distribution to schools in Wisconsin, creating delays and uncertainty.

As school districts grappled with the possibility of funding shortfalls (and in the wake of 24 states—including Wisconsin filing a lawsuit to challenge the impoundment of such funds), on July 25, 2025, the Administration announced it had completed its review of remaining grant funds and directed the USED to release all funds. The reversal has come to be the norm with

the Administration's review and withholding of funding for various federal programs.

As of early August, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) [announced](#) to school districts that it had received the Grant Award Notifications (GAN) for the FY25 programs whose funds had been frozen. However, the DPI is proceeding with caution, **"conducting a careful review of the language within each GAN to fully understand the terms and conditions before releasing funds to local education agencies."**

As a result of the uncertainty surrounding federal funding, school districts have been scrambling to determine how to bridge gaps in the possible loss of federal funding at any given time. Such stopgap measures include considerations such as staff reductions, program elimination, forgoing partnership contracts, and other measures intended to curtail already challenging funding conundrums and shortfalls.

As the Administration continues to restructure the USED and review all federal expenditures, school districts are wise to closely follow the Administration's actions relative to the allocation of federal funds.

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New Wis. School Risk Manager Certification coming soon

After one final round of courses this fall, WASBO will be sunsetting the existing CSRM program

WASBO is offering a new “Wisconsin School Risk Manager” (WSRM) Certification through [WASBO University](https://www.wasbo.com) starting this spring after offering one final round of [Certified School Risk Managers](https://www.wasbo.com) (CSRM) courses this fall. After this fall, WASBO will no longer be licensing the CSRM program from the [Risk & Insurance Education Alliance](https://www.wasbo.com).

The new WSRM Certification is a 34-hour certification that will be tailored to Wisconsin school risks (as opposed to the nationwide focus of the CSRM certification). It is one of the many new certifications

being added to [WASBO University's](https://www.wasbo.com) existing slate of certifications in 2026 and beyond.

The six WSRM courses include: “School Business Ethics” (4 hours) as well as five courses (each of which is 6 hours long) that examine the risk management process: “Risk Identification,” “Risk Analysis,” “Risk Financing,” “Risk Control,” and “Risk Administration.”

Similar to other WASBO U courses, all of the WSRM certification courses will be offered in two-hour sessions that last two weeks per course.

Starting this spring, the WSRM certification will be offering all six courses

from January to June 2026 for those interested in earning this new certification this school year!

The full list of WSRM certification courses — along with announcements of many other new WASBO University Certifications — will be published in the November 2025 issue of *Taking Care of Business*.

Registration for WASBO University's Fall 2025 courses (the first of which begins at the end of September) is open now! Learn more at [WASBO.com/U](https://www.wasbo.com/U)!

For questions about CSRM, please visit [WASBO.com/CSRM](https://www.wasbo.com/CSRM).

risk damage my school budget.

I will not let unexpected risk damage my school budget.

LAST CHANCE FOR CSRM

WASBO will be offering The Certified School Risk Managers (CSRM) national designation for the final time this fall before launching the Wisconsin School Risk Manager Certification this spring!

WASBO.COM/CSRM





EXCEL WITH WASBO U!

WASBO University offers live professional learning, created and presented by your WASBO peers, tailored to the unique needs of Wisconsin school business office & facilities professionals.

Register for WASBO U's Fall 2025 Courses now covering the School Business Office Professional Certificate and the Mastering Capital & Operating Referenda Certificate. Look out for more information on MANY NEW WASBO U CERTIFICATIONS in the November 2025 issue.

WASBO.COM/ UNIVERSITY

Thank you to the miracle workers in our schools!

A reprint of State Superintendent Jill Underly's remarks at WASBO's Spring Conference on May 16, 2025

EDITOR'S NOTE: Many of us may be heading into this upcoming school year with very valid concerns. While the current state budget still falls very short of meeting all our schools' needs, it's important to recognize that there are dedicated leaders at the state level who continue to advocate tirelessly for our students and educators. That's why we are reprinting the remarks made by State Superintendent Jill Underly at WASBO's Spring Conference on May 16, 2025, as both a reminder and an encouragement to stay hopeful, engaged, and united in our efforts to ensure outstanding educational opportunities for all Wisconsin students.



Dr. Jill Underly
Wisconsin State Superintendent

Good morning, WASBO! It's great to be here with you today. A big thank you to Mike Barry and the entire WASBO leadership team for inviting me to join you - it is an honor to be here among such a dedicated group of professionals. I'm excited to see so many familiar faces. I know how committed you all are, and I am curious to hear more about the challenges you're facing and the solutions you're building as critical members of our education system here in Wisconsin.

Let's be real for a moment: You really are the people who keep the lights on in our schools...literally and figuratively. Without your work, we wouldn't have safe facilities, transportation, or

food service. We wouldn't have sound budgets or financial oversight. And we certainly would not have the emergency preparedness and long-term planning that schools need in order to function. The truth is, the things you do are essential. But your work is also complex and often invisible - but it is never unimportant. I, and all of my colleagues at the DPI, deeply appreciate and value your dedication and expertise. You make our schools run and help our students thrive.

Before I go further, I'd like to give a special shoutout to our DPI School Financial Services team, some of whom are somewhere out here in the crowd today. These folks work hand-in-hand with you all year round, and I know they are just as grateful as I am for the work you do to support Wisconsin's students, educators, and communities. I think most of you know this about me, but I came out of a rural school district. And like many

of you, in those small districts, the superintendent wears a lot of hats—including the business manager hat. I'll tell you a little secret: I loved being the business manager.

Why? Because I got to make things happen. If the board decided they wanted to upgrade the science labs, who would find a way to make it work? The business manager. If we needed new PE equipment for the elementary school or needed to hire another teacher, who figured it out? The business manager.

You are the problem solvers. You are the dream makers. You take vision and turn it into reality. And in today's school finance world? You're miracle workers. I'd work with the school bookkeeper, the custodial staff, the maintenance crew, and you all - you were the dream team of getting shit done. But here's what I admire most: you never lose sight of why you do it. You keep your eye on the prize—kids. Everything you do is rooted in what's best for students. And that, to me, is the heart of leadership.

So today I'd like to talk with you on a broader level about some of the things that we are seeing from the state level - what is on the horizon and what it means for all of us in the future. As many of you know, we are currently in the thick of our state's biennial budget process. Late last year, the DPI

under my direction sent Governor Evers a budget proposal that reflects not only where we are right now, but also where we need to go. Because the simple truth is: If we want to improve educational outcomes, we have to invest. If we want students to grow and succeed, our state must provide resources to make that possible. Just like a garden needs water and sunlight to thrive - especially right around this time of the year - our schools need real, sustained investment to deliver the kind of quality education that every child deserves. And unfortunately, there are some folks out there who may think that the challenges schools face today are problems of excess or waste.

Now, I know I'm preaching to the choir here when I say this, but it is important: The financial challenges facing so many of our schools are not the result of waste or mismanagement. You know better than just about anyone that our teachers aren't sitting on gilded desk chairs and districts are not flush with extra cash.

What we are currently dealing with is a school finance system that is broken. One that has failed to keep up. Revenue limits were established about 30 years ago, and for the last 15 years, they have not even been tied to inflation. And just two budgets ago, our state legislature told schools to rely on one-time federal money that came with significant strings attached.

The result? So many districts across our state faced a fiscal cliff...and every year since, we have seen an unprecedented number of districts being forced to ask local taxpayers to increase their own property taxes just so their schools can continue to operate. So, as we move through this current budget cycle, we're doing everything

that we can to make sure lawmakers understand the reality on the ground. The reality within your district.

So, in our budget proposal, we requested flexible, predictable, and sustainable funding for our schools so they can get to where they should be. On top of that, we added a provision that calls for the reinstatement of the indexing of revenue limits to inflation. We must water our gardens if we expect them to grow. We must appropriately fund education if we expect students and our state to thrive.

Now, I'll be honest—there was one part of the job I didn't love: marketing a referendum. Selling an operational referendum to your community? That's not why any of us got into this work. You have better things to do—like focusing on students, supporting teachers, and fulfilling the vision your school board and community have for your schools. But the reality is, in today's world, that work has become necessary. I think about the countless hours you pour into passing a referendum—the meetings, the communication, the stress—and I can't help but imagine how much more impactful that energy could be if it were spent directly on helping kids learn.

Our state's school finance formula has created too many unnecessary hurdles. And as the problem solvers you are, you know what would fix it: sustainable, predictable revenue.

This past year, we saw a record number of Wisconsin school districts going to referendum - many for the second, third, or even fourth time - to try and bridge the gap left by stagnant spendable school aid. That's simply not a sustainable model for public education. And to those of you here who have had to lead your

districts through that process (I'm guessing that it's a lot of you here): I have incredible empathy for you. It is energy and resource-intensive, and can be draining. Referenda should be a tool for growth, not a lifeline for survival. Our state needs to uphold its end of its responsibility to provide a high-quality education to every learner in our state.

And while we're here, one piece of this conversation that we just cannot overlook is our state's abysmally low special education reimbursement rate - currently hovering right around 30 percent. That has real consequences for all learners. It means districts are forced to dip into general funds just to meet legally mandated obligations of providing special education services to students with disabilities.

That's why, in our budget proposal, we made it a clear and urgent priority to increase that reimbursement rate. Governor Evers' budget calls for raising that rate to 60 percent. Now, just to point out, the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission just a few years ago, looked at our school funding system and recommended increasing that reimbursement rate to 60 percent. We're now over six years after that recommendation, and not much has changed. This is a no-brainer. It is a necessary, long-overdue investment.

When the Joint Committee on Finance held its statewide budget listening tour last month, people showed up in overwhelming numbers all across the state. And they asked for one thing loud and clear: more support for public education.

At the DPI, we also hosted our own sessions to make sure people had the

Continued on P. 16

Thank you to the miracle workers in our schools!

Continued from P. 15

chance to truly understand the state budget process and what is at stake, especially as the very real threat of federal funding cuts to education continues. It was important to me and my team that we get out there and listen to folks and answer their questions. It was important not just to talk, but to listen. In times of uncertainty, clarity matters. And right now, we are indeed in uncertain territory.

As it stands, the Joint Committee on Finance has announced it stripped some major K-12 education proposals from the DPI and Governor Evers' budget. That does not necessarily mean those ideas are off the table... but it does mean that we have work to do. The truth is, it does not matter who gets credit. I do not care whose name is on a policy win. I care that we get results for our schools. For our communities. For our educators. For our kids.

Now is not a time to play politics. Our investment isn't in ego or ownership or scoring points... it is in doing what is best for Wisconsin students. When we find ways to support districts, staff, and educators, we enable them to do what they do best. We're saying yes to and empowering school nutrition teams, bus drivers, finance officers, IT staff, teachers, counselors and kids. That is what truly matters.

Now, as these state budget conversations continue, we're also dealing with a backdrop of changes at the

federal level. If you haven't already, I encourage you to visit the DPI's Federal Funding webpage - it has some helpful resources that we've created to help you stay on top of updates that could impact your district's planning.

So far, we've seen reductions to school nutrition programs through the USDA, as well as cuts to the AmeriCorps Program and our state's portion of Homeless Children and Youth Administrative funds, as well as the elimination of the School-Based Mental Health Professionals Grant, which has been so instrumental in helping our schools to respond to the growing youth mental health crisis.

There has been a lot of turbulence. But here in Wisconsin, we will continue to stand our ground and do what is best for kids. Our work is guided by our obligation to provide a free and equitable public education. That commitment does not change based on the news cycle.

As I'm sure you've experienced as well, we have this cloud of chaos that feels like it is constantly churning in the background. Yet, our approach to this federal chaos at the state level will continue to be measured, thoughtful, and calm. We have and will continue to fulfill our responsibilities and duties to our kids, their families, and the people of Wisconsin.

I know that many right now are trying to read the tea leaves and predict what "cut" may be coming next. And I'd like to remind us all that amidst all

of this hubbub and bluster, that the legal landscape of the services that we provide as representatives of our state and local educational agencies are not something that can be undone by a tweet, nor by an executive order. The power of the purse remains with Congress. Funds that are legally appropriated and allocated for specific purposes cannot simply be stricken on a whim. We must remain focused. We must continue to trust in our process and follow the roles and regulations set out by the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of our great state of Wisconsin.

Despite all the noise, I remain optimistic about what is ahead of us. I see incredible strengths and opportunities. That optimism is not just hope - it is based on what I've seen you do. And what you continue to do every day for our schools and districts all across Wisconsin. When I travel around the state, I see those same qualities in our people in school after school.

You are the reason our schools continue to operate through challenge after challenge. You are the reason our kids have safe spaces to learn and grow. Your professionalism, your honesty, your expertise, and the passion with which you support your district - those remain unchanged. Your resilience is truly a source of hope and optimism. You are one of the many reasons I remain hopeful that, together, we will get through whatever comes next - stronger, smarter, and more united. And I want to close with

a heartfelt thank you. I know you don't hear it enough.

Business Officials are often the behind-the-scenes heroes of public education—the fairy godmothers and godfathers making sure the lights stay on, the buses run, and students have what they need to learn. I know this work is hard—and right now, it's especially hard. With the pressures of referenda, looming funding cliffs,

federal cuts, and policy uncertainty, it can feel like you're holding it all together with grit and duct tape.

But you are steadfast. You are true public servants. None of us went into this work for the glory—but let's be honest: it takes a lot of guts to keep doing what you do every day. When I think of the truest form of public service, I think of people like you—making difficult decisions, showing up

for your communities, and sacrificing quietly behind the curtain.

So thank you—for your strength, your service, and your heart. Public education in Wisconsin stands stronger because of you. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for showing up. And thank you for everything you do for our schools, our students, and our future here in Wisconsin.



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Staying ahead of deadlines: A reminder for business offices

As the 2024–2025 school year comes to a close, many of you in school business offices are deep in the year-end rush—finalizing journal entries, reconciling receivables, preparing for audits, and laying the groundwork for the upcoming 2025–2026 school year.

On top of that, you're hopefully finding time to enjoy a little bit of Wisconsin's summer sunshine. But even in this busy season, it's critical to keep a close eye on the numerous financial reports that must be submitted to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in the months ahead.

It might be tempting to assume that submitting a report a few days late isn't a big deal. After all, when you're managing competing priorities and unpredictable schedules, it's easy to let a deadline slide.

However, the timely submission of these reports is not just a matter of compliance. It has tangible financial consequences for your district and for all 421 public school districts across the state. That's why it's so important to have reliable internal processes, clear timelines, and built-in accountability to ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

Use visual management to stay on track

One of the most effective tools I've found is visual management. Whether it's a bulletin board in your office



Becky Hansen

Executive Director of Business Services and Sustainability | Kimberly Area SD

with sticky notes for each report, its due date, and who's responsible—or a monthly filing system with checklists—having a visual system helps your whole team stay aware of what's due and when.

Start by visiting the DPI Finance Portal to access the [Fiscal Year at a Glance 2025–2026](#). This document outlines the financial reports required and their due dates. From there, you can create a system tailored to your team.

You also can utilize [WASBO's 2025–26 School Business Calendar](#) as well!

How we manage it

In my current district, we use two key tools:

- **A Monthly Board** that lists each person's responsibilities by month
- **A Weekly Board** that tracks current tasks and deadlines

We also hold team huddles twice a week to review upcoming due dates and offer help if someone's workload is heavier. This practice not only keeps us on track but also serves as excellent

training and onboarding for new team members.

Why timeliness matters

Let's take the District Aid Certification Report as an example. This critical report is due by August 29, 2025. If a single district fails to submit its report on time, DPI cannot finalize the October 15th Equalization Aid calculation for any of the 421 school districts in Wisconsin.

The process depends on each district's shared costs being submitted so that the funding formula can be accurately calculated and applied. In short, one delay can ripple outward and affect the entire state.

It's important to recognize that these reports are not just administrative exercises—they determine how funding is allocated to support students and programs throughout Wisconsin.

Submitting them late, even by just a few days, can delay decisions and jeopardize planning at the local and state levels.

DPI is here to help

DPI staff understand the challenges, especially when there is staff turnover, a new business manager, or a learning curve with complex data. They are committed to providing support and guidance. But for that partnership to work effectively, it is essential to start early.

Giving DPI the chance to review and answer questions or resolve issues,

particularly when they are supporting hundreds of districts simultaneously, takes time. Building time into your internal deadlines to allow for questions or corrections is very valuable.

DPI also has some valuable resources to help business managers stay informed and connected. Make sure you sign up for them using the links below.

Helpful resources from DPI include:

- WISEdata Finance and Financial Reporting Podcast – stay informed on current reporting requirements
 - Sign up or listen to past episodes [WISEdata Finance and Financial Reporting Podcast](#) by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- DPI School Finance Bulletin – a must-have for updates and deadlines
 - Subscribe to receive timely notifications from the [DPI School Finance Bulletin](#)

Lean on your colleagues

Don't hesitate to reach out to fellow business managers or your regional WASBO group. Chances are, someone has faced the same challenge you're up against.

The school finance community is incredibly supportive! Many of us are happy to share templates, advice, or just a listening ear.

Don't lose sight of the bigger picture

With so many tasks competing for your attention, it's easy to push off reports or feel overwhelmed by deadlines. But having a system, knowing your timelines, and fostering a collaborative team culture make it all more manageable.

And don't forget: while our world revolves around spreadsheets and compliance 260 days a year, our work directly supports the 180 days that truly matter for Wisconsin students.

The work you do ensures students have the resources they need to succeed. So here's to a productive summer, a strong start to the 2025–2026 school year, and a few more sunny days before the hallways fill again. **Have a great year, and thank you for all you do.**

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Ashwaubenon's hydroponic journey to engaging students

The COVID-19 pandemic. What a wild time. Talk about the need to pivot and adapt – but that's exactly what we all did! We were scared, lonely, and knew we had to take care of the kids. This rang true for teachers, administrators, and school boards, but it also rang true for School Nutrition Departments all over the country. Parents were losing their jobs or waiting for temporary unemployment checks. Free and reduced kids weren't going to have access to school food like they would during a normal school day. We packed cases. We pre-wrapped, pre-cooked, and pre-prepared everything.

We ordered farm-to-school supplies so we didn't have to worry about supply chain issues. Two things clicked in my brain: (1) I needed my own garden; and (2) I needed something



Kaitlin Tauriainen, RD
Child Nutrition Coordinator
Ashwaubenon School District

new and exciting. In the winter of 2021, I took a field trip with a dear colleague of mine to the Fork Farms offices in the Titledown District. They were right down the street from Ashwaubenon High School.

I had seen the units before, but I wasn't ready for them then. It seemed like something I couldn't add to my plate. Seeing them that day gave me hope

and rejuvenation. The bright lights, trickling water sounds, and fresh fragrances coming from the unit were exactly what I was missing in my life. Twenty-eight days to grow around twenty pounds of lettuce, minimal work (or so we thought!), and a Fund 50 balance that needed to be spent down. I went out on a limb and ordered ten. When Fork sent their sales representative, Sue, to our district to scope out the best location for the farms, I took her through an "empty" space we had in our high school. It was an old kitchen space that was currently being used for storage.

I wasn't aware that there were other plans in the works for this space as well, but I took Sue through it as a possible space. She said, "Kaitlin! We need to put a full-fledged farm here!" The idea stuck with me, but I had just purchased 10 units. Let's see how they do before we purchase more.



Ashwaubenon has a total of 34 hydroponic farms that supply produce to the district and encourage engagement from students!

We spread those 10 units out to our 5 schools. Three at the high school, two at our middle school, two at each of our elementary schools, and one at our early learning center. I learned quickly that I couldn't keep up. The lettuce was great, the units were easy to upkeep, but I wasn't getting enough lettuce to supply my district. Sure, I could purchase lettuce locally during the warmer months, but I really wanted local products in the winter, too.

It took approximately a year of planning. After extensive conversations about why I wanted these products for our students, I was told that I

could only have the space & the products if I were going to involve kids. Easy, right? I reached out to a number of groups and organizations, and finally settled on our Special Education students. The ease of caring for the individual units told me that I would have no issues with a couple of kids coming in a few times per week to maintain the large 24-unit garden we were putting in. We planned blueprints, electrical work, took down walls, ordered units and seeds, and supplies. There were a number of times I thought it would never happen. The first goal was Thanksgiving, then Christmas break. We finally got The Farm in during Spring Break of 2023 (March 27, my mother's birthday to be exact).

I cared for the farms by myself over that first summer. I wanted to learn the ins and outs of the units. We started partnering with the students around Halloween of 2023 and learned quickly that these units required far more work than what we had previously planned.

We decided to hire an AmeriCorps worker for the remainder of the year, but while waiting for someone to fill that spot, we were still really needing another set of hands. Justin was 17 when we hired him to work in The Farm for pay. He had worked there as part of the school day and was super passionate about growing produce. It wasn't like he was familiar with hydroponic units before, but I can guarantee that he is now!

Justin worked alone in The Farm every day after school from November - the first week in June. Once he graduated, Justin helped our AmeriCorps member clean, grow, harvest, and work our booth at the Farmers'

Market on Broadway on Wednesday evenings. Justin is still working in The Farm while attending a local tech college, but will be leaving us shortly as he heads to a university in search of a Meteorology degree. To be very clear: the greatest growth that has ever come out of The Farm is that student.

Since putting the correct people in place, we have been able to significantly grow our garden (no pun intended). AmeriCorps allowed us to ease into having a staff member dedicated to that work while significantly saving money! This is because we were paying a small stipend to the AmeriCorps program, about \$7,000 total per year for a full-time AmeriCorps employee. The cost savings were substantial: We were paying about \$4 per hour for the AmeriCorps employee as opposed to the \$25 per hour it would cost to hire an employee with a full wage with benefits.

Our LifeSkills students learn important skills in that classroom that include things other than growing produce; things like mopping floors, communicating with your peers, getting the work done even if you don't feel like it, and the patience and delicacy of caring for a live being, even if it's a being that they'll eat off the lunch line in a few short weeks!

With our total of 34 hydroponic farms, we have been able to supply all lettuce to our buildings, sell lettuce in the summer at our local farmers' market, and teach kids where food truly comes from. One of our special education teachers has also created a Summer School course around the hydroponic farms.

Along with our large farm room, we have individual flex farms in other



Ashwaubenon's farms can grow close to 5,000 heads of lettuce in a month.

cafeterias and classrooms to impact as many children as possible. Organic, student-grown produce that can range anywhere from cilantro to trilogy beans. We've (almost) grown it all!

Financially, the cost of producing organically grown produce is far less than if it were purchased from a local distributor or even a local farmer. This includes the cost of electricity, seeds, growing mediums, nutrients, water, supplies, and labor hours. For example, the cost of a locally grown, organic head of lettuce is about \$2.50 per head. However, we can grow close to 5,000 heads of lettuce in a month at an average price of about \$0.50/head.

While the initial investment was pricey (we spent close to \$200,000 to remodel our space and purchase all of the units), Fork Farms estimates that there should be an ROI after about 12 months if the units are being used correctly.

Ashwaubenon received WASBO's 2025 Business Services Award for this project at the 2025 Spring Conference back in May.

Don't overlook leasing when funding technology

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article originally appeared on the [School Business Now](#) website in August 2025 with the title "[Funding Technology: Is Leasing the Answer?](#)" This is the first in a series of articles. It being is reprinted with permission of the Association of School Business Officials International.

As you survey the landscape of the U.S. government and its appetite for funding education, it is clear that fewer dollars will be available. While some of the burden to make up deficiencies will fall on the states, it is the local school business officials who will have to become creative to meet student and teacher needs.

One area that will require SBOs to be innovative is technology. Technology has become pervasive across all aspects of education. It has been integrated into lesson planning, classroom instruction, and remote learning. The demand for IT departments to continue to provide state-of-the-art technology to meet teacher and student requirements has expanded greatly over the past 10 years. To meet these needs, financial managers in schools and districts have had to maneuver budget dollars to compensate for this demand. The expiration of ESSER funds made this task much more challenging.

One option to consider is leasing. When considering leasing as a funding method for technology and other rapidly depreciating assets, the first



Bob Chlebowski
Owner
CI Marketing LLC

thought that often comes to mind is the complexity of contracts, including hidden legal clauses and tricky use and return provisions at the end of the lease. These are all topics that can be easily navigated.

Benefits and pitfalls of leasing

What are the benefits of leasing?

- **Managing Technology Obsolescence.** Lease terms can match the useful life of an asset, most typically two to five years.
- **Budgeting Made Easy.** Leasing makes costs predictable and manageable since the payment stream is fixed for the life of the lease. Monthly, quarterly, and annual payments are typical. However, special financing structures, such as placing an asset in use in one fiscal year and paying for it in another fiscal year, are not uncommon.
- **Inclusive Funding.** Leases can include software, warranty, delivery costs, preparation services (like imaging), installation, and end-of-

lease return provisions, all wrapped into a single monthly, quarterly, or annual payment.

- **Conserve Cash Flow.** Leasing depreciable assets allows schools and school districts to acquire long-term capital assets like land and buildings, as well as other equipment that has an extensive useful life.

What are the pitfalls of leasing?

The biggest downside to leasing is an onerous contract. The language of a leasing contract must clearly define the obligations and costs of the lease.

Following a standardized process from the request for bid to contract signing can ensure a fair outcome for schools and school districts that choose to work with a vetted, reputable leasing organization. A solid contract can eliminate all unforeseen costs and hassles from the lease process. An obstacle to choosing leasing as a path to funding technology and other rapidly depreciating assets is often the school board or the finance committee of the school board. The choice of leasing causes a shift in financial reporting from a capital acquisition to an operating expense since the lease payments are monthly, quarterly, or annual.

Since this is the favorable treatment for these assets, which are so rapidly consumed like a utility, boards tend to want to capitalize these assets, which can mean they are on the financial statements well past the useful life.



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Leadership is a Choice. Will You Step Forward and Join this Year's Leadership Academy Cohort?

Learn more and register at WASBO.com/Leadership

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- Take advantage of the most powerful component of the Leadership Academy: The District Innovation Initiative, which is a personalized, hands-on project that significantly enhances staff transparency and efficiencies, empowers staff in areas like onboarding and fairer pay, builds trust with the public, and/or improves the well-being and experience of students. When you complete the Leadership Academy, you will have designed and implemented a project that is an investment in your district's success.
- Here's one of many examples of the impact of a District Innovation:
 - Years of pay inequity was eliminated with a graduate's committee-driven compensation redesign that restored trust and fairness in their district. The project also addressed legal risks and helped the district remain competitive in a tough labor market.

Develop Your Leadership Vision

- Craft a leadership development goal tailored to your strengths and growth areas.

- Identify your personal leadership values and use them to guide your decisions and actions.
- Learn to navigate tough conversations, lead innovation, build high-performing teams, and drive sustainable change.
- Practice essential skills like storytelling, meeting facilitation, and stakeholder engagement.

Analyze Your Leadership Skills & Master New Strategies

- Transform your leadership style with WASBO's expert instructors. This includes assessing your current leadership strengths to exploring effective change management models & building a community.
- Apply new tools & strategies related to communication, innovation, and change management through assignments integrated into your daily work.

Boost Your Career & Build a Powerful Network

- Join a cohort of emerging leaders across Wisconsin to share ideas, solve problems, and build lasting professional relationships.
- Position yourself as a future-ready leader with experience leading change, managing teams, and delivering measurable results.

WASBO's First Year Academy

The first step all school business and facilities professionals should take

Starting a new role in school business or facilities management can be both exciting and overwhelming. But you don't need to navigate your first few years alone. [WASBO's First Year Academy](#) is here to help! This year-long experience is designed specifically to support, educate, and connect new school leaders across Wisconsin.



Danielle Bosanec
WASBO's Professional Development
Coordinator

As the Academy continues, participants follow specialized tracks tailored to their roles. Business officials gain a practical overview of what to expect in their role—from reporting timelines to financial planning—while facilities professionals dive into school safety, maintenance cycles, and regulatory updates. Across both tracks, participants hear from seasoned experts and colleagues who share real-world insights and lessons learned from the field.

What is WASBO's First Year Academy?

The First Year Academy is a cohort-based learning series that spans an academic year, giving professionals in their first few years, as a business manager or facilities leader, the foundation they need to succeed. Through a combination of in-person gatherings and virtual check-ins, participants explore leadership development, ethics, finance management, and school facility operations—everything you need to thrive from day one.

Where and when?

Recognizing Wisconsin's geographic diversity, WASBO offers two cohorts—North and South—so participation is accessible statewide:

- North Cohort – Wausau
 - September 17–18, 2025 & February 18–19, 2026

- South Cohort – Madison
 - September 3–4, 2025 & February 12–13, 2026
- Virtual Check-In mid-year for all participants ensures ongoing support.

What you will learn

The First Year Academy begins in the fall with two energizing days designed to orient new professionals to the world of school business and facilities leadership. The fall experience introduces core topics that are essential for every new leader.

Sessions explore the differences between leadership and management, ethics, guidance on effective communication with stakeholders, and provide space for setting professional goals aligned with district needs.

The winter session includes topics such as navigating pupil transportation and food service operations, understanding environmental considerations in school buildings, and getting ready for summer activities like audits, facility upgrades, and summer school. Communication is also a major focus of the winter session.

Why you should register now!

Throughout it all, the Academy continues to reinforce a central theme: you are not alone. Whether it's through collaborative discussions or shared resources, participants come away with the support network they need to thrive. [WASBO's First Year Academy](#) equips new school leaders with the knowledge, support, and connections needed to build a foundation for lasting success.



WASBO'S FIRST YEAR ACADEMY

Yearlong academy for school business & facility officials in their first few years!

REGISTER NOW AT [WASBO.COM/FYA](https://wasbo.com/fya)

Welcoming words of wisdom

"Don't ever feel like you're bothering somebody by asking questions. I've been doing this for almost 13 years, and I still ask questions every day."



Shannon Grindell
Business Manager, Osceola

"Take the time to show everyone your one and three-year facility plans, and regularly solicit 360-degree feedback loops. It does not need to be in writing, but check in with teachers, administrators, parents and peers. You will be surprised by the information you will receive and how that can motivate the team and individuals. Also, once community members feel empowered, they can be a valued resource as they share information with their friends and neighbors. Finally, always let staff know that what they do each day is making a difference for students, teachers, parents, and the community."



Troy Miller
Architect & Interim Buildings and Grounds Director

"Reach out to those of us who have been in the profession for a lot of years. That helped me. Every opportunity to learn more is important."



Angie Roble
CFO, Green Bay

"Work to maintain transparency regarding budget projections and the district's finances. The budget is a projection made with the best data and information available at the time. Be prepared for your projections to change based on new information and communicate these changes to your Board and community."



Michelle Brown
Director of Business Services, Glendale-River Hills

"I always recommend looking at every opportunity that exists to maximize revenues. An example of that would be the state's transfer service program, which allows for requests through the state to increase your revenue limit for student needs, such as an EL or special education student who moves into your district and needs a paraeducator. There are also grants out there, like the state mental health grants, that provide reimbursements based on the increase in salary for social workers. I highly recommend that all school business officials familiarize themselves with all of these opportunities that exist out there to maximize revenues. Learn about them, then apply for those funds. You may end up receiving more than you thought, and it's worth the time to pursue additional revenue sources."



Steve Summers
Executive Director of Operations, Waunakee

In celebration of WASBO's new First Year Academy, veteran school officials offer advice to those new to the profession

"One of the best things you can do as a Buildings and Grounds manager is make time for team development. Whether it's hands-on training, building leadership skills or improving customer service, it all adds up. And it doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes it's as easy as setting up a quick one-hour session with a contractor or supplier, starting a book study on leadership, or just having regular check-ins with team members who are ready to take on more.

Sending staff to WASBO conferences is also a great way to expose them to new ideas and connect with others in the field. Also, don't forget about recognition. There are a ton of fun and genuine ways to celebrate your team's hard work, and it goes a long way in building morale."



Andy Daniels

Director of Buildings and Grounds, Franklin

"I've been doing this for 26 years in a variety of roles in a variety of districts.

The one thing that WASBO continues to do is we support each other, and we try to find resources that help each other, and so work hard and try to stay positive. Some of my favorite days are regional meetings. It's good to see our colleagues in that informal setting, and I believe that's true as well with newcomers into the field."



Andrew Sarnow

Executive Director of Business Services, Mequon-Thiensville



**LEARN MORE ABOUT
WASBO'S FIRST
YEAR ACADEMY AT
[WASBO.COM/FYA](https://wasbo.com/fya)**

"I'm going into my fourth full school year, and I gave myself the grace to make it to year three. You should do the same! Year one is probably going to be really hard, and your head may hurt from trying to learn everything. Take in little bits at a time. Year two is going to be a little better. Year three finally felt like a job I was settled into. Every year, you just get a little more comfortable. It helps to go to conferences and get to know your peers. I've never felt more supported than I do by other business managers! A boss once told me, 'if you ever struggle with something for over five minutes, reach out to someone else,' and I've always kept that in the back of my head. So reach out!"



Amanda Tutor

Business Manager, Ashland

"I love the saying: 'The mountain tops are great for their views, but growth happens in the valley.' The biggest challenges bring about the most change and learning. It is always tough going through difficult things at work, but you usually come out on the other side with a story to tell and greater insights for the next big thing!"



Jeremiah Johnson

*Chief Operations Officer,
Muskego-Norway*

Coaching by WASBO

Are you looking to enhance your skills in school business management or facilities operations?

The Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO) is excited to introduce a powerful new resource just for you! Our coaching program is designed to support professional growth for all members—no matter your current experience level.

Why participate?

Whether you work in a school business office or manage facilities, the WASBO Coaching Program offers tremendous benefits.

Here's what you can expect:

1. Personalized Learning
 - o Receive one-on-one guidance tailored to your specific needs from an experienced peer in your field.
2. Skill Enhancement
 - o Strengthen your knowledge in key areas such as financial management, facility planning, and more.
3. Leadership Development
 - o Build the confidence to make informed, strategic decisions that positively impact your school.
4. Professional Networking

Empowering education professionals at every level



Danielle Bosanec
WASBO's Professional Development
Coordinator

- o Expand your network by connecting with other school business professionals across the state.

What does coaching involve?

Participants who request a coach will be matched with a seasoned professional in their area of focus. Together, they'll engage in one-on-one coaching sessions on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, either in person or virtually.

At the beginning of the coaching cycle, the participant will set goals for the year—these might include leadership development, building technical expertise, enhancing skills in

finance or facility planning, or other areas of professional interest. Sessions are confidential and designed to offer meaningful, personalized support while expanding your professional community.

Coaches also benefit from this experience. It's a chance to give back by helping a colleague grow, while also refining your own communication and leadership skills.

Open to all experience levels

Whether you're just starting your career or are a seasoned expert, the WASBO Coaching Program is open to you. Whether you're seeking guidance or eager to share your expertise, there's a place for you in this vibrant coaching community.

Ready to take the next step?

Visit [WASBO.com/Coaching](https://www.wasbo.com/coaching) to learn more and get started. You'll find all the details on how to apply as a coach or request one.

Don't miss this opportunity to invest in your growth and contribute to excellence in Wisconsin's public schools.



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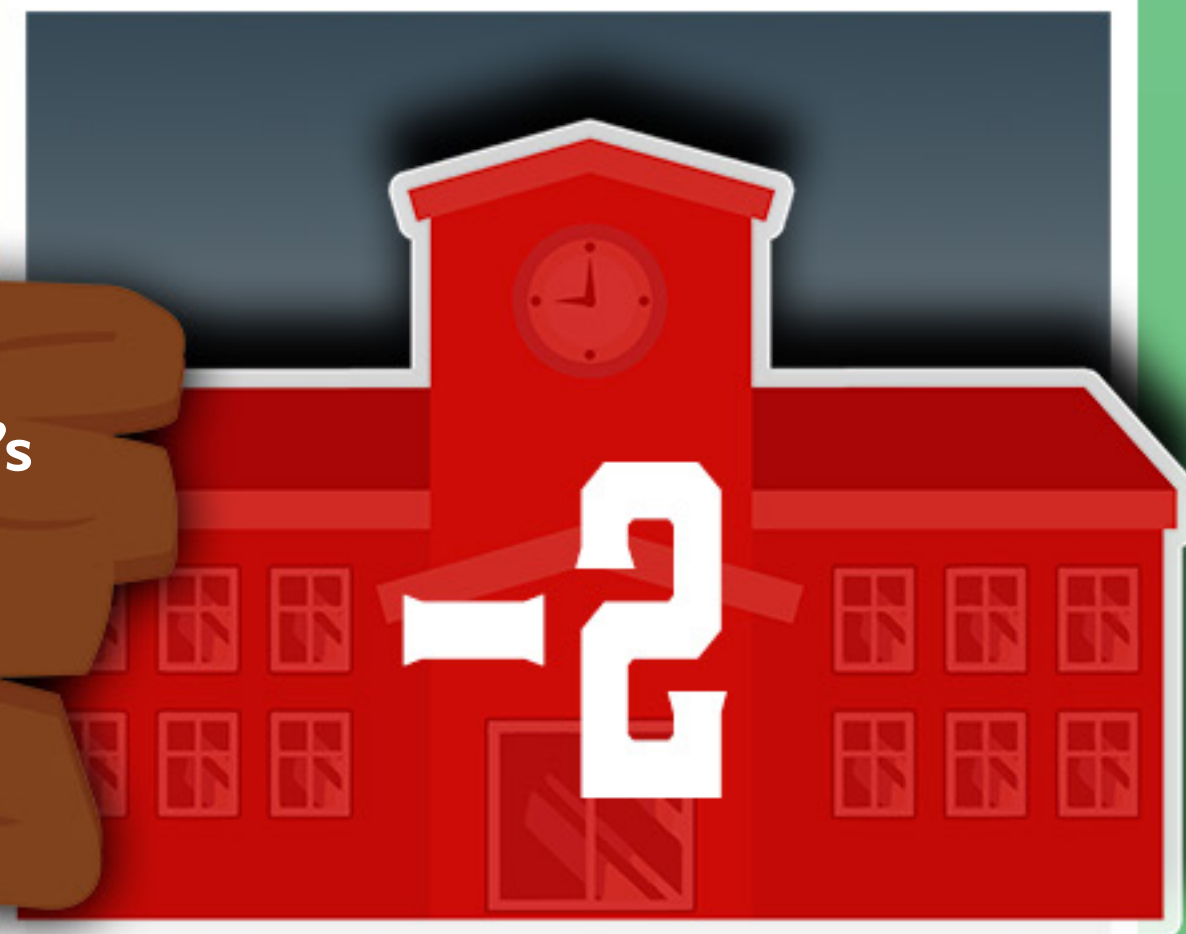


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Meghan Cropp, Partnerships Manager
info@cesapurchasing.org

TWO STEPS FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

Turn to page 32 to learn more about the impacts of Wisconsin's new budget, the most notable being an estimated statewide increase in property taxes of at least \$760 million.



**An analysis of
the 2025-27
Wisconsin
state budget's
impact on
schools**

Two steps forward, two steps back

An analysis of the 2025-27 state budget's impact on schools



Ryan Silvola
WASBO Marketing &
Communications Coordinator

Wisconsin's 2025-27 state budget provided some gains for K-12 education.

However, with revenue limits lagging behind inflation for the 17th and 18th consecutive years and no new general school aids, the fiscal outlook for many school districts remains unfavorable.

This article first covers the statewide impacts of the three big tentpoles of the 2025-27 state budget: revenue limit, general aid, and primary special education aid. Then we'll cover six business managers' perspectives on the local impacts of the state budget. Finally, we'll dive deeper into additional aspects of the state budget and their impacts, including: no increase in the low revenue ceiling, substantial increases to high cost special education aid, an increase to the open enrollment transfer amount, changes to voucher and independent charter school payments, and the interplay with federal funding uncertainties.

Based on our analysis of the key features of the state budget, some historical context for those provisions, and the perspectives of a diverse set of school district officials, overall, despite modest increases in the revenue limit and special education aid, the 2025-27 state budget will present many districts with challenges either to meet the needs of their students, mitigate the burden it places on property tax payers, or a combination of both.

Putting the burden on taxpayers

Due to the Wisconsin Supreme Court [upholding Governor Tony Evers' 400-year veto](#), the revenue limit will increase according to current law by \$325 per pupil each year of the current biennium. In addition to the revenue limit increase, the budget also included increases to a handful of categorical aid programs, mainly for special education. State leaders have touted that the overall budget provides nearly [\\$1.4 billion in spendable revenue](#) for K-12 schools. However,

WASBO Research Director Anne Chapman said the \$325 per pupil increase is still below inflation, and the \$1.4 billion figure can be misleading.

"The term 'spendable revenue' does not mean all of that is coming from the state. The increase over the prior two-year state budget in total support for K-12 schools from the state adds up to about \$613 million," Chapman said. "Almost all of the rest of that portion of the nearly \$1.4 billion in spendable revenue, an estimated \$760 million, is going to be from property taxes." (That figure does not include an additional [\\$169 million](#) increase in property taxes to replace aid deductions from school districts to pay for projected growth in the cost of voucher and independent charter school programs.)

Due to the state not increasing general aid for schools, many school districts will likely see a tax increase for local taxpayers. According to [DPI's July 1 general aid estimate](#), about two-thirds of Wisconsin school

Methodology

To better understand the statewide impacts of the 2025-27 state budget, I interviewed two experts: WASBO's Research Director Anne Chapman and School Administrators Alliance Executive Director Dee Pettack. To get local perspectives, I interviewed six business managers of districts of various sizes, demographics, and locations, including Michelle Brown (Glendale-River Hills), Shannon Grindell (Osceola), Angie Roble (Green Bay), Andrew Sarnow (Mequon-Thiensville), Steve Summers (Waukegan), and Amanda Tutor (Ashland).

districts will see their general aids decrease next year, while one-third are projected to have more aid. That breakdown represents a reversal compared to 2024-25, when two-thirds of school districts expected an increase in general aids. Even more significantly, 86 districts are projected to lose 15% in general aids, which is the most they can lose before the state's hold-harmless provision kicks in. That is a substantial jump over the previous year, when only 64 districts hit the hold-harmless threshold.

Chapman said the overall effect of the higher tax burden that will result from this budget could anger taxpayers and impede districts' ability to:

- Take full advantage of their own revenue limit authority
- Go to referendum to meet their needs
- Avoid dipping into reserves for temporary relief
- Utilize some combination of these strategies

"It can be very confusing in terms of how to understand the impact of this budget," Chapman said. "What we do know is that we have recent census data that tells us Wisconsin has been dropping in national rankings of state spending on K-12 education. Not only is Wisconsin dropping in its rankings relative to other states, but it's really dropping in how much it's spending per pupil relative to other states."

As of 2023 (the most recent year of [U.S. Census Bureau data](#)), Wisconsin has fallen to 26th in the nation in terms of spending per pupil on K-12 education, spending almost [10% below the national average](#). By contrast, [two decades ago](#), Wisconsin ranked 11th nationwide on this measure, spending 11% above the national average in 2002.

"If you add up the amount of general operating revenues school districts would have received each year, had annual adjustments to revenue limits remained pinned to the Consumer Price Index, school districts would have an estimated \$3,573 per-pupil more than they actually do by the end of 2026-27."



Anne Chapman
WASBO Research Director

"Wisconsin has officially dropped to the bottom half of the pack in terms of K-12 spending per pupil," Chapman said. "This statistic cuts through the noise and confusion about what's happening with school finance in Wisconsin. It should raise concerns for policymakers and state leaders about how Wisconsin competes with other states and on the global stage. It also raises serious questions about whether Wisconsin is devoting the resources necessary to prepare our kids for their future and the future of our state."

A key driver of Wisconsin's plunge in national rankings on educational investments is the way revenue limits have trailed behind inflation. The 2025-27 state budget marks the 17th and 18th consecutive years that Wisconsin schools have had to balance their budgets without enough resources to keep up with standard growth in operational costs.

"If you add up the amount of general operating revenues school districts would have received each year, had annual adjustments to revenue limits remained pinned to the Consumer Price Index, school districts would have an estimated [\\$3,573 per-pupil](#)

more than they actually do by the end of 2026-27," Chapman said.

Chapman notes that the legislature cut the revenue limit by an average of [\\$554 per pupil](#) for 2011-12 as part of the 2011-13 state budget (during which Act 10 was signed into law). Even starting from 2011-12, it's estimated that the revenue limit per pupil will have trailed inflation by an estimated [\\$2,575 by the end of 2026-27](#).

Evers' budget proposal to increase revenue limits by \$334 per pupil in 2025-26 and \$345 in 2026-27 was an unsuccessful attempt to align school revenue with inflation, at least for the upcoming biennium.

The revenue limit is key to school finance because it governs how much school districts receive per pupil to cover their general operating costs. But it is made up of two components - general school aids from the state budget and local property taxes. Traditionally, policymakers try to appropriate enough general school aids to offset the impact of revenue limits on property taxes, at least on a statewide basis. But in the 2025-27 budget,

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policymakers provided no increase in general school aids in either year of the biennium.

“In this budget, the legislature appropriated zero new general aid in both years,” Chapman said. “That is not something we’ve seen since the [2009-11 state budget](#), which cut aid in the first year and added no aid in the second. The last time the legislature did not increase general aids was in 2017-18, but the aid was increased slightly in the second year of that biennium, by 1.6%. On a statewide basis, the main implication for school districts of no new aid over the next biennium is that the entire burden of the \$325 revenue limit increases is going to fall on local property taxpayers for the next two years.”

As shown in Figure 1, the year-to-year percentage change in general school aids will be 0% for the next two consecutive years.

Although it does not affect schools or property taxes directly, it is worth noting that the new state budget also includes a provision that expands the state’s second-lowest income tax bracket. The [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) reports that the new bracket now includes married couples earning between \$19,090 and \$67,300 and single filers earning between \$14,320 and \$50,480. The previous caps in this bracket were \$38,190 for couples and \$28,640 for single filers.

Overall, about 1.6 million Wisconsinites will pay lower income taxes under the spending plan, and taxpayers benefiting from the cut will see an average reduction of \$180.

Dee Pettack, Executive Director for the School Administrators’ Alliance, called the budget a compromise but said the income tax cuts provided to Wisconsinites will be diminished by inevitable school district property tax increases.

Special ed. categorical aid increase: Is it enough?

One highlight of the 2025-27 state budget was the [increase of \\$504.7 million](#) for primary special education aid. The sum certain appropriation (i.e., a flat amount no matter how much need for aid there will be) is estimated to increase the reimbursement rate for special education costs from 30.6% in 2024-25 to an estimated 42% in 2025-26 and 45% in 2026-27. Most of the business managers interviewed said the rate increases, which are substantially larger than any seen in recent memory, still are not high enough to meet the needs of students. Pettack said the rate increases forged in a compromise between the Governor and lawmakers are the highest we have seen since 1994-95, but below the needed 60% the SAA and other K-12 education stakeholders were advocating for. However, she said the increases give stakeholders a better negotiation floor moving forward.

Because primary special education aid remains a sum-certain appropriation, state spending will not exceed the appropriation dollar amount of \$504.7 million. This means the projected annual reimbursement rates stated in the budget document are not guaranteed at 42% and 45% because the actual reimbursement rate will vary based on the number and dollar amount school districts claim for special education aid. For example, while 33% was the estimated special education reimbursement rate in 2024-25, the actual rate ended up at 30.6%.

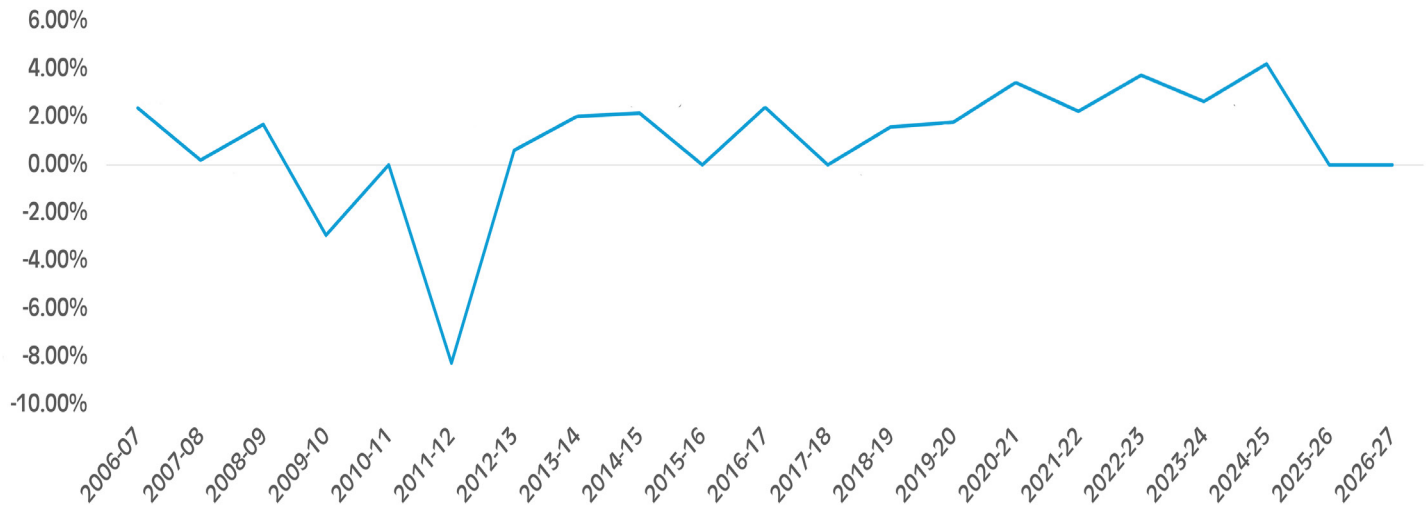
Instead, stakeholders were advocating for a guaranteed rate by changing the

“This method of funding special education that forces school districts to draw substantial resources away from their general education program doesn't even guarantee that students with disabilities are receiving as robust a set of services as schools would aspire to provide. In many cases, it just helps districts meet the requirements of a student's Individualized Education Plan, while unfortunately reducing supports and programs for all students.”



Anne Chapman
WASBO Research Director

Figure 1: Total general aids: Percent change over prior year (2006-07 to 2026-27)



Sources: 2005-2006 to 2024-25 aid data: Legislative Fiscal Bureau [Informational Paper 30 "State Aid to School Districts"](#).
2025-26 to 2026-27 aid data: [DPI 2025 Act 15 Final School Aids](#).

appropriation to be sum-sufficient. Because the funds remain sum-certain, many business officials are budgeting conservatively for special education reimbursement to protect their budgets, using estimated rates of 2-3% below the published reimbursement rate.

Historically, a 60% reimbursement rate wouldn't even be the highest Wisconsin has seen. In the 1960s and 1970s, Chapman said that state law guaranteed special education reimbursement at [70%](#) of eligible costs.

Despite the increase, many stakeholders believe the updated special education reimbursement rate is insufficient. Chapman adds that the lower the reimbursement rate, the more a district needs to draw funding away from general funds, which are already capped by the revenue limit.

"This method of funding special education that forces school districts to draw substantial resources away from their general education program

doesn't even guarantee that students with disabilities are receiving as robust a set of services as schools would aspire to provide. In many cases, it just helps districts meet the requirements of a student's Individualized Education Plan, while unfortunately reducing supports and programs for all students," Chapman said. "So reimbursing special education at a relatively low level has these reverberating impacts on the fiscal strength and stability of a school district's budget and on its ability to meet the needs of all its students, not just students with disabilities."

In 2023-24, Wisconsin school districts had to pull a total of \$1.29 billion in general funds to cover mandated special education costs. If special education programs had the funding they needed, Chapman said, there likely would be fewer referendums, and schools could invest in more resources for students. This could include, for example, career and technical education, AP programs, smaller class sizes, access to school nurses, and

school-based mental health services, to name a few of the vital services and programs that are often on the chopping block when district resources are scarce.

The local impact

Disappointment was a common theme among many of the business managers interviewed about the state budget's impact on schools. Statewide declining enrollment, which negatively impacts most district budgets, was also a big concern for many.

The biggest concern for many business managers was the fact that there was no increase in general aid for the next biennium.

After Wisconsin ended 2023 with a record [\\$7.1 billion surplus](#) and the last budget biennium [with \\$4.4 billion](#), many business managers — including Angie Roble, CFO for Green Bay Area Public Schools — were left confused by the state's decision not to

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award more aid to school districts, especially as legislators continue to raise concerns about the record-breaking frequency of referendums.

"Referendums shift the responsibility to taxpayers, so it seems like an unusual position to shift the cost of education to local property taxpayers instead of giving schools more aid. It's unfortunate all the way around," Roble said. "Overall, I felt that this budget did little to address the increased inflationary pressure that our district faces, along with every other district in the state."

Steve Summers, Executive Director of Operations for the Waunakee Community School District, said "in the last 20 years, Wisconsin has gone backwards, especially with our rankings nationally and the cost of inflation. So this is a nice opportunity to start going in the right direction. I would call it a step forward, but one step of many that needs to be taken."

"In the last 20 years, Wisconsin has gone backwards, especially with our rankings nationally and the cost of inflation. So (the state budget) is a nice opportunity to start going in the right direction. I would call it a step forward, but one step of many that needs to be taken."



Steve Summers
Executive Director of Operations
Waunakee Community School District

'Not a game changer' for Green Bay

Though she is thankful that the special education reimbursement rate was increased, Roble said it "wasn't even close to what we were asking for," falling short of the 60% that was requested by the School Administrators Alliance and other stakeholders.

"I don't want to be dismissive of the increase, because it helps. It equates to about \$3.1 million for us," Roble said. "However, in our overall budget, where we transfer more than \$30 million from Fund 10, the increase isn't a game-changer for us."

Green Bay is facing an estimated \$3 million reduction in general aid, which may increase the district's mill rate. Green Bay enrolled 18,379 students in 2024-25, according to [DPI enrollment data in WISEdash](#).

"Heading into the summer, we knew that it was likely we would have to ask voters to support an operational referendum when our current one expires next year," Roble said. "The

outcome of the budget will likely result in the district needing to seek a larger referendum than we had hoped. Despite our sound fiscal management, which has included a strategic capital referendum to address long-term costs, 17 years of no cost-of-living increases from the state, and recent unprecedented inflation has placed the district in a difficult position."

A referendum is only one of many methods the district is employing to close deficits, and it is not the district's first choice. In the past two years, Green Bay closed three school buildings due to consolidation efforts. Roble said three more buildings will close at the end of 2025-26. Through attrition, the district has also been working to reduce staffing to have efficient staff-to-student ratios. Additionally, budgets have been reduced by 10% for departments at the district level.

"We are projecting a balanced budget for 2025-26. Unfortunately, that does not include a cost-of-living increase for staff at this point," Roble said.

"We will be having those conversations with our unions and the school board to determine next steps. We understand that everyone is feeling inflationary pressures, and we need to keep that in mind as we work hard to recruit and retain staff. Ideally, the state budget would have provided at a minimum a per-pupil increase that matched CPI."

Like many others, Green Bay is considering deficit spending via its fund balance, which hasn't been done in the last 15 years Roble has worked in the district.

"We will continue to demonstrate to the community that we are efficient and are continuing to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars," Roble said. "However, we are running out of resources to continue to provide the opportunities our students deserve and the level of support they need."

The district continues to prioritize having as few reductions as possible to classroom opportunities. However, as inflationary costs continue to rise for items like software, vendors, transportation, and more, eventually, students will likely be impacted.

"The strategic effort to decrease spending without impacting students has been successful up to this point, but this state budget definitely has not helped with those conversations," Roble said.

High property value + declining enrollment = A lot less general aid for Osceola

A surprising and significant drop in the district's three-year rolling enrollment average has left Osceola School District with less state general aid than expected.

Since Osceola's per-pupil spending amount has increased, and the district is considered "property rich," Business Manager Shannon Grindell said the state's equalization aid formula determined that Osceola will receive less equalization aid, to the tune of an estimated \$1.4 million.

"While I do feel very confident in our estimates, we were off on how high our reduction in state aid was going to be. That's because the formula is so complex that it's just so hard to nail down," Grindell said. "I think it's a difficult time for everybody in edu-

"Referendums shift the responsibility to taxpayers, so it seems like an unusual position to shift the cost of education to local property taxpayers instead of giving schools more aid...Overall, I felt that this budget did little to address the increased inflationary pressure that our district faces, along with every other district in the state."



Angie Roble
Chief Financial Officer
Green Bay Area Public Schools

cation, and it would just be nice if we could just get the state to help us out a little bit."

Osceola is estimating a \$500,000 increase in its revenue limit this year and is planning to go into deficit spending, a plan that has been communicated to stakeholders over the past year. From a categorical aid standpoint, Grindell said Osceola is estimating a \$150,000 increase in special education reimbursements for 2025-26. However, challenges remain.

Osceola is planning to utilize its full revenue limit authority as well as the declining enrollment exemption. In 2023-24, after a recurring operational referendum expired, the district took excess reserves and applied them to the fund balance. In 2025-26, Osceola is looking to maintain a "healthy" (as defined in district policy) 25% fund balance. Given that the district will be in a similar situation (with even less of a fund balance) in 2026-27, Grindell is now preparing stakeholders for the possibility of putting an operational referendum on the ballot in 2026. A 2026 capital referendum may also be in the works.

Through numerous reductions to staffing, bus routes, and more, Grindell has whittled the deficit down to about \$880,000. This is after the district made \$1.2 million in reductions for 2024-25. Osceola enrolled 1,421 students in 2024-25, according to [DPI enrollment data in WISEdash](#).

"I feel like we've made all of the reductions that we can make without impacting kids," Grindell said. "At this point, we're going to have to look to our community to help, because if this goes any further, we're going to start impacting programming and student opportunities."

A false picture for Ashland

At first glance, seeing the special education reimbursement rate increase was exciting for Amanda Tutor. However, when the business manager began running the numbers for Ashland School District, that excitement deflated.

"It just kind of felt like we were unsupported. The media kind of painted a picture of support," Tutor said. "Once you start running the numbers,

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though, it gets frustrating, and then you're trying to figure out how to tell taxpayers that they're going to be paying more again. So, I guess I'm more frustrated that the state can't fund the future."

While she appreciates the increase to the special education reimbursement rate, Tutor said it's not enough until the rate is 100%.

"Kids' needs need to be met at 100% so that we can give them everything they need when they're inside our doors," Tutor said. "We're in a low-income district, and a lot of kids don't get services or food or clothing unless they're inside our building. So our number one concern is taking care of them and having the money to do so."

Using budgeting at home as an example, Tutor believes the special education reimbursement rates should be guaranteed with a sum-sufficient appropriation as opposed to one lump

sum with a varying rate depending on the number and amount of claims.

"If you're at home doing your budget, you want to know how much your paycheck is. It's easy to know you spent \$50 on groceries and \$50 on gas, but what if your employer said your paycheck amount is uncertain and subject to change? It creates so much confusion. You may get to December and not know if you have the money to eat the last week or fill your car up with gas," Tutor said. "It's the same for us when we're estimating a 42 percent reimbursement rate in our budgets rather than having a guaranteed amount."

Overall, Ashland saw about \$700,000 of reduction in general aid (almost 4% of the district's overall budget), Tutor said. This rate reduction plus the \$325 per-pupil increase means her local taxpayers may be picking up about one million dollars. Additionally, the district passed its first-ever operational referendum in April 2025.

The [non-recurring referendum](#) authorized the district to exceed its revenue limit by \$2,000,000 per year for five years, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year and ending with the 2029-2030 school year. This consists of operational expenses, including wages, benefits, curriculum, professional development, and maintenance. Constituents will first see the referendum reflected on their tax bill this November. Ashland enrolled 1,784 students in 2024-25, according to [DPI enrollment data in WISEdash](#).

"I'm afraid we're going to be accused of being dishonest during the referendum process, and that we weren't telling them the true cost," Tutor said. "If we have to go to operational referendum again, taxpayers might be very hesitant to support us, because they may believe our numbers aren't accurate even though they are."

The district's first operational referendum attempt in November 2024 failed by less than 50 votes. Tutor said convincing voters to move past the two big issues required a Herculean effort. The first issue for taxpayers was the perception some voters had about the district not being truthful about a 2017 capital referendum. District staff then had to explain the impact of a failed referendum, including the real cuts the district would need to make.

"It was kind of a battlefield the whole time. My Superintendent and I were on the road, two, three nights a week, at town hall meetings and meeting with church groups and veterans," Tutor said. "I met with everyone we could meet with to try and get it to pass. So yeah, I'm glad we were successful, but that burden doesn't end."

"While I do feel very confident in our estimates, we were off on how high our reduction in state aid was going to be. That's because the formula is so complex that it's just so hard to nail down. I think it's a difficult time for everybody in education, and it would just be nice if we could just get the state to help us out a little bit."



Shannon Grindell
Chief Financial Officer
Osceola School District

Additional issues that Tutor believed sold voters on approving the district's first operational referendum included the following:

- Comparisons with other neighboring districts showed the district was at the bottom of the pay scale for teachers in their region, which hampered recruitment efforts.
- The ramifications of a failed referendum, which included:
 - Increased class sizes
 - Reduced athletic programs
 - Reduced arts offerings
 - Eliminating interventionist positions

Tutor is now working to ensure taxpayers have an estimate of how their tax bills will be affected by the state budget and the district's operational referendum. She estimates her district will use its full revenue limit authority but might under-levy in the operating referendum. District staff promised voters that it would only use what the district needed to "make ends meet," Tutor said. They also promised the lowest tax increase they could manage, which will be a challenge.

An aid increase for Glendale-River Hills

Glendale-River Hills School District saw the highest percentage increase in equalization aid of any district in this year's [July 1 aid estimate](#), from \$112,408 in 2024-25 to the July 1 estimate of \$1,460,590. Michelle Brown, Director of Business Services, said this increase was due to a combination of factors, including the district's enrollment increasing, property values decreasing, and the way these factors compare to those of other districts in the state.

This substantial increase in aid will decrease the property burden on taxpayers, as the levy amount is also pro-

"It just kind of felt like (schools) were unsupported. The media kind of painted a picture of support (in the state budget). Once you start running the numbers, though, it gets frustrating, and then you're trying to figure out how to tell taxpayers that they're going to be paying more again. So, I guess I'm more frustrated that the state can't fund the future."



Amanda Tutor
Business Manager
Ashland School District

jected to decrease due to a \$1,580,000 operational referendum that expired this year. Brown estimates taxpayer savings of \$53 per \$100,000 in property value this November based on the increase in aid alone. Glendale-River Hills enrolled 973 students in 2024-25, according to [DPI enrollment data in WISEdash](#).

Overall, the district is projecting a balanced budget, though Brown said recruitment efforts could impact the budget due to salary and health insurance costs. Brown, like all of her fellow business managers, also said she would like to see the special education rate increase even more.

The district also passed an operational referendum last fall authorizing a revenue limit increase of \$4.5 million each year over a two-year period, which will expire after 2025-26. For now, Brown said the district is holding steady.

A nice surprise for Mequon-Thiensville

Positively surprised is how Andrew Sarnow, Executive Director of Business Services for Mequon-Thiensville School District, described the special

education reimbursement increase, because it allows districts to offset some of the cost of mandated services without increasing the tax burden. Sarnow said this will net his district about \$700,000.

With the awareness that every district's funding is different depending on the state's complicated school funding system, he said this categorical aid increase is "a step in the right direction." However, he shares fellow business managers' disappointment in the lack of an increase in general aid. Mequon-Thiensville enrolled 3,553 students in 2024-25, according to [DPI enrollment data in WISEdash](#).

"I think that's going to be something that districts will feel, and it feels contradictory to what has been a priority over the last at least 10 years," Sarnow said.

As a "property-rich" district, Sarnow said Mequon-Thiensville receives minimal state aid. In fact, the district had the largest decrease in percentage of state aid in the state, according to

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the [DPI's July 1 aid estimate](#). The district is estimated to have a decrease of -\$1,228,612 (from \$1,898,482 in aid in 2024-25 to an estimated \$669,870 in aid for 2025-26) with a percentage change of -64.72%.

The next district with the largest percent decrease was Swallow with -27.53% (Note: Both Mequon-Thiensville and Swallow school districts may be eligible for special adjustment aid).

Going into the upcoming school year, Sarnow said the district has already conducted its annual meeting, where staff presented a balanced budget. Another factor affecting the district's budget is a successful four-year non-recurring referendum [in November 2024](#) that authorized the school district to exceed its revenue limit by \$5,500,000 for the 2024-25 school year, by \$6,200,000 for the 2025-26 school year, by \$6,900,000 for the 2026-27 school year, and by

\$7,800,000 for the 2027-2028 school year. Sarnow said the goal is to be as least reliant on the referendum funds as possible, which the district has been successfully achieving so far.

Two sides of a coin with Waunakee

Two sides of a coin. On the one side, the most significant investments in spendable revenues the state has seen in a very long time. On the other side, no investment in equalization aid means there likely will be property tax increases for many districts.

This dynamic is how Steve Summers, Executive Director of Operations, has described the 2025-27 state budget's impact on the Waunakee Community School District. The district expects to lose \$1.1 million in state aid and projects a tax levy increase of 10.4%.

"We have a unique situation in that our school district is in a much better financial shape than we were prior to the state budget being signed," Summers said. "However, our local prop-

erty taxpayers are going to be the ones funding it, because the funding isn't coming from the state."

Summers and Waunakee Director of Business Services Allie Newton are now working on strategies to bring the levy down for taxpayers, including re-evaluating the district's debt service schedule. Waunakee enrolled 4,415 students in 2024-25, according to [DPI enrollment data in WISEdash](#).

Summers praised all of the WASBO members and education stakeholders who advocated for the special education reimbursement rate increase, which he called a "huge accomplishment that sets the stage to continue the request to move the percentage higher." Following the passage of the state budget, Waunakee is estimating a \$348,000 increase in open enrollment revenues, a \$400,000 increase in high cost special education aid reimbursements, and a \$600,000 increase in primary special education aid for 2025-26 following the passage of the state budget. In total, that's a \$1.4 million increase in revenues from those three main revenue sources.

Low revenue ceiling

After a \$1,000 increase to the low revenue ceiling in the 2023-25 state budget, Roble was discouraged to see no increase in the current budget. As a low-revenue school district, the last increase brought Green Bay closer to the state average. Roble said this stagnation means the district will now trail farther behind many districts.

In Osceola, while Shannon Grindell was hoping for that \$1,000 increase, she also knows taxpayers would have to pay for this increase.



Amanda Tutor
Business Manager
Ashland School District

"I'm afraid we're going to be accused of being dishonest during the referendum process, and that we weren't telling them the true cost. If we have to go to operational referendum again, taxpayers might be very hesitant to support us, because they may believe our numbers aren't accurate even though they are."

High cost special education aid

Separately from special education reimbursement, [\\$54.6 million was allocated](#) to the state's High Cost Special Education Aid program over the biennium. The sum-certain reimbursement rate also increased from an estimated 25.9% in 2024-25 to 50% in 2025-26 and 90% in 2026-27.

[High Cost Special Education Aid](#) provides additional support for school districts and other eligible LEAs serving students with disabilities who individually have actual, additional, non-administrative costs of special education and related services in excess of \$30,000. Agencies apply for partial reimbursement of the costs for individual students in the previous fiscal year.

Waunakee's reimbursement for high-cost special education was one of the top ten in the state in 2024-25. Summers said that reimbursement will now substantially increase with the expanded reimbursement rates in the biennium. The district is currently estimating a \$400,000 increase following the passage of the state budget.

"The challenge with this is it's a complicated system," Summers said. "You have to have a really strong relationship between the business office and the special education office, and everyone has to be willing to roll up their sleeves and put some time and energy into it."

WASBO is offering a sold-out year-long [Special Education Budgeting Academy](#) this fall in partnership with the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS). Learn more at WASBO.com/SEBA.

"The challenge with (high cost special education aid) is it's a complicated system. You have to have a really strong relationship between the business office and the special education office, and everyone has to be willing to roll up their sleeves and put some time and energy into it."



Steve Summers

*Executive Director of Operations
Waunakee Community School District*

Green Bay was reimbursed \$263,000 in 2024-25, and this number will likely double next year. Unfortunately, Roble said this still won't solve the district's deficit.

In Glendale-River Hills, Brown said this rate increase would have been especially helpful last year. For 2023-24, the district received \$77,000 for high cost special ed. reimbursement after spending more than \$400,000.

Chapman said about two-thirds of all districts (265) benefited from the high cost special education aid program in 2024-25. It remains to be seen how many more districts might apply for the program now that reimbursement levels have been so substantially increased. In other words, more districts might decide it is now worth the considerable investment in administrative resources needed to go through the process to apply for these funds.

Open enrollment and voucher payments

In the 2025-27 state budget, the public school open enrollment transfer amount will increase by [\\$1,150 in 2025-26](#) and [\\$928 in 2026-27](#). This

raises the open enrollment transfer amount significantly, from \$8,962 in 2024-25, to \$10,102 in 2025-26, and then to \$11,030 in 2026-27. Depending on the district, the transfer amount increase is either a cause for concern or celebration.

The state also increased per-pupil payments for voucher programs by \$640 in 2025-26 and by \$428 in 2026-27, bringing K-8 per-pupil voucher payments up to \$11,305 and high school vouchers to \$13,790 by 2026-27, a figure that exceeds the revenue limit of most school districts.

As a result of projected growth in the cost of Wisconsin's voucher and independent charter programs, [total payments](#) to these schools will go up by \$274 million compared to the 2023-25 budget. Almost \$170 million of that will be paid for by reducing state aids to school districts and allowing them to make up the difference by raising property taxes.

For Green Bay, the Governor's provision through his veto of \$325 per pupil and special education reimbursement increases are being offset

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Two steps forward, two steps back

Conclusion

From a state-level perspective, the principal effect of the 2025-27 state budget will be an estimated statewide increase in property taxes of at least \$760 million.

That is a direct result of the legislature's decision not to add any new general school aids in either year of the budget, a policy decision without precedent going back decades. Those property tax increases are in addition to the estimated growth in the cost of voucher and independent charter schools, which will cause school districts to levy property taxpayers to replace the general aids and possibly categorical aids that will be reduced to pay for resident voucher and independent charter students.

Apart from the main property tax implications, overall, the statewide impact of the 2025-27 state budget will be mixed for school districts across the state. Although the substantial increases in reimbursement for special education costs and the boost in the open enrollment transfer amount are welcome developments, for some districts that open enroll more students out than in, the gains made in special education will largely be eroded by what they will have to pay districts that enroll their resident students.

In addition, while the revenue limit increase of \$325 in each year of the biennium will boost spendable resources for all districts, it still falls short of the growth in inflationary costs, and the absence of state aid to offset the property tax impacts of that increase could put many districts in a difficult position that could induce them to underlevy, reconsider referendum plans, draw on their fund balance, or other hard choices. Finally, these challenges will fall especially hard on districts experiencing enrollment declines and those that shoulder the cost of large numbers of voucher students.

Continued from P. 41

by the increases in the amount of the open enrollment payments per student. Roble said the number of students enrolling in and out of the district has remained stable for the past several years; however, the large increase in the amount paid per pupil has a substantial impact on the budget.

In Osceola, historically, the district was net-in when it came to open enrollment. [In 2022-23](#), the district had a net gain of 57 students, according to DPI enrollment data, a typical level relative to the previous ten years. However, [in 2023-24](#), the district's net open enrollment in decreased to 19 students. When considering the [DPI's basic transfer amount](#), this was a loss of more than \$300,000 for the district.

Since this dip, Osceola's net open enrollment has been flat, meaning it won't be significantly affected by the open enrollment transfer increase. However, the per-pupil voucher payment increase will likely affect the property tax levy. Grindell estimates a 20% increase in voucher expenses this year after the district levied \$194,000 in 2024-25. The private school levy amount for public schools can be difficult to predict for many, as private schools aren't required to report their enrollment numbers in the statutorily required [PI-1207 Private School Report](#) until mid-October.

In Ashland, Tutor said the district is likely enrolling about 100 students net-out, so the open enrollment transfer amount increase is likely to wipe out most of the additional funds from special education reimbursement increases. She added that the district will not see much of an impact from the voucher payment increases.

In Glendale-River Hills, Brown said the district has seen a decline in open enrollment since the district has been unable to take more students. In 2024-25, Glendale-River Hills had 92 students enroll in the district and had 105 students open enroll out. She said the district is expecting to have ten fewer openly enrolled students this year. In terms of vouchers, the district is seeing an increase. The district levied \$751,846 for vouchers in 2024-25, an increase of \$183,304 from 2023-24. In this two-year period,

special needs vouchers doubled in the district.

Mequon-Thiensville doesn't anticipate the increased open enrollment transfer amount to have a large impact on its budget and will be monitoring increases to voucher payments. According to [DPI enrollment data](#), the district was net-in 29 students in 2023-24 and net-in 6 students in 2022-23.

Waunakee's net-in enrollment is 250 students, so this open enrollment transfer increase will help the district's budget. The district is estimating about a \$350,000 increase in open enrollment revenues following the passage of the state budget.

Federal funding

After freezing funding for certain congressionally authorized federal Title education programs, the Trump administration announced last month it was releasing these funds. For Wisconsin, this included \$72 million in

funding from Titles I-C, II-A, III-B, IV-B, and IV-B. When the funds were released to the state, the administration attached stipulations that schools had to adhere to all related executive orders, including one that required that funds could not be used for students who do not qualify as U.S. citizens or "qualified aliens."

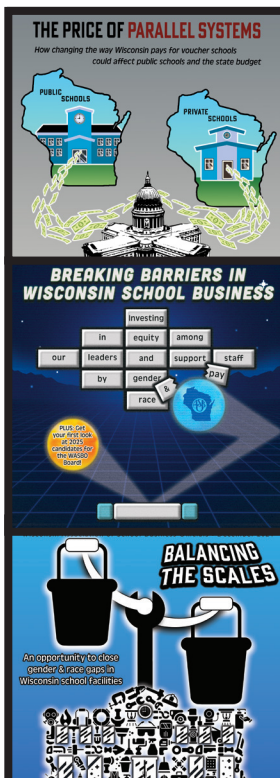
At this time, there is not a feasible way to comply with such requirements, Chapman said, as schools are required by federal law, including a U.S. Supreme Court precedent set in [Plyer v. Doe \(1982\)](#), to accept all students, and they do not currently have processes to assess immigration status. For now, there's a court agreement in place for the Trump administration to pause enforcement of this policy after 20 states, including Wisconsin, sued the administration. As part of this agreement, the states that sued cannot be held liable for admitting undocumented students into programs before September 4.

[As of August 1](#), DPI received official

notification that the U.S. Department of Education had released the withheld federal funding. However, the department is conducting a thorough legal review of the terms and conditions on the use of those funds before releasing the funds to districts.

However, there is a major cause for concern moving into the 2026-27 school year. President Trump's proposed FY26 budget included significant cuts (about \$6 billion) to federal education programs. Congress would have to finalize funding plans for the next school year by September 30 to avoid a shutdown, or else a stopgap continuing resolution will have to be reached.

While Pettack acknowledges how frustrating it can be to not hear back from legislators, she still encourages WASBO members to reach out to lawmakers about all of these current and proposed changes to federal funding. Lawmakers will soon be deciding on the future of federal funding, and more elections are coming soon.



Reach District Decision-Makers by Advertising with WASBO

Advertise in WASBO's flagship publication: Taking Care of Business!

The May 2025 issue of Taking Care of Business was viewed by more than 80% of WASBO's members and was forwarded by members nearly 300 times to additional education stakeholders!

Each issue will also have a theme with a larger centerspread article. Here are the themes for the rest of the 2025-26 Publication Year:

- November 2025: Environmental Sustainability in our Schools
- February 2026: Employee Pipeline (Recruitment and Retention)
- May 2026: The Local and State Impact of School Referenda

In addition to Taking Care of Business, WASBO also has a monthly e-newsletter (WASBO Focus) and a daily & weekly email blast of news clippings from around the state! Advertise in multiple publications for an even larger discount!

Learn more at WASBO.com/Advertise



Building the blueprint for STEM/CTE programming

The day has arrived—your district is celebrating the grand opening of a new STEM/CTE facility. But suddenly, the real questions start rolling in:

- Who will provide training on the new equipment?
- Does the curriculum align with the new space?
- What's the plan for cleaning, maintaining, and sustaining all this cutting-edge infrastructure?
- This is where the real work begins.

Beyond the ribbon cutting

As districts across Wisconsin invest in modern learning environments, excitement around Career & Technical Education (CTE) facilities is growing. These projects are often highlighted through sleek architectural renderings and innovative design features. But while the physical space is important, truly impactful CTE programming



Dustin Lehman

Coordinator of College and Career Readiness
Mukwonago Area School District

requires much more than bricks, mortar, and modern finishes. It's the curriculum, equipment, upskilling of staff, and deep industry alignment that truly make the difference. When a CTE referendum doesn't incorporate these foundational elements from the start, it risks falling short, producing beautiful buildings that aren't equipped to deliver future-ready instruction or deliver a strong return on taxpayer investment.



Jim Michlig

Career & Experiential Learning Coordinator
Muskego-Norway School District

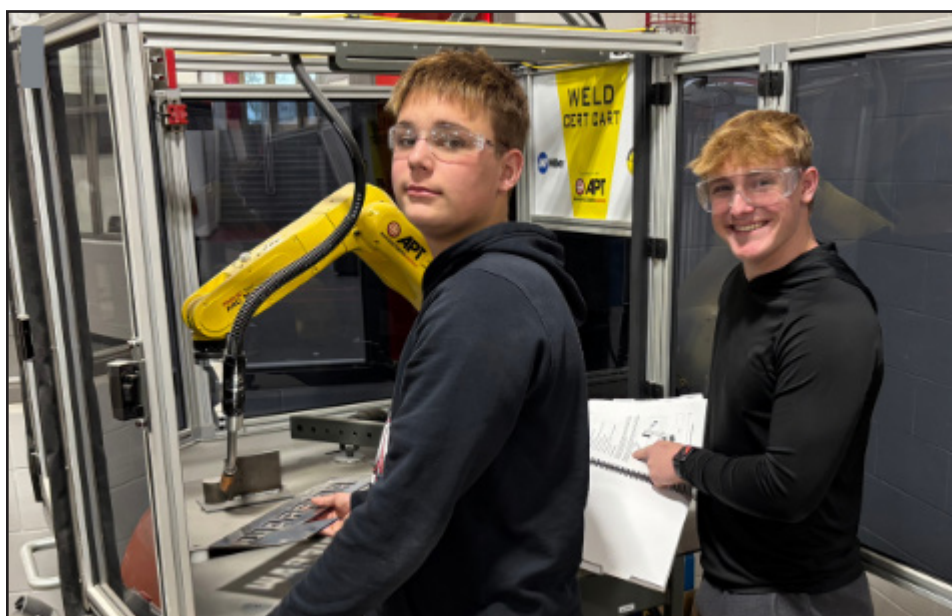
CTE facilities should prepare students for high-skill, high-demand careers. Yet too often, districts rely solely on teacher input—teachers who may be limited by their own past experiences—or consultants connected to vendors who lack classroom expertise. The result? A space that looks great but isn't designed for modern project-based learning with 25+ students.

Lessons from the field:

Culinary lab transformation

Take our own experiences overseeing a referendum project that included the renovation of our culinary labs. We had two incredibly skilled teachers who were experts in their craft but understandably hesitant to change. Their entire careers, from their own schooling through their teaching years, had taken place in residential-style kitchens. If we had simply followed that path, we would've rebuilt the same layout with nicer cabinets and updated appliances.

Early on, a vendor-consultant pitched a layout with just one commercial



Muskego High School students engage with the school's fabrication lab.

station that only four students could work at—at the same cost we later discovered we could provide six commercial kitchen stations, a commercial wash station, six fridges, and three commercial freezers.

While our background was in Technology Education, we took it upon ourselves to become the content experts. We took architectural plans and equipment proposals to local technical colleges and industry partners and asked: “What are we missing? How can we do better?”

That outreach completely shifted our approach. We redesigned a space that could support an entire class with real-world, commercial-grade experiences. Then came the next challenge: building collective efficacy with our teaching staff.

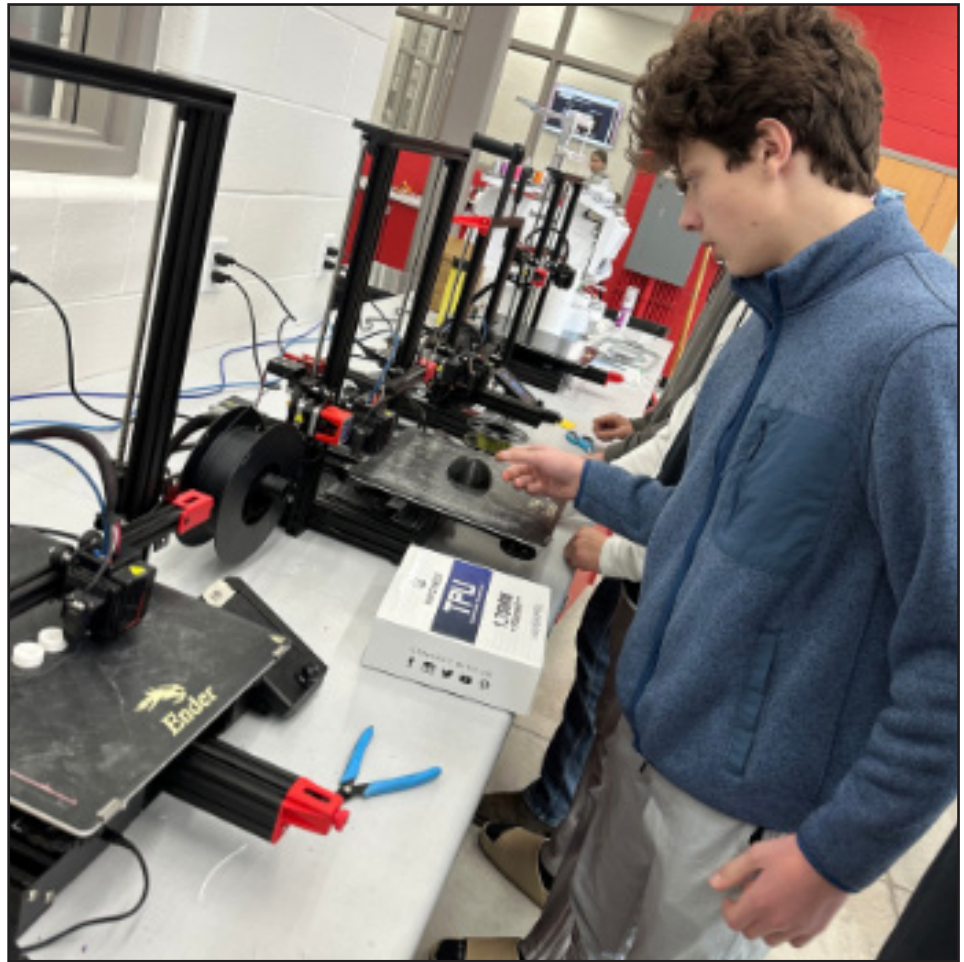
They were nervous, and understandably so—new equipment, new expectations, and big changes to how they had taught for decades. But with guidance and ongoing support, those same teachers have now hosted multiple transformative experiences, including:

- The Military MRE Challenge with guest judges
- A Food Truck Extravaganza for the high school staff
- And the Great Burger Showdown culinary competition

Through collaboration, professional development, and connecting the lab design to industry demands, we built a space that reenergized staff and is meaningfully preparing students for the workforce.

Designing with purpose, not just aesthetics

When planning a new CTE space, the physical design should be driven by instructional outcomes. Flexible



A Muskego High School student engages with the school's innovation lab.

lab layouts, integrated technology, and collaborative learning areas are essential—but they must be backed by the right tools and programs.

A 30-foot ceiling and a glass curtain wall might look stunning, but they won't deliver student outcomes. Spaces must support real-world applications—fabrication labs with CNC automation, robotic welding, and UV printing; healthcare labs built to industry specs; and robotics arenas ready for competitive programming. These labs must be multifunctional, allowing students to explore, fail, create, and succeed in a way that mirrors industry settings.

We're preparing students for jobs that may not even exist yet. That means labs must be agile—designed with change in mind. Avoid fixed furni-

ture and bulky layouts. Take a page from leading engineering firms: build flexible, reconfigurable work environments grounded in durable infrastructure and adaptable design.

Strong leadership is essential in guiding this shift. Staff will need support transitioning from traditional teaching spaces to industry-modeled labs. Your community voted for innovation—make sure you lead the change.

Curriculum and certifications: The power of alignment

Certifications are often the missing link in CTE programs. When embedded into coursework, they give students industry-recognized credentials that employers and post-secondary institutions respect. Whether students pursue college, apprenticeships, or

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Building the blueprint for STEM/CTE programming

Continued from P. 45

the workforce, certifications provide a competitive edge.

One of the most strategic decisions a district can make is designing curriculum and labs that align directly with certification pathways. Credentials like NC3, SolidWorks, FANUC Robotics, and OSHA 10 not only boost student outcomes, they unlock alternative funding streams—creating a win-win scenario. For example, Wisconsin's CTE Incentive Grant provides funding for every student who earns an approved certification. These dollars can be used for equipment upgrades, teacher training, and consumable materials, which are crucial as project-based learning costs continue to rise.

Imagine a student completing Level 1–3 of the Career Connections certifications in a building trades program, participating in Youth Apprenticeship with a local contractor their Junior and Senior year, and being awarded 950 apprenticeship hours by the union upon graduation from high school. That student skips the entry-level wage of \$25.65/hr and starts at \$26.81/hr (with benefits and a pension) and earns nearly \$28/hr within six months.

It all started by embedding certifications into our curriculum. This model plays out across industries—from building trades to healthcare to manufacturing—and it's a game-changer for students.

Strategic planning for grants and alternative funding

Thoughtful alignment of facilities, curriculum, and certifications not only improves student outcomes but also unlocks valuable funding opportunities. Early planning gives districts the edge when pursuing state and federal grants.

Wisconsin's DWD Fast Forward grant, for example, provides matching funds for CTE equipment purchases. Referendum cycles are ideal for leveraging these opportunities.

During our referendum, we were allocated \$600,000 for equipment across our automotive, fabrication, innovation, and building trades labs—but the true cost was closer to \$1 million. Through strategic grant writing and industry partnerships, we closed that gap. The result: fully equipped, industry-aligned labs that didn't compromise quality due to budget constraints.

Investing in staff capacity and growth

Facilities and curriculum are only effective with the right people leading the work. Many of our CTE educators have deep hands-on knowledge but may lack exposure to emerging technologies, modern certifications, or industry trends. Ongoing professional development is essential.

Teachers need continuous opportunities to train on new equipment, attend industry conferences, and collabo-

rate with professionals to keep their instruction relevant. When we transitioned our traditional woods lab into a modern fabrication lab, the change was significant. Our previous sequence—Woods 1 and 2—evolved into:

- Intro to 3D Printing & Design
- Intro to Fabrication
- Fabrication & Design I
- Fabrication & Design II
- Fabrication Entrepreneurship

This pathway now allows students to work with wood, metal, acrylic, leather, and more, culminating in an entrepreneurship course where students design, build, and sell products. Our teacher initially resisted, and understandably so—he was a master in woodworking, but had limited experience in automation and digital fabrication. We supported his professional growth, invested in training, and collaborated through the transition. Now, the projects coming out of this lab are nothing short of incredible, and they go far beyond basic woodworking projects.

Conclusion: CTE is a system, not a space

Ultimately, building a CTE facility isn't about furniture or floor plans. It's about creating a system, one rooted in student outcomes, industry relevance, financial sustainability, and continuous growth.

As more schools invest in CTE, let's shift the focus from what a room looks like to what students can do in it—and more importantly, what opportunities it opens for their future.



FALL 2025 CONFERENCE

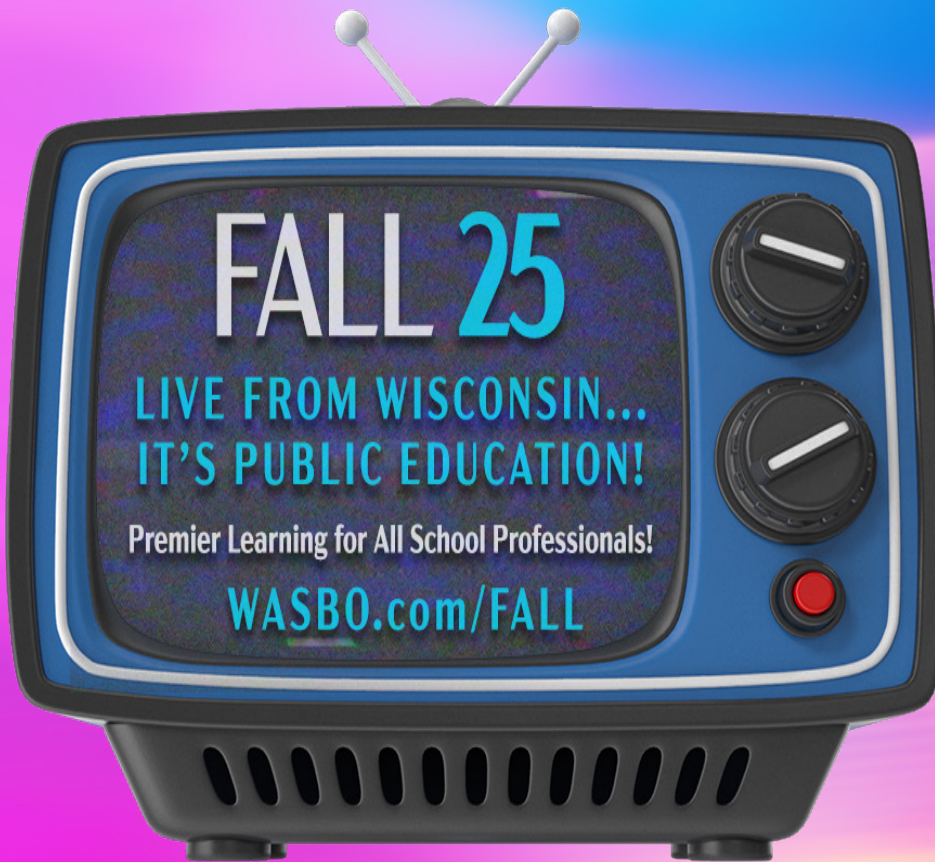
October 2-3, 2025

Elkhart Lake, Wis.

WASBO.com/Fall

Get ready to cue the spotlight, because WASBO is inviting you to join us for a live and in-person premier learning opportunity! This year's conference is packed with a dynamic lineup of breakout sessions, roundtables, and networking opportunities tailored for school business and operations professionals at every stage of their careers. Whether you're just starting out or are a seasoned veteran in your role as a bookkeeper, facilities director, accountant, business manager, custodian, or a dedicated service affiliate, you'll find sessions designed to provide fresh insights and practical strategies across key areas like finance, facility operations and management, HR, safety, and emerging technologies.

But the real showstopper? Thursday's keynote speaker, Katlin Hall, founder of Improv2Grow. With a background that includes launching The Second City Chicago's business arm and consulting for Fortune 100 companies, Katlin brings a unique blend of improvisation and behavioral science to the stage. Her interactive keynote will have you laughing, learning, and leaving with actionable communication skills you can apply immediately. It's professional development with a twist—engaging, energizing, and anything but ordinary! So, if you're ready to be part of an event that's as informative as it is inspiring, register now for WASBO's Fall Conference and be part of the action!



Consider coming up one day early on October 1 to Golf or Hike in WASBO's Student Scholarship Fundraisers!

Partnering with experts for smarter facility planning

At the heart of our facility improvement efforts are our **architects, engineers, and facility staff**. We rely heavily on them to provide comprehensive feedback and a full list of building issues during facility studies. Their input is incredibly valuable, and we commend them for the level of detail and expertise they bring to the table.

However, some systems (**particularly plumbing and electrical**) require more than what meets the eye. A walkthrough may reveal outdated lighting or aging fixtures, but it takes more than that to truly assess the condition of these complex systems.

The limits of visual inspections

While architects and engineers give us an excellent foundation, it's often hard to determine whether plumbing and electrical surveys are being done with full fidelity just by looking at them. These systems demand deeper inspection. Take lighting as an example. Sure, it's easy to spot when fixtures aren't LED. But that's just the start:

- What do the **main distribution panels** look like?
- Have they been scanned using **infrared thermal imaging** to detect overheating?
- What's the full **scope of the electrical load**. Are we powering parts of the building that don't need full service anymore?

Now consider a plumbing example. You might see a 25-year-old hot water



Andy Daniels

Director of Buildings and Grounds
Franklin Public Schools

system, but have we looked at everything around it?

- How are the **domestic waterlines**?
- Are the **valves functioning**—or even accessible?
- Do **sanitary lines** show signs of sagging from settling?
- Are **stormwater systems** clogged with stones and debris?
- Are **vent stacks** blocked with unexpected materials?

These are the deeper-level issues that often go unnoticed without targeted inspections.

Why our approach is changing

Facility surveys from our partners are vital, but looking deeper into building systems helps us plan better and prevent failures. However, thorough inspections sometimes require an investment—plumbing line scoping, for example, or thermal inspections of electrical panels. These costs are worth it, especially when compared to the cost of reactive emergency repairs.

That's why we're shifting from reactive to proactive planning. As a part of



Zach Guzlecki

Head Custodian (Pleasant View Elementary)
Franklin Public Schools

this transition, Franklin developed Requests for Proposals (RFPs) specifically for comprehensive electrical and plumbing system assessments.

Lessons from real incidents

We've had firsthand experience with why this deeper look is so important:

- At Pleasant View Elementary, the main sanitary line backed up and flooded classrooms, prompting us to move students to an off-site facility for the remainder of the school day.
- At Ben Franklin Elementary, a routine test of emergency showers and eyewash stations ended in a flood—this time, the shutoff valves didn't hold.
- A lightning strike exposed vulnerabilities in our electrical systems, leading to the loss of a minor piece of equipment.
- During the completion of an electrical project, we found additional issues with a circuit in a panel board.

Each of these situations drove home the same point: **we need to know**

what's happening beneath the surface.

What you should be surveying for

We've learned that partnering with licensed plumbing and electrical professionals isn't just helpful—it's essential. Here's what a thorough survey should include:

Plumbing system checklist

- **Water supply system**
 - Main water service line: Material, pressure, corrosion, leaks
 - Shutoff valves: Accessibility, functionality
 - Backflow prevention devices: condition
 - Water meters: Accuracy, logs
 - Booster pumps & pressure regulators: Leaks, performance
- **Domestic hot water system**
 - Water heaters (gas, electric, tankless): Age, capacity, efficiency
 - Storage & expansion tanks: Leaks, corrosion, relief valves
 - Recirculation pumps: Functionality, energy use
 - Temperature mixing valves (TMVs): Accuracy, scald protection compliance
 - Pipe insulation: Condition, completeness, efficiency
- **Sanitary sewer system**
 - Sewer lines & cleanouts: Root intrusion, blockages, camera scoping
 - Floor drains & traps: Odor prevention, water seals
 - Vent pipes & stacks: Obstructions, structural integrity
- **Stormwater drainage systems**
 - Roof drains & gutters: Clogging, slope, overflow risks
 - Downspouts & piping: Integrity, erosion concerns
 - Catch basins & trench drains: Functionality, debris removal
 - Sump pumps: Backup systems,

alarms, capacity

- **Kitchen & cafeteria plumbing**
 - Commercial Dishwashers: Leaks, temp compliance
 - Food Disposers: Functionality, blockages
 - Spray Valves & Pot Fillers: Efficiency, leaks
 - Grease Interceptors: Proper sizing, cleaning logs, condition
- **Science labs & specialty areas**
 - Chemical waste systems: Compliance, neutralization system
- **Water quality & efficiency**
 - Flow rates & pressure: Balanced supply
 - Water conservation measures: Low-flow fixtures, leak detection

Electrical system checklist

- **Electrical service & distribution**
 - Main service entrance: Transformer, disconnects, metering
 - Switchgear/switchboards: Load capacity, arc flash labels
 - Panelboards: Overloads, labeling, breaker condition
 - Electrical Rooms: Clearance, code compliance
- **Wiring & conduits**
 - Circuits: Voltage drop, overheating, correct sizing
 - Wiring types: Conduit, MC cable, exposed wiring
 - Junction boxes: Secure covers, proper grounding
- **Grounding & bonding**
 - Grounding system: Electrodes, continuity
 - Metal bonding: Panels, enclosures
 - Lightning protection: Ground rods, surge protectors
- **Emergency power systems**
 - Generators: Load tests, fuel system
 - UPS units: Battery condition, test logs
 - Battery backups: Run time, connections

Electrical safety and code compliance

- GFCI/AFCI: Correct placement, testing
- Arc flash protection: PPE labels, coordination study

Your physical survey becomes your 10-year guide

Once the survey is complete, you should receive a physical survey report—this document becomes your long-term roadmap for addressing system issues.

A well-constructed physical survey should include:

- **A complete equipment list**
- **Condition reports** on each major system/component
- **Proposed solutions** with clear scopes of work
- **Cost estimates** for each fix or upgrade
- **Priority levels** (e.g., urgent, 1–3 years, 3–10 years)

This report isn't just a snapshot—it should integrate with your **capital planning guide for the next 10 years**. You can use it to budget strategically, apply for funding, and schedule projects in a thoughtful, proactive way. Instead of reacting to emergencies, you'll be executing a smart, data-driven plan.

Move forward with confidence

The bottom line: **visual inspections are only the beginning**. Our architects and engineers provide a critical foundation, but complex systems like plumbing and electrical need **specialized, in-depth analysis**. By investing in thorough system surveys and using a well-structured physical report as your planning tool, we can ensure our facilities are safe, reliable, and ready to support our staff and students well into the future.

How to find the right expertise for your district

Over my 40-year career in the building industry — as an architect, construction manager, and facility director — I’ve seen firsthand how little information is sometimes used to make major building decisions. That’s unsettling.

When I present at conferences or speak with school districts and communities, I often begin with a quote from Donald Rumsfeld: “We don’t know what we don’t know.”

If we accept that truth, the next question becomes: Where do we go to find the information needed to make sound decisions—and how do we communicate it effectively?

Start with trust

The first question is: Who do you trust? There’s a consultant for everything; each offering goods and services they believe are best in the industry. But the firm’s reputation doesn’t always reflect the experience of the individuals on the team.

Many professionals don’t fully understand the differences between building ages, materials, and systems. Architects and engineers are trained to be broadly knowledgeable, but even their expertise is shaped by the projects they’ve encountered.

Ultimately, you want to know: Have they seen or solved this issue before?



Troy Miller

Architect at LHB and interim buildings and grounds director

Experience is invaluable — and often worth the investment.

Seek multiple opinions and perspectives

Another way to build confidence and become more familiar with the issue is to gather multiple opinions. When attending conferences or vetting consultants, talk to several individuals — three or four architects, for example. Learn about both the firms and the people behind them. Use each meeting as a chance to uncover reliable expertise.

I recommend focusing on the individuals, not just the firm. Jot notes on the back of their business cards or add details to your database. Marketing and business development staff can help connect you to the right technical experts, though they may be more assertive.

Meanwhile, those with deep technical knowledge might be more reserved — but don’t let that stop you. Ask ques-

tions. You’ll be surprised how quickly you can identify the right resources.

Visit the buildings

Buildings are complex, and it’s hard to provide sound information and guidance without seeing them firsthand. I strongly encourage on-site visits. These are opportunities to assess the consultant’s experience and approach. For example, when I’m called to investigate a roof leak, nearly half the time the issue isn’t the roof itself — it’s something else, like improper modifications or adjacent system failures. These visits and conversations often result in saving districts tens of thousands of dollars.

Avoid the path of least resistance

We’re creatures of habit. It’s easy to rely on familiar consultants or assume past experience translates to new challenges. But many districts wisely use multiple consultants because no one knows everything.

When planning an addition or renovation, it’s especially important to find professionals who understand how building codes apply to your specific building vintage and proposed uses. Some architects default to building a fire wall to separate old from new — it’s cheaper, faster, and simplifies their work.

But firewalls can increase long-term maintenance costs and complicate future projects. It’s a short-term fix that can lead to long-term expense.

Build confidence through knowledge

Each of these steps helps you better understand your buildings and potential projects. The goal is to build confidence in your decisions and communicate them clearly to administrators, school boards, and the community. That builds trust — and saves time and money. It also helps you craft a strong Request for Proposals (RFP). Too often, RFPs are vague and don't ask for relevant experience.

Your RFP should reflect your specific concerns, require a site visit, and ask respondents to demonstrate their

understanding of the project and their proposed approach.

Many districts focus immediately on fees. But in my experience, fees have little bearing on total project cost. A consultant's experience can save far more than the difference in fees. I recommend asking firms to submit fees in a separate envelope, opened only after interviews. This keeps the focus on qualifications.

Show, don't just tell

A picture is worth a thousand words. Use visuals to explain what's being proposed. Put the project in context — how will it affect future work or re-

duce costs elsewhere? Provide good/better/best scenarios to encourage discussion and understanding. Share copies with the press and include them in meeting minutes.

Do your homework

So, how do you find the right information or consulting team? The short answer: Do your homework. Lean on the building industry to help you understand the challenges, options, and costs.

The more you know, the easier it is to communicate with your team and your community — and make decisions that stand the test of time.



BEYOND THE PAIL

A WEBINAR
SERIES BY & FOR
FACILITIES LEADERS

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TRANSPORTATION TIDBITS WEBINAR SERIES

This quarterly webinar series features expert panelists who delve into a wide range of topics, including operations, management, safety & compliance.

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Empowering custodians & future facility leaders

For the first time, WASBO hosted two Lead Custodian Academies this summer as an extension of its professional learning offerings, empowering frontline custodial leaders with the tools, confidence, and skills to thrive in their roles. These academies brought together custodial leaders from across the state for full days of professional development, connection, and recognition. Held during the summer months for the first time, this strategic scheduling allowed for broader participation from those who are typically stretched thin during the school year.

Custodians are often the first to arrive, the last to leave, and the quiet force behind clean, safe, and functional learning environments. For lead custodians, those who supervise teams,

WASBO hosted two Lead Custodian Academies, 81 exhibitors, four keynotes, and vital learning across the state this summer

manage schedules, communicate with building administrators, and troubleshoot challenges, the role demands strong leadership as well as operational expertise.

The Lead Custodian Academy was designed around that reality. Its mission is to support and elevate the unique leadership responsibilities of lead custodians and custodial supervisors. Sessions focused on developing people-centered leadership skills, including effective communication, conflict resolution, staff scheduling, new employee training, morale building, and team accountability.

Rather than concentrating solely on technical skills, the academy empha-

sized leadership, communication, and the soft skills that often determine a team's success. Attendees networked with peers, shared strategies, and gained recognition for the broad impact of their roles. WASBO plans to continue this summer tradition to ensure these professionals have consistent access to leadership development. In addition to the academies, the 2025 Custodial & Maintenance Conferences brought WASBO staff to Oregon, Bangor, Amery, and Elkhorn, gathering over 700 facility professionals and 81 exhibitors. These \$50-per-person, full-day events included Facilities Manager Core Certification sessions, inspirational keynotes, and practical, hands-on content.

Keynotes reminded attendees that leadership often starts behind the scenes. Greg Gard (UW–Madison Men's Basketball) spoke in Oregon. Michael Durnin (former UW–La Crosse coach) inspired attendees in Bangor. Scott Nelson, a certified leadership coach, headlined Amery. Jeremiah Johnson of Muskego-Norway School District closed out the series in Elkhorn.

Conference sessions ranged from HVAC, turf care, and pool maintenance to supervision, trauma-informed care, and energy systems. Each conference featured a module from WASBO's DPI-recognized Facility Manager Core Certification Program. Oregon delivered Module



Congratulations to Carol Dufek (TOP) of South Milwaukee for winning the individual Safety Room Challenge in Elkhorn and to Todd Machmueller, Tyfani Mathewson, Patrick Krause & Jessica Radant (LEFT) of Ripon for winning the Team Clean Room Challenge in Oregon!

5 (Facility Life Cycle & Budgeting), Bangor hosted Module 1 (Custodial Operations), Amery offered Module 4 (Maintenance & Operations), and Elkhorn concluded with Module 2 (Building Systems).

Adding excitement to each site were the Cleaning Room and Safety Room Challenges. The Cleaning Room Challenge (sponsored by GSF USA) challenged team members and individuals to plan for a nightly, every-day cleaning of a school room while considering anything that might be broken. The cleaning concerns ranged from cleaner bottles with no label to electrical coils not being intact. Additionally, each Safety Room Challenge tasked teams and individuals with identifying and explaining how to resolve hazards staged by district staff at each of the conferences. The safety concerns ranged from open paper cutters to electrical equipment near sinks, and each of the team and individual winners identified & resolved the most hazards.

Here are the winners:

Oregon (June 25)

- Safety Room Team Challenge Winners: **Abi Chavez, Beth Milan, Lesley Lemminger, Robyn Beske, and Joe Lord of Beaver Dam Unified School District.**
- Clean Room Team Challenge Winners: **Todd Machmueller, Tyfani Mathewson, Patrick Krause, and Jessica Radant of Ripon Area School District.**
- Clean Room Individual Challenge Winner: **Tyler Kerr of Fox Point-Bayside School District.**

Bangor (July 16)

- Safety Room Team Challenge Winners: **Jaclyn Bundy, Xor Vue, Mayriciel Aquino, Por Choua Yang, Chad Yang, Noah Finn,**



TOP: Congratulations to Corrado "Dino" Marino, Jose Gonzalez, and Tiffany Johnson of Sun Prairie Area School District for winning the Team Safety Room Challenge in Elkhorn! RIGHT: Hear Elkhorn Keynote Speaker Jeremiah Johnson's next freestyle rap performance at the Midwest Facility Masters Conference in October!

and Cong Moua of the School District of La Crosse.

- Clean Room Team Challenge Winners: **Amanda Boswell, Matt Nagy, Steven Vonn, and Kendra Rentz of Bangor School District.**
- Clean Room Individual Challenge Winner: **Tammy Johnson of Melrose-Mindoro Area School District.**

Amery (July 23)

- Safety Room Team Challenge Winners: **Nancy Sward, John Holm, and Randy Altendorf of Winter School District.**
- Safety Room Individual Challenge Winner: **Susan Stuiwenga of the School District of Turtle Lake.**
- Clean Room Team Challenge Winners: **Mitch Breed, Dave Kuffel, Chris Maresca, and Jaydon Clark of Cameron School District.**
- Clean Room Individual Challenge Winner: **Carol Librande, also of Cameron School District.**

Elkhorn (July 30)

- Safety Room Team Challenge Winners: **Corrado "Dino" Marino, Jose Gonzalez, and Tiffany Johnson of Sun Prairie Area**



School District.

- Safety Room Individual Challenge Winner: **Ariel Whitmore of Oconomowoc Area School District.**
- Clean Room Team Challenge Winners: **Rosalba Mora, Ben Zerrien, and Maria Deaton of Kettle-Moraine School District.**
- Clean Room Individual Challenge Winner: **Carol Dufek of South Milwaukee School District.**

WASBO extends its sincere thanks to all attendees, speakers, sponsors—including Nexus Solutions and GSF USA—exhibitors, and host districts.

These conferences and academies reflect the essential role custodians play in helping to educate students. They are not just operations experts, but as team leaders and culture-builders. We look forward to welcoming even more participants in 2026!

WASBO Member Profile: Kodi Ethridge



**Kodi Ethridge is the
Buildings and Grounds
Supervisor for Viroqua
Area School District.**

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Viroqua, Wisconsin.

What WASBO Regional are You In?

Southwest Regional

**Describe your involvement in and
participation with WASBO.**

Continually learning the benefits of being a WASBO member and how it helps serve our district.

Describe WASBO in one word.

Thorough.

What makes you proud to be a WASBO member?

The amount of involvement that WASBO has throughout all programs of the district.

What made you want to work in education?

I enjoy watching and helping young kids grow into successful adults.

What's your favorite part of your job?

Having the ability to help make a beautiful and safe district for our staff and students to thrive in. It allowed me to coach several sports such as baseball, basketball, and football for many years.

When you're not at work, what do you do for fun?

Spending time with my wife Allie, and our two beautiful daughters, Alexandria (4) and Ariella(2).

**What was your favorite memory
from the last school year?**

Being involved in the process of designing and overseeing the construction of several amazing additions to our school district.

What is your favorite TV show?

"How I Met Your Mother"

What has been your favorite part of the summer?

My kids starting sports and playing on the same fields I played on when I was growing up, in the district that I now serve.

**What're you most looking forward
to about the upcoming school year?**

My oldest daughter, Alexandria will be attending 4K, and I am excited to see her in the halls of the schools where I work.

Regional update

WASBO has seven regional groups (along with a few facility-focused regionals) that meet anywhere from quarterly to bi-weekly. Below is updated information on new Regional chairs and 2025-26 meeting dates!



Northwest Regional

- Chairs: Lynette Coy & Shannon Grindell
- Chairs emails: lynette.coy@rfsd.k12.wi.us
grindells@osceolak12.org
- Frequency of meetings: Last Friday of the month at 10 AM
- Mode of meeting: Hybrid depending on other WASBO meetings and schedules
- Next meeting: September 26

Wisconsin Valley Regional

- Chair: Lynn Knight
- Chair email: Lynn_Knight@nekoosa.k12.wi.us
- Frequency of meetings: Six times a year-schedule determined at the beginning of the year
- Mode of meeting: In-Person with virtual option
- Next meeting: October 31 in Rhinelander

Northeast & Bay Area Regional

- Chair: Janelle Marotz
- Chair email: marotzj@denmark.k12.wi.us
- Frequency of meetings: Monthly
- Mode of meeting: Both in-person and virtual with a desire to have more in-person meetings
- Next meeting: 8:30-11 AM on September 19 (Hybrid at Howard-Suamico School District)

Southeast Regional

- Chair: John Stellmacher
- Chair email: stellmacherj@kmsd.edu
- Frequency of meetings: Monthly swapping between in person and virtual each month
- Next meeting: August 28 (Virtual)

Madison Regional

- Chairs: Nathan Knitt
- Chair email: knittn@fortschools.org
- Frequency of meetings: Every two weeks
- Mode of meetings: Mostly virtual
- Next meeting: September 12 (Virtual)

Southwest Regional

- Chair: Demetri Andrews
- Chair email: andrews@platteville.k12.wi.us
- Frequency of meetings: Quarterly
- Mode of meetings: Hybrid
- Next meeting: September 12 at CESA 3 in Fennimore

West Central Regional

- Chair: Wayde Pollock
- Chair email: wpollock@cesa4.org
- Frequency of meetings: Monthly on the first Thursday
- Mode of meetings: Hybrid
- Next meeting: September 4 at CESA 3

Milwaukee Metro Facility Regional

- Chair: Nick Datka
- Chair email: datkni@elkhorn.k12.wi.us
- For more information, contact Nick!

Coulee Facility Regional

- Chair: Scott Johnson
- Chair email: johnson.scott@wsalem.k12.wi.us
- Frequency of meetings: First Thursday of the month
- Mode of meetings: In-Person
- Next meeting: September 4

For more information, please contact your Regional Chair!

Celebrating our New Members!

Please congratulate our new members!

District Professionals

- **Michael Blaskowski**, Director of Facility Services and Safety, Fond Du Lac School District
- **Alison Bondar**, District Accountant, School District of Waukesha
- **Dalton Bray**, Custodian, Elkhorn Area School District
- **Tara Chesebro**, Business Manager, Green Lake School District
- **Larry Chua**, Custodian, McFarland School District
- **Jason Crocker**, Head Custodian, School District of Onalaska
- **Daniel Davis**, Lead Custodian, Mukwonago Area School District
- **Jonathan DeLuca**, Lead Custodian, River Falls School District
- **Jacob Deshotels**, Operations Manager, Nativity Jesuit Academy
- **Linda Dwyer**, Head Custodian, Oconomowoc Area School District
- **Christopher Earle**, Business Manager, Elkhorn Area School District
- **Nathan Fox**, Head Custodian, East Troy Community School District
- **Inga Fredericks**, Lead Custodian, Merrill Area Public Schools
- **Jeffrey Gardon**, Finance Manager, School District of Menomonee Falls
- **Haley Gausmann**, Budget/Planning/Accounting, Madison Metropolitan School District
- **Trinton Gess**, Business Manager, Valders Area School District
- **Marc Grasswick**, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Nicolet High School District
- **John Goodman**, Business Manager, Fall Creek School District
- **Marc Grasswick**, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Nicolet High School District
- **Frankie Hage**, Custodian, Clinton Community School District
- **Carissa Hammons**, Sheboygan County

- **Brenda Hartl**, HR Specialist, Sturgeon Bay Schools
- **Carol Hepner**, Administrative Assistant, Somerset School District
- **Adam Herkert**, Building & Grounds Supervisor, Stratford School District
- **Matt Hermesen**, Lead Custodian, River Falls School District
- **Austin Hiess**, Superintendent & Director of Special Education, New Auburn School District
- **Amy Holley**, Director of Business Services, Hamilton School District
- **Eric Johnson**, Facilities Superintendent, City of Waupaca
- **Ryan Johnson**, Senior Director of Operations, Hmong American Peace Academy
- **Patrick Kassens**, Head Custodian, Oconomowoc Area School District
- **Ian Kelly**, Lead Custodian, Madison College
- **Tyler Kerr**, Head Custodian, Fox Point-Bayside School District
- **Lachelle Lackey**, Director of Facilities, Howard Suamico School District
- **Cary Liao**, Head Custodian, Shorewood School District
- **Dean Loew**, Building & Grounds Supervisor, Somerset School District
- **Megan Loomans**, CESA #5
- **Aaron Markiewicz**, School District of Greenfield
- **Aaron Mason**, Head Custodian, Kenosha Unified School District
- **Marcela Mata**, School District of Waukesha
- **Matt McCuddin**, Head Custodian, School District of Onalaska
- **Savannah Medley**, Administrative Assistant, La Crosse School District
- **Scott Mellum**, Custodian, McFarland School District
- **Nikolai Monson**, Lead Custodian, Shorewood School District
- **Olivia Osmann**, Head Custodian, East Troy Community School District

- **Patrick Radlinski**, Maintenance, Salem School District
- **Erik Ramirez**, Custodian, Wauwatosa School District
- **Ryan Rieger**, Custodian, West Salem School District
- **Hayley Schipper**, Payroll/Business Assistant, Westby School District
- **Virgil Statz**, Director of Buildings & Grounds, Dodgeand School District
- **Nick Summers**, Accountant, CESA #5
- **Scott Truskowski**, IT Coordinator, Ashwaubenon School District
- **Dawn Walls**, Lead Custodian, Clinton Community School District
- **Christina Wayland**, Lead Purchasing Clerk, Madison Metropolitan School District
- **Erin Westcott**, Finance Manager, School District of Bayfield

Service Affiliates

- **Ashtyn Boland Morrison**, Sales Rep, Boland Recreation
- **Michael Breyer**, Sales Account Executive, Lifetouch
- **Brent Dahmke**, Education Consultant, Kelly Education
- **Ben Glisk**, Director of Business Development, ESS
- **Max Hoffman**, Sales Executive, Complex Security Solutions Inc.
- **Nicole Jahnke**, Event Specialist, Sourcewell
- **Ashley Kaniasty**, Administrative Coordinator, EMC Insurance
- **Patrick Leigl**, Shareholder, von Briesen & Roper, s.c.
- **Charlie Munkwitz**, Retirement Plan Consultant, M3 Insurance
- **Allen Perkins**, Customer Relations, SafetyFirst Playground Maintenance
- **Mary Pfeifer**, Educational Consultant, Nexus Solutions
- **Tim Prosek**, Territory Sales Associate, Musco Sports Lighting
- **Todd Riggs**, CEO, Stain Erasers
- **Roger Rindo**, Educational Consultant, Nexus Solutions

Member Moves

Please join us in congratulating members on their successes as they move to a new position!

- **Erik Farrar**, Business Manager, Belleville to Business Manager, Evansville
- **Jessie Backes**, Business Manager, Marshall to Business Manager, Belleville
- **Margaret Banker**, Superintendent, Cambridge to Superintendent, Spooner
- **Nathan Carlson**, Facilities Director, Howard Suamico to Project Manager, MSN Professional
- **Matt Clark**, Finance Manager, Menomonee Falls to Director of Business & Finance, Sun Prairie
- **Dave Gerberding**, Business Manager, Somerset to Assistant Director of Finance, Hudson
- **Amy Holley**, Director of Business Services, Hartland/Lakeside to Director of Business Services, Hamilton
- **Bryan Kadlec**, Business Manager, CESA #8 to Business Manager, Shawano
- **Traci Lewis**, Assistant Director of Finance, Hudson to Finance Specialist, Ellsworth
- **Katie Reynolds**, Custodial Supervisor, Verona to Custodial Supervisor, DeForest
- **Erica Schley**, District Administrator, Flambeau to Business Manager, Lakeland Union
- **Matthew Sontag**, Lead Custodian, Arrowhead Union to Lead Custodian, Menomonee Falls
- **Sean Strauss**, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Shorewood to Director of Buildings and Grounds, Lake Geneva
- **Amy Jo Vesperman**, Business Manager, Dodgeville, to Director of Business Services, Waupun

Member Retirements

Thank you for all you've done for the students and the profession. Please keep in touch!

- **Biran Bautz**, President, Engineered Security Solutions
- **Caroline Hintze**, Director of Business Services, Waupun Area School District
- **Peter Kempen**, Business Manager, Raymond School District #14
- **Jacqueline Niemie Boland**, Assistant Vice President, Wintrust Financial
- **Robert Smith**, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Tomorrow River School District

Email Retire@wasbo.com if you're planning to retire soon!

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WASBO's Learning Calendar

Here is a look at the professional learning opportunities that make WASBO's Learning Calendar. For more information on BROAD, DEEP and PERSONALIZED Learning offerings, visit WASBO.com/Learn

AUGUST

August 22

p-Card User Group

Noon | Virtual Meeting

WASBO.com/PUG

August 22

Money Talks: A Financially-Focused Webinar Series for Business Officials

8:30 AM | Virtual Webinar

WASBO.com/MoneyTalks

SEPTEMBER

September 3-4

First Year Academy Southern Cohort

First Meeting (Madison)

Open to all school business and facility officials in the first few years of their role

WASBO.com/FYA

September 11

Beyond the Pail Webinar: Office of School Safety

8:30 AM | Virtual Webinar

WASBO.com/Pail

September 17-18

First Year Academy Northern Cohort First Meeting (Wausau)

Open to all school business and facility officials in the first few years of their role

WASBO.com/FYA

September 23

CSRM: Fundamentals of Risk Management

Course 1 of 5 on the risk management process

WASBO.com/CSRM

September 25

CSRM: Handling School Risks

Course 2 of 5 on the risk management process

WASBO.com/CSRM

September 26

Money Talks: A Financially-Focused Webinar Series for Business Officials

8:30 AM | Virtual Webinar

WASBO.com/MoneyTalks

OCTOBER

October 1

Golf & Hike Student Scholarship

Fall Fundraiser

Elkhart Lake

WASBO.com/Fall

October 2-3

2025 FALL Conference

Elkhart Lake | Live from Wisconsin...

It's Public Education! Premier Learning for All School Officials

WASBO.com/Fall

October 9-10

Wally Zastrow Leadership Academy First Meeting

Leadership is a choice.

Will you step forward and join this year's leadership cohort?

WASBO.com/Leadership

October 14

CSRM: Measuring School Risks

Course 3 of 5 on the risk management process

WASBO.com/CSRM

October 16

CSRM: Funding School Risks

Course 4 of 5 on the risk management process

WASBO.com/CSRM

October 22

Transportation Tidbits Webinar:

Tiered Systems

Noon | Virtual Webinar

WASBO.com/Tidbits



October 27-28

2025 Midwest Facility Masters Conference

Wis. Dells | Building strength in school facility superheroes across the Midwest!

WASBO.com/Midwest

October 31

Money Talks: A Financially-Focused Webinar Series for Business Officials

8:30 AM | Virtual Webinar

WASBO.com/MoneyTalks

NOVEMBER

November 11

CSRM: Administering School Risks

Course 5 of 5 on the risk management process

WASBO.com/CSRM

November 13

CSRM: Crisis Prevention

Update Credit on the risk management process

WASBO.com/CSRM

November 18

Special Education Budgeting Academy First Meeting

Sold out yearlong academy to ensure you're making the most of your special ed. budgets!

WASBO.com/SEBA

MIDWEST FACILITY MASTERS 2025 CONFERENCE

October 27-28, 2025 | Wisconsin Dells

School facility leaders are the unsung superheroes of education, keeping campuses safe, efficient, and inspiring every day. Suit up for the 2025 Midwest Facility Masters Conference, which is all about “Building Strength in Your School Facility Superheroes.” This two-day hero-training ground empowers facility managers, buildings & grounds crews, business officials, and administrators with the latest powers in safety, energy, automation, disaster recovery, AI, and staff wellness. On October 27, the Exhibit Hall will be bursting with cutting-edge gadgets and innovations. It sold out in just 20 minutes! Earn career-boosting certifications (CPE, CPMM, CPS) and level up with Facilities Manager Core Modules. By joining forces with facility heroes from Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Missouri, your district taps into a Justice League of knowledge; sharing ideas, forging alliances, and galvanizing change.

Registering your team isn't just smart; it's heroic. With training, certifications, vendor resources, and super-charged connections, the 2025 Midwest Facility Masters Conference ensures your squad leaves stronger, sharper, and ready to save the day for students, staff, and community.



**REGISTER NOW
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MIDWEST](https://wasbo.com/midwest)**



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