



Newsletter

WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATORS OF SPECIAL SERVICES, LTD.

Fall 2009



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President's Message by Gary Myrah



Greetings, I am writing this on Leif Erickson day and listening to the forecast of the first possible snow coming in this weekend. Now we know why they are no longer stressing global warming, and instead are referring to global climate change. If you have a chance to do some reading outside of your job, I would recommend: **Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution--and How It Can Renew America** by Thomas L. Friedman. This book has incredible research and helps understand various global issues.

Now to the WCASS issues. I would like to encourage you to attend the public hearing that will be held in conjunction with the WDPI Leadership Conference in Madison. This will be a public hearing conducted by the State Superintendent's Advisory Council on Special Education. This would be your opportunity to voice your opinion on special education issues. Typically the audience is made up of parents that have issues with local districts/directors. I believe it would be beneficial to hear from directors regarding issues of concern. Last year the Council was made aware of the Medicare concerns and the shortage of various special education professionals in the state. The time of the hearing will be 5:00-7:00 PM on Monday (the day before the conference begins). So if you plan to arrive on Monday and could spare some time, stop in. Last year's hearing was the first in a long time where we had a sizeable representation of directors and it was noted.

I also want to remind everyone that we will be having an election for president elect to WCASS at our spring conference. The term of office is two years as president elect (which is an opportunity to be on the executive board and participate in selected workgroups), then two years as president, then two years as past president (during which you again are primarily on the executive board). The position is open to anyone interested in becoming more involved in influencing change in education.

The two-year term of president will be busier than the two years before or after. Yet it is a great experience to be actively involved in making change to improve instruction for children. In addition, as president, you are able to go to the International CASE meeting held in November. CASE picks up part of the cost and WCASS picks up the remaining costs. So there is no financial burden to you or your district and it is a great experience. This year the conference is in San Diego, California. So contact Phil Knobel or me if you have questions or are interested in submitting your name. Again, this is open to any WCASS member, even if you have not been involved in other WCASS committees or executive board.

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One of the roles I have had this year is participating on the WDPI SLD Rule Revision Ad Hoc Task Force that is reviewing and re-working the Specific Learning Disabilities criteria as it relates to Response to Intervention (RtI). Vaunce Ashby, SLD Consultant and John Humphries, School Psychology Consultant have worked diligently to provide the committee with research that will provide specificity to the regulations (as WCASS has requested) that will provide improved methods of identification, yet maintain the incident rate approximately the same.

The Ad Hoc Committee met for the last time on Monday, October 5, 2009 to review every line to the proposal for the regulations. We are not at liberty to share even a draft version of the document since it has not received final approval through all of the different levels at WDPI.

The actual document will not differ much from previous documents that went to hearing. If you are interested in learning more, you can go to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) website and search for an article entitled Response to Instruction in the Identification of Learning Disabilities: A Guide for School Teams. Within this article is a description of a "Dual Discrepancy Format" in which there will be two factors for qualifying for learning disabilities. First will be low academic performance which will compare a student's performance to their classmates. The at risk criteria will be a performance that is 1.25 standard deviations from the mean in one or more areas after intervention. The second level will be measuring the student's rate of progress over time.

Much of the language that will be in the regulation parallels the federal language. There has been extensive discussion regarding the specifics of the regulations including do we need to specify the number of data points, to how many intensive interventions to how long the interventions need to be to who is providing the intervention, etc. The representative from the Wisconsin State Reading Association expressed concern over the specificity of the regulations and stated she had concerns her association may not support the rule. She raised several interesting issues during our deliberations which will likely be considered when the WDPI prepares an informational packet/manual on how to implement the regulations.

As soon as we receive a final version of the document from WDPI, we will make it available to all of you. The WDPI is anticipating having another round of hearings for public input. Our hope is to have a final version that we can review and discuss at one of our conferences. Since the hearings will be throughout the state we will be seeking WCASS members to appear to testify on behalf of the regulations.

Another experience that I have had involves the OSEP preliminary process for their onsite visit to Wisconsin in December. As the chair of the State Superintendent's Advisory Council on Special Education, I was responsible for preparing a response to a technical survey that was sent to WDPI for the Council's input. The survey was a challenge, so it was necessary to convene a special meeting of the Council to collectively respond to the questions. During this session it was reported the parents of children with special needs were also sent a survey. One of the representatives from a parent advocacy group stated it took a couple of hours to research the answers to the questions.

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As we discussed the questions as a group, it was noted that the directors throughout the State did not receive any form of a survey to complete. Further, it was noted by Don Nielson from Racine, that the survey was not offered in a format that he could access as a visually impaired person. He found it ironic that the federal agency that is the watchdog for ensuring equal access for individuals with impairments would not have given thought to how they should solicit input from individuals with disabilities.

The last issue that I will speak to in this column is the continued growing concern related to restraint and seclusion. As an organization it appears we have been portrayed in a negative way based on our defensive position on this topic. Unfortunately what is not discussed is the concern that many of us have regarding the outcome of legislation in this area. We are already overwhelmed by the required documentation that is already our responsibility. Many have discussed the concern of what alternatives does a school have to preserve the safety of the children and staff if a child becomes physically aggressive. As directors we must maintain vigilance with our staff and building administrators to receive proper training on how to prevent aggressive behavior and safe methods of handling aggressive behaviors when it occurs.

We also need to start having stories of success as well as stories of situations that required physical intervention shared with representatives throughout the State. I believe we have reached a point where as a group we need to be proactive and assertive in pointing to the successes of special education. We need to begin to bring forward individuals that represent the positive aspects of special education.

In closing I also would encourage the use of our new interactive website to post questions or issues. We recognize that everyone is up to their eyeballs in issues and you may have little precious time to check the website out. However, we hear that once this is rolling it will become quite popular based on similar programs around the nation.

I wish you a great fall and look forward to seeing you at the WDPI Leadership Conference in November.

— Gary

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Executive Director's Comments

by Phil Knobel

I hope the school year has gotten off to a good start for you. Based on the meetings I have attended and discussions I have had with directors, it seems everyone is very busy and finding more students in need of services.

In the WCASS office we have upgraded our website and membership database. You now have your own member portal. When you are logged into your portal you can view open invoices, update your view upcoming conference dates, register for conferences and view a member directory.

Recently you should have received an e-mail announcing the **WCASS Communication Platform** from K12QA. This web-based tool is both a discussion forum and a document repository brought to you by Oasys, LLC. It allows WCASS members to post questions and answers as well as Microsoft Word, Excel and Powerpoint as well as Adobe pdf documents on a variety of special education topics. The WCASS Communication Platform is easy-to-use and offers you the opportunity to network and collaborate with other WCASS members right from your desk.

This service is the first of its kind to be used with the educational community (as far as we know). This is a member-only forum that we hope grows into a very important information and discussion forum for members. It is new so we anticipate making changes and improvements as we move forward. It is important that members provide us with suggestions and comments so we can make it a useful resource for members. If you have not logged in yet, please do so today. If you have problems logging in, contact Jeanne or Deb in our office.

— Phil

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Success is not built on what we
accomplish for ourselves.

Its foundation lies in what we do for others.

Danny Thomas
(1912-1991)
American Entertainer

President-Elect Comments by David Kwiatkowski



Student learning and progress...

what does “trust” have to do with it?

One does not have to look far or possess an expert eye to recognize how “mistrust” has become a driving force in both policy and practice in public education over the past several decades! Our student assessment systems have been developed and implemented to serve school accountability purposes rather than to inform and guides us toward improved student learning. It is clear that these systems represent our federal government’s mistrust that educators will adequately promote student learning without this public scrutiny. In special education, we do more than any others in education to protect and document student and parent rights, suggesting that we can’t be trusted not to trample all over these if not prescriptively regulated. Most currently, the emphasis being placed upon “horror stories” related to the use of seclusion and restraints suggest that parents and legislators should not trust schools to keep students safe without more explicit and detailed regulations to force them to do so. But does this scrutiny born of mistrust really lead to better outcomes for our students?

My personal experience tells me that they don’t! I have observed over the years that it is not the procedural protections governing the IEP process that holds out the best promise for the student to make good progress, but rather the quality of relationships between those who sit at the IEP conference table, particularly those of the teacher and the parent(s). Similarly, it is not the pressure or the drive to score well on the WKCE’s that motivate students to care for the schoolwork and love learning, but more frequently it is the desire to please the teacher who has shown care and high hopes for them, personally. Research has clearly pointed out that high teacher expectations for their students is far more powerful in improved student learning than are either sanctions or material rewards related to student progress.

Further, mistrust carries costs in terms of both material and human resources. When we are not able to trust each other, we naturally spend more time and energy in cautious vigilance and protection, which leaves less for real learning and growth. The shift of time and attention that we have devoted legal presentations versus innovative instructional practices in our professional development programs over the past years would seem to illustrate that principle at work. Similarly, if we are spending millions of dollars and countless hours in the administration of testing programs that provide little useful information to guide student learning, we obviously have that much less time and money to invest in improved instructional practices which lead to improved student learning. Even as we enjoy the promise of unanticipated resources for improved learning opportunities for our student and staff through ARRA funding, we find ourselves frustrated and discouraged by increased paperwork, regulation and the threat of poorly defined accountability measures, all reminding us the lack of trust for as professionals to use these funds wisely for the best benefit of our students. So if we as educational leaders recognize that the scrutiny borne of mistrust is not beneficial to student learning and school improvement, what can we do about it?

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I believe the answer lies in empirically demonstrating the value of positive human relational factors in improving student learning, particularly the importance of trust. Noted educational researchers such as Wayne Hoy, Megan Tschannen-Moran, and Roger Goddard have demonstrated that the level of trust between educators, students and parents is positively related to student learning in urban and suburban schools, with most notable impact seen in children of poverty. I hope to replicate their studies over the next year in small, rural elementary schools across Wisconsin. If you are interested in this research or would even like to be of some help in its completion, please talk to me about it at one of upcoming conferences or contact me by email at davek@cesa8.k12.wi.us

I promise to keep all who may be interested informed as the project develops and we come closer to answering the question: "Student learning... what does "trust" have to do with it?"

As always, thanks for listening!

— Dave

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The Standard for Politically Effective School Leaders

With the 2009-10 school year well underway and the 2009-11 State Budget carnage still fresh in our minds, it is a good time to continue our discussion on how you can help strengthen the SAA and become an even stronger advocate for the children in your school district. The last article in this series discussed the purpose and inner workings of the SAA. This article focuses on what you must do to be a politically effective school leader.

The politically effective Wisconsin school administrator does the following in advocating on behalf of Wisconsin school children:

STAY INFORMED

Your knowledge of the issues and of the legislative process builds credibility with your legislator; and your credibility dictates your legislator's level of response to your concerns. Stay up to date on legislative/political issues by reading the SAA Capitol Report as well as your local newspapers. Also, before contacting public officials, it is vitally important that you know and understand the SAA's positions on issues. If you ever have questions concerning legislative issues, please contact the SAA at 608-242-1370 or via email through the SAA website at www.wsaa.org

FOCUS ON YOUR LEGISLATORS

Rather than wasting time and energy contacting all legislators, concentrate on influencing your legislators. Communication from citizens residing outside their district rarely influences lawmakers. Focus your efforts where the potential for influence is greatest – your legislators.

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Standard continued from pg. 6**BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS**

The best way to influence your legislators is to develop relationships with them. Each legislator has a “small circle of experts” that they count on for advice on various legislative issues. It is important for you to become one of your legislator’s experts on K-12 education issues. Inviting your legislators to your school is a great way to begin or continue developing this relationship. In fact, make it a point to meet with each of your legislators to review key issues at least once a year. It’s a good idea to coordinate these visits with your district’s administrative team.

KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR’S STAFF

A legislator’s staff is the gatekeeper to power. If you cannot talk directly with your legislator, expressing your school district’s concerns to an office staffer, whom you know and who knows you, is the next best thing.

KEEP SAA STAFF INFORMED

SAA members are an invaluable source of field intelligence for SAA staff. Legislators often speak more candidly with constituents than they do with lobbyists. Inform the SAA staff what your legislators are saying in their districts. Also, remember to copy the SAA on your communications to your legislators.

PARTICIPATE IN SAA POLICY DEVELOPMENT

We encourage your participation in every step of the SAA policy development process available to you through the SAA Legislative Committee and your professional association. Also, do not hesitate to respond to SAA positions on legislative issues. Participation in the policy development process, and member review of and response to SAA positions, is the best way to ensure that SAA positions represent the views of the members.

RESPOND TO SAA LEGISLATIVE ALERTS

Grassroots lobbying is the real strength of the SAA. Our ability to mobilize SAA members in response to SAA legislative alerts is the backbone of our grassroots strategy. When the SAA issues a legislative alert, we need your response. Our success on important legislation depends on it.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE SAA PAC

The School Administrators Alliance Political Action Committee (SAA PAC), which is supported by members of all four SAA member associations, was created to strengthen the SAA as a political organization. SAA PAC funds are used for campaign contributions designed to strengthen our relationship with key legislators and to influence legislation. A strong SAA PAC is critical to our success on legislative issues.

The SAA, like your professional association, is prohibited from using any portion of its budget to make contributions to anyone running for or holding elective office. Therefore, if we want a stronger voice in Madison to help us advocate more effectively on behalf of Wisconsin school children, it is vital that we support the SAA PAC.

I hope you find this information useful in understanding how you can be more effective as an advocate for Wisconsin school children. If you have any questions please contact SAA Director of Government Relations John Forester at (608) 242-1370 or john.forester@wsaa.org. Thanks for listening and, as always, thank you for your efforts on behalf of Wisconsin school children. For up-to-date reports on legislative activities, please visit the SAA’s website at www.wsaa.org

———— **John D. Forester**
Director of Government Relations

Welcome to the WCASS Communication Platform

WCASS is pleased to introduce our new Communication Platform, powered by K12QA. The Communication Platform is a professional networking service provided to WCASS members by OASYS LLC, and is included as part of your WCASS membership. The Platform offers both a document repository and a discussion forum to facilitate communication among WCASS members.

Why K12QA?

It's fast, simple and you get information quickly. K12QA reduces the need to check websites. You receive e-mails only on topics that you are interested in. E-mails sent by you only go to people who are interested in your topic. So your colleague doesn't get unwanted e-mails either.

How do I get started?

Simply open an internet browser and go to: www.wcass.org

Click on: WCASS Communication Platform, then Members Login Here.

As part of your membership, your e-mail address has been pre-loaded. Your initial password is WCASS.

Now what?

Click on the: My Profile box

Make sure your demographic information is correct. And this is a good time to change your password.

Show "Questions to Answer" From offers two options – All Categories or Only Preferred Categories. Your setting selection here determines what questions appear when you log in to the Communication Platform.

To determine when you are emailed notifications, click on: Notification Options (Click to Expand)

Under Each category there are 3 options:

1. Do Not Notify – This indicates you should not be notified when someone posts a question or a response in this specific category. However, you may still search this category. And you may still optionally Subscribe to a specific discussion within this category.
2. Questions Only – This indicates that you should be notified when someone posts a question to this category but you are not notified when people respond to the question.
3. Questions and Responses – Anytime someone submits anything to this category, you are sent an e-mail. (Recommended)

By default all categories are set to "Questions and Responses". After you have completed all your changes, remember to hit the SUBMIT button.

Why are there different category labels?

Some categories begin with "WCASS –" while other categories begin with "WI –". The categories that begin with WCASS will only be available to WCASS members. Initially, the WI categories are only available to WCASS members as well. However, at some future time, the WI categories may be shared with another professional organization such as the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials. This sharing of categories will not occur without the consent of WCASS and with prior notification.

How do I get my feet wet?

Choose Search Discussions on the right. Initially, you may want to choose "All Items" and after awhile limit your search to 1 category. This is also good practice to Search Discussions prior to posting a question to see if a similar question has already been asked. Searches use exact matches on keywords. A search for "Activity" will not display keywords of "Activities". Search on derivatives if you don't find what you are looking for.

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How do I post a Question?

Click on: Post a Question on the right. Enter your question. Always choose the most appropriate category for your question. **Keep in mind you are always identified with anything you post in the Communication Platform, including responses and documents.** If you have Questions and Responses selected in your profile for this category, you will automatically receive an e-mail when anyone responds so it is not necessary to check back with the site. Always remember to hit the SUBMIT button.

How do I help someone else out?

Click on: Answer Questions on the right. This allows you to respond to a question.

What is the E-library?

The E-library is a collection of documents. A document can be a WORD document, PDF, or EXCEL spreadsheet. You can upload a document by using the Publish Document link on the right. Please keep document filenames under 30 characters.

How do I get Help using the site?

You can get help by clicking the HELP bar on the top of screen. A list of commonly asked questions will appear. Some of the questions refer to some of the advanced features of the site like: Tailoring my news line, searching for members, and subscribing/unsubscribing. If you need additional help, e-mail saeger@wasbo.com or Deimund@wasbo.com for assistance.

I forgot my password.

Click on: Forgot your password? on the initial login screen. Enter the email address you log in with and your password will be e-mailed to you at that address. It is a good practice to change your password anytime your password is e-mailed to you.

What if I want something changed on the site?

Click on: Feedback/Comments on the right side.

We want you to know that:

! The Calendar link on the right, links back to the WCASS calendar of events.

! The Job Bank link on the right, links back to the WCASS job postings site.

! Information posted to the web site is not edited or monitored. WEBQA, OASYS, and WCASS are not responsible for its content.

! WCASS reserves the right to revoke user privileges if the site is misused or if access information is knowingly given to a non-WCASS member.

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WCASS Region News**Region 1 Chair: Mardi Freeman** freema@hamiltondist.k12.wi.us

For information from this region, please contact Mardi Freeman.

I am new to the position of WCASS Region 1 representative, replacing Mary Cimbalk from Pewaukee who retired at the end of last year. I am the Special Services Supervisor in the Hamilton School District in Sussex, WI. We in Region 1 have had a great start to the 2009-10 school year. Many directors are working on the ARRA budgets and reporting requirements, and some of us are also dealing with H1N1 procedures and plans.

Region 1 has their meetings and topics scheduled for the upcoming year in conjunction with our CESA #1 RSN meetings. We held our first meeting of the year on September 30th when we had Dani Scott, DPI Data Consultant, present on the 20 Indicators and Focused Reviews to be conducted by DPI. It was a highly informative meeting! Our schedule for the upcoming year is:

October 27, 2009 -- Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

January 19, 2010 -- Autism and SCERTS

March 2, 2010 -- Universal Design for Learning

April 29, 2010 -- Specific Learning Disabilities/ WCASS Awards

Region 2 Chair: Bob Geigle Robert.geigle@oshkosh.k12.wi.us

For information from this region, please contact Bob Geigle.

Region 3 Chair: John Peterson jpeterson@waterforduhs.k12.wi.us

For information from this region, please contact John Peterson.

Region 3 of WCASS held our first meeting of the year on October 2nd. Similar to previous years, we will be piggybacking off of the RSN legal briefings at CESA #2. For this past meeting, Attorney Tom Shorter shared some outcomes of recently settled cases regarding parochial versus public school placement that reached as high as the Supreme Court. These outcomes could impact how we work with parents who are thinking about placing their child in a private school that caters to students with disabilities instead of the local educational agency. Attorney Shorter also shared some information about private school cost calculation of flow through funds and some tips / recommendations to think about when tracking and allocating your lea's money for area private schools.

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Region 3 Message continued from p. 10

On the WCASS end of the meeting, the two hot topics in the state right now are seclusion and restraint and the rules revision for the specific learning disability criteria. In the area of seclusion and restraint, Barb Van Haren and Nissan Bar-lev, shared their power point training presentation. More importantly, they videotaped their presentation so that others can access it on the WCASS website. Currently, there is a serious push from Disability Rights Wisconsin to have some form of legislative oversight when districts use seclusion and restraint and to ban certain types of restraint. WCASS' stance is that the legislative oversight is not necessary. What we view as necessary is that local educational agencies need to have proper training on the use, documentation, and communication involved when secluding and/or restraining a student. This training is highlighted in Barb and Nissan's presentation. It is WCASS' hope that every school district in the state views this presentation with their staff once a year. Furthermore, as Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services, we need to talk about this issue with our entire department on a regular basis. In particular, the areas of communication and documentation cannot be overlooked. Parents need to be informed on when seclusion and restraint will be used with their child, how it is used, when it is used, and when / how they are informed after it is used. School districts should only use these techniques as a last resort and/or if a student's physical safety is being threatened. Ultimately, WCASS and Disability Rights Wisconsin want these same outcomes; we just disagree on how to achieve them.

The other hot topic at the state level right now is the rules revision of the specific learning disability criteria. The SLD Adhoc Committee held their 4th out of 4 meetings on October 5th at DPI. Those in attendance included representatives from DPI, WCASS, the school psychologist association, and the reading association. There has been great discussion regarding the use or call for a specific number of data points over a set period of time when using the process of RtI to determine a specific learning disability. The bigger issue behind this is that depending on how the criteria is worded could open the door for an IEP team to use curriculum based measures (e.g., DIBELS, Aimsweb, etc.). Regardless of what recommendations the DPI representatives put forth to State Superintendent Tony Evers, I would encourage you to have your voice heard. There will be a series of public hearings on the SLD rules revision as soon as late winter / early spring. Stay tuned.

Our next WCASS and legal briefing will take place on Friday December 4th at CESA 2. I hope to see you there.

Region 4 Chair: Diane Knudsen knudsend@esschools.k12.wi.us

For information from this region, please contact Diane Knudsen.

Mark Your Calendar

2009

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|------------------------|--|
| October 28-29 | WCASS Board Meeting, Madison |
| November. 17-19 | State Superintendent Conference on Special Education & Pupil Services |
| December 4 | WCASS and Legal Briefing (at CESA 2) |
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