



President's Message

By Tim Gantz

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! At the writing of this, Christmas is only five days away. My desk seems more buried than usual with too many things I need to do without enough time to do them. Drives home are more chaotic than normal as the streets are congested with holiday shoppers. With all this "stuff" going on, it is easy to lose sight of what this time of year means. While my religious affiliation gives it an even deeper meaning, this time of year universally represents a time for all of us to take account of all the many blessings we have, be truly thankful for them, and find a way to extend ourselves to others who may not be as fortunate.

A case I am currently dealing with is a poignant example. In late September, a childhood friend of mine was in a severe car accident with his children. One of them suffered a traumatic brain injury. They were just able to bring him home from the hospital earlier this week. Since they are residents of the district, I am now having to introduce them to the special education pro-

cess and work with them as they simultaneously grieve what was lost, give thanks for what they do have, and hope for what time and healing may bring. Their life has been forever changed to a degree that I struggle to fully comprehend.

In a strange way, I am honored and humbled to be in the position that I am: to be able to personalize our often impersonal and over-legalized process for friends who are in need. I hope I never again need such an extreme reminder of how we can and do make a difference in the lives of the children and families we serve. I am thankful for the daily opportunities I have to be a positive and supportive influence. I can only hope that over time, hindsight will tell me I rose to that challenge.

I hope you all found time to relax, enjoy, and give thanks for your blessings this holiday season!

-Tim

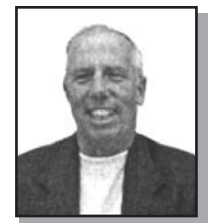


Executive Director's Comments . . .

I hope that your 2008 year is off to a great start. The coming of 2008 also brings the beginning of my 10th year as executive director. WCASS opened its first office with a 40% time director's position on January 2, 1999, so this time of the year always brings some time to reflect the past year's activities with my job. Since that beginning we have added a half-time administrative assistant to the organization. In addition, membership has grown from 225 to 265 over that period. We have an active and updated Web site that offers us opportunities to post information for our conferences. We publish a newsletter consistently four times each year that is included in the *Journal*

of Disability Policy Studies for our active members. We have seen our average conference attendance grow from 130 to over 200 at both our winter and spring conferences the past few years.

In the area of legislation we have had some success and some failures. Certainly one of the biggest legislative challenges facing WCASS and SAA was the re-write of Chapter 115 after IDEA was re-authorized in 2004. With the



Phil Knobel

help of many WCASS members, DPI, legislators, and parents, we were able to get a bill passed and signed by the governor in the spring of 2006. My biggest disappointment has been that we have not been able to get a bill approved so school districts can use IDEA flow-through dollars for private contracting for special education direct services to students with disabilities. We have been working on this legislation for years without any success and intend to work on it again during the spring 2008 legislative session.

As I am writing this, a draft bill arrived that would establish a standard rate of reimbursement for school nurses, school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. This

is a bill that we proposed along with DPI and are hopeful of its passage during the spring legislative session.

WCASS and SAA will continue to oppose AB 484 in the coming weeks. The bill would let all school employees remove students from school activities. As always, we will be calling on WCASS members to be in contact with legislators on issues that are important to the students we serve in Wisconsin schools. Without WCASS members and others working on legislative issues at the local level, we will not have the successes we have seen in the past. Thanks to all WCASS members and educators for all you do for Wisconsin public school students.

Message from Gary Myrah, President-Elect: Challenges That Directors Face

As we enter a new calendar year, many tend to reflect on the year that has passed. It is likely that many of us have faced a challenge or two in the past twelve months. My reflections lead me to share some thoughts within this article.

Parent/Child Advocates

In three separate situations this year I have had conflicts arise regarding expectations a parent had for services offered to his or her child. As these cases intensified, it became apparent that the parents were developing a mistrust of school personnel. Upon my recommendation, each of the three families requested the involvement of the Wisconsin FACETS program.

Whereas some that I have talked to have reservations when they are informed that WI FACETS will be involved in a meeting representing the parents, I find it beneficial when it involves families that have developed a mistrust of the district. The representative from WI FACETS who serves our area is well versed in the rules and regulations that have been established for special education. There is a potential for discomfort when requests are suggested that seem unreasonable, yet it is these talking points that may generate interesting discussion of program options.

Attorneys

Having a representative from FACETS is more conducive to making progress than having a local attorney who has little background in or knowledge of special education enter the room with intentions of intimidation. If you face this type of situation, you may wish to consider stopping the meeting in order to seek your own legal representation.

An interesting point: Your district may have a retainer with a law firm for general representation, yet if your conditions require reporting to your district insurance company, you may find you will have representation from a different attorney.

Recording Equipment

In some cases you may have a parent enter the room with recording equipment. Regardless of the reasons why they are recording the meeting, it would be my recommendation that you utilize district recording equipment so you have a copy of the meeting proceedings. In one case where this happened, the parent's equipment did not work properly, and the parent had to ask for a copy of our version, which we provided.

Union Representation at Student Meetings

You may also find situations in which a teacher feels it is necessary to have union representation during a meeting (e.g., IEP meeting) for a student. It is very important that you, as a director, insist that this not happen since it is a violation of the student's right to confidentiality. You will want to ask the union representative to contact the WEAC legal department for clarification.

At some meetings you may find that a parent becomes hostile and verbally abusive. If it appears that the level of verbal attacks is escalating, it would be my recommendation to calmly request reconvening the meeting at a later date. It is critical to remain calm with hopes of reducing

the hostile response. You may wish to suggest that the parent contact WI FACETS prior to the reconvening of a meeting. You might also suggest that the parent contact the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for advice.

As I write this article the day before the holiday break, I have been informed of a student who became aggressive, resulting in extreme profanity, kicked the EBD teacher near the groin, and kicked the principal in the knee. It looks like the return from break will be a busy week. Just another day in the life of a director of special education/pupil services. Let us convene in Appleton and swap stories and share experiences.

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SAA Report

SAA Legislative Agenda Scorecard

The SAA, with the help of its education community partners, Governor Doyle, and pro-education legislators, achieved big victories on the 2007–09 state budget—current law estimates on the revenue cap increase; additional declining enrollment relief; an increase in the low revenue ceiling; increases in special education, SAGE, and school breakfast funding; creation of sparsity aid and 4K grant programs; and school library aid flexibility—and in the process achieved the majority of its 2007–08 legislative agenda.

The shift from general aid to school levy credits was a significant disappointment, and we will work hard to reverse this trend in the next budget session. Highlights of the SAA's progress appear below.

State School Funding, QEO and Revenue Limits

The SAA supports continuation of the current two-thirds state funding of K–12 public education and supports changing the current "sum certain" general aid appropriation to "sum sufficient" status. The SAA also maintains that any change

in the QEO requires corresponding adjustments to revenue limits as well as changes in the current mediation–arbitration laws.

The 2007–09 state budget increases K–12 funding by about \$525 million. Of this figure, we see about a \$216 million increase in general, categorical, and residential school aid, with a \$309 million increase in school levy credits. The budget also maintains current law on revenue cap per pupil adjustments and the QEO. The general aid appropriation remains on a "sum certain" basis.

Transportation

The SAA supports increasing the current level of state categorical aid funding to help school districts manage the rising cost of transporting Wisconsin school children.

The state budget increased the reimbursement rate for pupils transported more than 12 miles from \$180 to \$220 for both years of the biennium. No new GPR funding was needed to make this limited change, and none was added.

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Special Education Categorical Appropriation

The SAA supports increasing the current level of state categorical aid funding for special education to reimburse 30% of the prior year's aidable costs. We also support making the special education categorical a "sum sufficient" appropriation.

The state budget increased this appropriation by \$53.6 million over the biennium.

Sparsity Aid

The SAA supports creating a new statewide categorical aid program that provides additional funding to address the unique problems faced by small, sparsely populated rural school districts.

The state budget created a new sparsity categorical aid program in 2008–09 (\$3.6 million) for school districts with enrollment of 725 or less, less than 10 students per square mile, and FRL eligibility of at least 20%. Aid would be \$300 per pupil for districts with FRL of 50% or more and \$150 for districts with FRL between 20% and 50%.

Bilingual/ Bicultural Aid

The SAA supports increasing the current level of state categorical funding to districts required to offer programming for limited English proficient (LEP) students. The SAA also supports extending aid to districts that serve LEP students but do not currently qualify for aid.

Although State Superintendent Burmaster and Governor Doyle forwarded proposals to increase bilingual/bicultural aid, budget conferees removed the proposed increase in the final budget compromise.

Relief for Declining Enrollment Districts

The SAA supports changing the current 75% hold harmless non-recurring exemption to a recurring exemption that districts could retain in their base revenue limit for the forthcoming year and in each year thereafter.

The state budget changed the current 75% hold harmless non-recurring exemption to a full

100% non-recurring exemption and provides that no district starts the new school year with a revenue cap (after consideration of the per pupil adjustment and low revenue ceiling) that is less than what it had been at the end of the prior year.

Relief for Low-Spending Districts

The SAA supports increasing the low revenue ceiling to \$8,800 in 2007–08 and to \$9,200 in 2008–09.

The state budget increased the low revenue ceiling by \$300 annually, to \$8,700 in 2007–08 and to \$9,000 in 2008–09.

Health Insurance

The SAA supports measures that (a) would improve the quality and efficiency of health care delivered to Wisconsin school district employees and (b) provide school districts with the tools necessary to manage rising health insurance costs. More specifically, the SAA supports:

- Requiring health care providers to disclose complete and comparable information on the quality and cost of care. It is imperative that health care providers compete on cost and quality and that school districts have the ability to direct members to high quality, cost-effective health care providers and facilities.

- Requiring a certification of need for expansion of health care facilities.

- Making the selection of the health insurance carrier a prohibitive subject of bargaining.

No change through the budget process. Given the current political dynamic, any significant change is unlikely.

SAGE

The SAA supports increasing the FTE low-income aid from \$2,000 to \$2,250. The SAA also supports allowing school districts that are participating in SAGE to have flexibility in meeting the current grade level and class size requirements.

The state budget increased FTE low-income pupil aid from \$2,000 to \$2,250 in accordance with current law (\$26.8 million increase over the biennium). No action in the budget process on SAGE flexibility.

District Control of Federal Funds

The SAA supports changing current law/rules to allow school districts to use their entitlement flow-through federal funds in accordance with federal requirements without additional restrictions from the state. The SAA believes these federal funds should only "flow through" the state and should be considered school district entitlement funds to be used flexibly to meet the instructional needs of students.

No action in the budget process.

Categorical Aid System

The SAA supports a system of categorical aid for targeting state financial support to specific student services, programs and/or costs (special education, bilingual/bicultural, transportation, etc.), as opposed to a "weighted" system of general aid.

The state budget retained the state system of categorical aid and added 10 categorical aid programs.

WCASS Region News

Region 1 Chair: Mary Cimbalnik (Mary.Cimbalnik@pewaukee.k12.wi.us)

For information from this region, please contact Mary Cimbalnik.

On January 30, 2008, Region 1 will be holding a joint meeting with ESEA members on the implementation of RTI. The meeting will be led by Glenn Schilling, superintendent at Hartland-Lakeside School District in Hartland, WI. Glenn is putting together a panel of people who have started the journey, and we invite you to extend an invitation to principals and others in your dis-

trict who may benefit from others' experiences. The meeting will be held at WCTC in Pewaukee, WI, from 11:30 am to 3:30 pm. For more information, contact me or Barb Van Haren at CESA 1.

On March 18, Region 1 will be hosting its annual awards banquet and legal update featuring Mary Hubacher of the Davis & Kuelthau, S.C., Brookfield office.

The last meeting will be April 30, 2008.

Region 2 Chair: Dave Kwiatkowski (davek@cesa8.k12.wi.us)

For information from this region, please contact Dave Kwiatkowski at CESA 8 at (800) 831-6391 x 233 or by e-mail.

Region 3 Chair: John Peterson (petersonj@mail.fortschools.org)

For information from this region, please contact John Peterson.

At the time of this writing, we are closing in on Christmas break and preparing to have some much needed time off. It is amazing how quickly the year moves and how the work seems to pile up just as quickly. On December 7, 2007, Region 3 was able to meet and to discuss the recent updates provided at the fall leadership in the areas of Medicaid and RTI. Though there was some frustration expressed regarding the required signatures to access Medicaid funds, it appears all

of the districts represented at our meeting will adjust to the requirement and, hopefully, not see a negative impact financially.

Right after our Region 3 meeting on December 7th, the group heard a presentation on Section 504 from Ms. Dawn Matthias from the Office of Civil Rights. Ms. Matthias discussed the ins and outs of 504 plans, health plans, and Individualized Education Programs and when districts should be using each to address the needs of their student

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population. Though individual 504 teams are left to define the term "substantially limits" and Ms. Matthias was not able to provide a definition from the OCR, she was able to offer the group several issues to consider when deciding whether to pursue a Section 504 plan and what traps to avoid. All in all, Ms. Matthias' presentation was well received by those in attendance.

Region 3 will be meeting again on March 7 and listening to a presentation on Extended School Year. After this presentation, Region 3 will be hosting a roundtable discussion on issues related

to ESY and hear feedback on how districts address these issues. This meeting will take place at CESA #2, and an agenda will be distributed in the upcoming months.

If you have any questions on issues that you would like covered at a future Region 3 meeting, please feel free to contact me (petersonj@mail.fortschools.org). I hope to see you up in Appleton for the WCASS winter conference or at another professional development opportunity some time soon.

Region 4 Chair: Diane Knudsen

For information from this region, please contact Diane at:
knudsend@esschools.k12.wi.us.

Membership Update

Ann Wicklund, Membership Chair

For the 2007–08 school year, 26 new members have joined WCASS. We are delighted to welcome them to organization. At our upcoming

conferences, please extend a hand to our newest members.

Karen Baker	Lakeland Union High School
Patricia Basche	Durand
Judy Benzel	Spring Valley School District
Kris Blakeley	Johnson Creek School District
Todd Bugnacki	Greenfield School District
LeAnn Chase	Tomorrow River School District
Cheri Collins	Crandon School District
Elizabeth Dohrn	Lake Mills School District
Rebecca Felmlee	Student
Tanya Fredrich	Fairview South School, Elmbrook School District
Donna Jaeger	Lake Geneva Schools
Kim Kent	Student
Darren Kern	Somerset School District
Sheila Kindwall	Whitewater Unified School District
Autumn Kruse	Quarles & Brady, LLP
Jeffrey LaValle	Quarles & Brady, LLP
Dana Maney	CESA #11
Jill Mason	Galesville-Ettrick-Trempealeau School District
Lillian Peters	Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan School District
Rick Pongowski	CESA #10
Sheila Reichert	Student
Ann Roy	Sheboygan Falls School District
Joan Schultz	Hartford Joint One School District
Tracy Walczak	Parkview School District
Michele Yates-Wickus	CESA #5
Linda Zeman	

Did You Know . . .

You can renew your WCASS membership online. It is quick and easy. Just visit WCASS at the Web site (<http://www.wcass.org>) and click on "Renew Your Dues Online". It is that easy.

Don't delay! Update today!



Check out the Web . . . for pictures of recent events: www.wcass.org

WCASS Members Involved on Statewide Committees

It is important for you as a WCASS member to stay abreast of what is happening around the state. The following WCASS members are involved on statewide committees representing the interest of WCASS. Feel free to contact any of them for input or questions.

State Superintendent's Council on Special Education

Brian Anderson, Appleton

Wisconsin Association of Pupil Service Organization

Marty Armato, Elmbrook

SAA Legislative Committee

Matt Collins, CESA #9

Carol Zarske, CESA #6

Dave Kwiatkowski, CESA #8

Kurt Eley, Waunakee

Eric Hartwig, Marathon CDEB

Karen Schulte, Janesville

Ann Gamoke, Plymouth

SAA High School Committee

Gary Myrah, Port Washington

Fred Weissenburger, Eau Claire

SAA Open Enrollment Committee

Matt Collins, CESA #9

Carol Zarske, CESA #6

Fred Wollenburg, CESA #5

Greg Dietz, CESA #10

Kurt Eley, Waunakee

Eric Hartwig, Marathon CDEB

Jerry Wieland, Green Bay

Articles . . . News . . . Announcements . . .

Please contact Kelly Kapitz,
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Membership Privileges

One of the greatest benefits of belonging to WCASS is the opportunity to meet other professionals from across the state who work in the ever-changing world of special education and pupil services. In this era of increased accountability and scrutiny for progress of students with special needs and the legal obligations that challenge us, having a friend or colleague to turn to for advice or problem solving can be a real life saver. Encourage others you work with to join WCASS. Listed below are seven different categories for Membership. Help make our organization even stronger by bringing in new faces and some fresh ideas.

- **Active Membership** — This category is open to anyone who is a current member of the Council for Exceptional Children, is a current member of the Council of Administrators of Special Education, and holds current licensure as a director of special education and pupil services (80), supervisor of special education (81), or college faculty member whose major responsibility is the professional preparation of administrators of special education/pupil services. **Active membership entitles the member to attend all meetings, to vote on all questions presented to the membership, to hold offices, and to receive the WCASS newsletter along with the *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* four times per year.** (Fee \$350)
- **Educational Leadership Associate Membership** — This category includes pro-

fessional educators whose job includes a primary leadership role for special education/pupil services within their employing agency. This category could include principals, school psychologists, counselors, etc. These people are not eligible for licensure as a director or supervisor of special education. (Fee \$200)

- **Educational Associate Membership** — This category includes individuals who are employed as professional educators and who are not eligible for participation under another membership category. (Fee \$90)
- **Commercial Associate Membership** — This category includes individuals who are employed in private business and whose employment obligations and interests are supportive of the interests of WCASS. (Fee \$300)
- **Law Associate Membership** — Law associate members must be attorneys who currently represent at least one school district and who do not currently represent parties with special education interests adverse to school districts. (Fee – Individual Attorney \$300; Law Firm Group \$600)
- **Retired Professional Associate Membership** — This category includes non-educational professionals who deal with children as part of their professional role and whose activities are supportive of WCASS interests. (Fee \$60)
- **Student Associate Membership** — This category of associate membership is limited to individuals who are full-time students in a graduate program leading to Wisconsin Leadership Certification 80. (No Fee)

The Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS) is a statewide organization devoted to improving services to children with special needs by promoting professional leader-



ship, providing opportunity for study of issues pertaining to special services, and facilitating communication and collaboration on behalf of special needs students.