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President’s Message by Gary Myrah

Response to Intervention

During the WCASS Winter Conference, John Humphries, consultant for school psychology and Vaunce Ashby, consultant for specific learning disabilities will be providing a quick review of the proposed language related to specific learning disabilities. It is important for directors to be familiar with these procedures because it will require revamping how we gather data for determining a specific learning disability.

Dr. Barb Van Haren, Mr. Hughes George and I were members of the task force that worked on refining the procedures. The task force had broad representation from throughout the State and representatives from various professional organizations and universities.

As you listen and review the materials, there may be many questions you will have. It is important to share these questions/concerns with John or Vaunce now. Later this spring there will be hearings throughout the State to hear testimony regarding the provisions in these regulations. If you find issues that need to be addressed, it is helpful for John and Vaunce to be aware of this so they may address them during the hearings.

The fact is we need to have a change in procedure for identifying students with specific learning disabilities. The various elements contained in these regulations are based on extensive research conducted by the WDPI. Dr. Jack Fletcher reported to Barb VanHaren that he believes the procedures found in this document are more comprehensive than what he has seen in other states. He further stated that we may be behind other states in having something set up, yet our procedures should be sound.

Restraint & Seclusion

As on the third week in January, John Forrester has been told the proposed language related to Restraint & Seclusion will proceed and have an assembly bill number assigned to it. Once a number is assigned it is then entered into a process for legislative review and action. The first action will likely be a hearing before the Assembly Education committee.

If you have not yet seen a copy of the draft version, contact the WCASS office or me for an electronic version. Be prepared that the document is twenty-six pages long and has elements that can be supported. There are other elements that will be hard to support, and then there are elements that will be hard to support because of the impact to our schools.

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At the same time this is occurring, there is proposed federal legislation on the same topic. The federal legislation has a house version (HR4247) and a senate version (S2860). If you go to the CASE website, you will find information on this proposed legislation and the CASE position paper.

Due to the federal legislation being submitted and prepared for action, WCASS Executive Board has taken the following action regarding the Wisconsin proposed legislation:

**Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services
Board Motion on LRB-2425**

Whereas, Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS) has been contacted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) to participate in four stakeholder meetings to discuss proposed legislation contained in LRB-2425 regarding the use of seclusion, restraint and aversive intervention in schools; and

Whereas, WCASS recognizes the safety of all students in our public schools is a solemn responsibility; and

Whereas, WCASS recognizes the safety of all staff in our public schools is a solemn responsibility; and

Whereas, WCASS has steadfastly promoted, developed and supervised training and best practices as set forth in the WDPI Directives on the Appropriate Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Special Education Programs; and

Whereas, WCASS actively collaborates with WDPI in promoting Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, as well as other behavioral support systems for all students in Wisconsin public schools; and

Whereas, WCASS anticipates federal guidance and regulation regarding the appropriate use of seclusion and restraint to be forthcoming; and

Whereas, WCASS finds the proposed Wisconsin legislative action to be unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible; and

Therefore, be it resolved that WCASS will respectfully decline participation in a stakeholder's advisory effort at this time because it would be inappropriate for Wisconsin to take action until this issue is resolved at the federal level.

10/29/09

Essentially, we believe it is premature to begin looking at the Wisconsin legislation until we are sure what is going to happen at the federal level. Interestingly, there are people at the federal level that are watching what develops in Wisconsin.

At this point it is critical to have directors be aware of the provisions of these documents and take the initiative to express thoughts and concerns as it may relate to the application of these procedures. We will be providing an update on this at our WCASS Business meeting at the conference.

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President's Message continued from pg. 2**Orphans in Haiti**

I would like to also share a message that many of you may already be aware of, yet it is important to send the word far and wide with hopes of reaching families that may have an interest in this story. My brother is a minister in Brookings, Oregon and he has been assisting a family that had been trying to adopt a child from Haiti prior the earthquake.

According to the United States State Department and Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, current estimates indicate 20,000 orphans in 187 licensed orphanages in Haiti. The immediate concern is for the safety and survival of these orphans. The State Department is working to ensure that they have access to life sustaining resources -- water, food, shelter, medicine, medical care, and clothing. Last week when asked to bring these children to the United States on a USAID plane; they were adamant their first priority was to evacuate the 45,000 American out of Haiti.

The State Department is also developing a database to update the number of orphans and their locations as well as assist in matching parents with children. They are also coordinating with the US Customs and Immigrations Services to have contact information for the parents who are in the process of adopting these children.

The Secretary of State has various immigration tools at her disposal that she can utilize to assist these orphans - those whose adoptions have been finalized by the Haitian government, those who were in the process of being adopted, and even those who are not currently being adopted or are just recently displaced due to the quake.

Right now the State Department figures that there are 300 orphans that can be approved very quickly and come to the United States as their paperwork was just awaiting the Haitian government's approval. The State Department is also working on finding a way to waive more of these cases. I am sending this out in this message with hopes of having the word spread to others.

In closing, I hope all of you will be able to attend our winter conference and wish you safe travels to Appleton.

— Gary

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Academy of New Special Education Directors

At the WCASS Winter Conference February 3-5, new Special Education and Pupil Service Directors will have an opportunity to participate in a panel discussion on various topics. The session will take place on **Wednesday, February 3 from 2:30 to 4:00 at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton.**

The panel will include special education directors and business managers who will discuss special education budgeting including local budgets, IDEA, ARRA, high cost student aid, SBS claiming and transfer of service claims. All new directors are encouraged to attend and take advantage of the experience and expertise of their fellow colleagues. More information is available at www.wcass.org

Executive Director's Comments by Phil Knobel

I hope 2010 is off to a good start for all of you reading the WCASS newsletter. As we move into the New Year, we have several new and continuing activities taking place which I will comment on. WCASS, WASDA, AWSA and WASBO have recently launched a full service career center designed especially for employer and job seekers in school administration. The Wisconsin School Leadership Career Center, as it is called, will give you direct exposure to a wide array of qualified job candidates and exciting opportunities in our professional community. Check out the career center by going to our web-site at www.wcass.org and clicking on Find Jobs and Qualified Candidates.



I would also like to encourage our members to use the WCASS Communications Platform as a method to communicate with other members of WCASS and get answers to questions you have. The platform is only open to WCASS members in good standing and you must log in prior to being able to use it.

We are continuing to work on several legislative and administrative issues which include the following:

- Seclusion & restraint legislation at the state and national level.
- More flexibility for using special education staff in Response to Intervention (RtI) activities.
- School based services claiming.
- Proposed Learning Disability (LD) eligibility criteria.

An update on all of these issues will be provided at the General Membership meeting on February 4th at the Winter Conference in Appleton.

During the last month, I, along with others representing education organizations in the state, had the opportunity to participate in the State Plan that Governor Doyle and State Superintendent Evers have submitted to the federal government for "Race to the Top" monies. If Wisconsin is awarded a grant, it would bring about \$250 million dollars into the state toward education reforms and improving the overall quality of education in the state.

I hope to see you all at the Winter Conference in Appleton on February 3-5 2010. As always, I encourage our members and others to feel free to contact our office if we can be of service to you in any way.

— Phil

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There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children.

One of these is roots; the other, wings.

Hodding Carter (1907-72)
American Journalist

President-Elect Comments by David Kwiatkowski

What's Best For Kids ?

In one of my earlier articles, I promised that if you didn't protest too vehemently, I would occasionally revisit some of the many lessons I learned from the fine educational leaders that I have had the good fortune work with and for over my career. Lately, I have been thinking a lot about one of those valued mentors and friends, Bill Trautt



I worked for Bill as a school psychologist and director of special education for three years while he served as superintendent for the School District of Bowler. In those three years, Bill taught me more about professional learning communities, shared leadership, teacher and learner empowerment and data-based decision-making than I have read and heard from the experts before or since. He did this not by preaching or professing these concepts, but by living them daily and expecting others about him to do the same. In this regard, he expected that we in his administrative team collaborate on decision-making, always keeping our main mission and core principles in mind. Since Bill always reminded us that as public school educators, "we work for kids" and "kids' learning should always be our top priority", our deliberations often narrowed to answering the question "Is this what is best for kids?"

I find myself thinking of Bill's words and example frequently of late as we are confronted with various directives and the seemingly constant scrutiny of various advocacy groups, lawyers, legislators and bureaucrats over such issues as seclusion and restraint, appropriate use of federal funds, Medicaid funding for school-based services, paperwork compliance, etc., etc. I find the need to remind myself that "we work for kids" not politicians, or lawyers, or even that angry or litigious parent. In the case of the latter, it is essential that I remember the plural sense of the "kids" for whom I am responsible. This helps to avoid the temptation to appease a problem parent(s) for the benefit of their child in a way that may jeopardize what is best for the many other "kids" in my charge. Further, I am more often finding it is necessary to make known the importance of our primary mission to those other concerned individuals and groups, as it may come into conflict with their motives and mandates. In short, we need to bring focus on "best for kids"!

Nowhere is this focus more necessary at present than in the current advocacy lobby and legislative deliberations over seclusion and restraint in the public schools. We must remain vigilant, proactive and vocal in our advocacy for a safe and productive learning environment for all students in our schools. Thankfully, Nissan has remained vigilant and is keeping our organization abreast of the developments in the legislative process at both the state and federal level. Gary has organized the WCASS Executive Board in providing the WDPI with clear communication of the WCASS position on this critical issue. However we need a total team effort to support Nissan, Gary and our Executive Board in advocating for a safe learning environment for all students in Wisconsin schools. Please stay informed and be ready to contact legislators consistent with the WCASS position and key points on this crucial issue as it is "**WHAT IS BEST FOR KIDS**"!

As always, thanks for listening!

— Dave

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New Directors Academy



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

For information from this region, please contact Mardi Freeman.

Region 1, along with CESA #1 RSN, held their Fourth Annual Learning Conference this year entitled “The ABC’s of RTI” on December 17-18th at Waukesha County Technical College. On Monday, the keynote speaker was Lucille Beers, Statewide Network Director from the Illinois PBIS Network. On this day we learned about Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or the behavioral side of the RTI triangle. Jack Fletcher, Ph. D., University professor of Psychology from the University of Houston was the keynote speaker on day two. His keynote address was on “Response to Intervention: Improving Outcomes for All Students”. We also had break-out sessions on “SLD Using RtI: Lessons from Wisconsin’s Rule Writing Process”, “Student Intervention Monitoring System (SIMS)”, and the “Legal Implications of RtI for Regular and Special Education”.

On January 19, 2010, we will be having our next CESA #1 RSN and WCASS Network Meeting of Special Education/Pupil Services Directors. We will be hearing from Dave Edyburn, from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee on “The State of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in 2010”, and an update from Shelly Weingarten on “Learning through Listening: A NIMAS and Assistive Technology Update.”

Our professional development opportunities continue to be of benefit to the many directors of our region. We are encouraging all directors to attend the WCASS Winter Conference in Appleton in February 2010.

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

For information from this region, please contact John Peterson.

In the Fall of 2009, State Superintendent Tony Evers announced that the Wisconsin DPI would be doing away with the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE). This test could be phased out within two years and replaced with an assessment or multiple assessments that will embrace the State Superintendent’s “Next Generation Assessment” Taskforce’s recommendations. As talks have begun both internally at DPI and as the School Administrators Alliance (SAA) has responded with their own taskforce on what this assessment should look like, the first thought that came to many administrators’ minds was that this should lead to a stronger, more balanced assessment system for Wisconsin. As Directors of Pupil Services / Special Education, we need to voice our hopes and concerns to both DPI and the SAA as to what this next generation assessment should encompass and address.

Two major concerns come to mind regarding the planning and implementation of this new state assessment. First, the populations that we primarily serve – special education students and English Language Learners (ELL) – are usually the last two populations that decision-makers take into consideration when developing assessments. One of the recommendations of the Next Generation Assessment Taskforce was to have the opportunity to participate in multiple administrations of the state assessment and receive timely feedback. This

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translates into some form of computerized, on-line assessment. The major concern for special education students and ELLs is that there will be potential barriers that come with an online / computerized assessment. In particular, I cannot imagine a current computerized assessment that accounts for all of the primary languages spoken in Wisconsin (let alone Spanish and Hmong). Though this is not a concern for all districts in Wisconsin, it is a concern for several of us who work with ELL students. I also foresee potential difficulty for some of our special education populations completing an on-line assessment. In particular, students who currently are academically too low for the WKCE but – in the same breath – too high for the WAA could potentially struggle with an on-line assessment. In other words, there are current special education students who take the WKCE but could probably benefit from a third option. Hopefully, both DPI's and SAA's respective taskforces take this into consideration when researching options for our new state assessment.

A second major concern that hopefully will be addressed by both DPI and the SAA's respective taskforces is that the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment (WAA) should be reviewed and potentially changed as part of the balanced assessment system overhaul. The easiest recommendation made by the "Next Generation Assessment" Taskforce for the DPI to implement will be to create an assessment system that provides "timely" feedback. If the WKCE is replaced with an online assessment and the WAA remains unchanged, then the majority of students that are served by our public schools will receive this timely feedback. The one to two percent of students that take the WAA will not be afforded this same opportunity, as the results of the WAA come many months after the administration of the assessment. I am not advocating for students with cognitive disabilities and significant adaptive behavioral deficits to take a computerized assessment. Rather, I am in favor of reviewing the purpose behind the WAA and researching other options as part of the state's overhaul of the WKCE.

Besides these two major concerns, Director of Pupil Services / Special Education should be encouraged by our state's educational leader's willingness to change our summative assessment and make our hopes known regarding this change. My biggest hope is that the ELL and special education populations we serve are always considered when decisions are weighed and made by both the DPI and the SAA. It is easy to zero in on the average to above average students that account for the majority of our students in our school-age population. However, if we exclude our ELL and special education populations from consideration, then there will be some unintended – and most likely undesirable – consequences to the new state assessment system.

Besides being encouraged by State Superintendent Evers' decision to revamp our assessment system at the state level, we need to acknowledge that this is no easy task. There are several factors – politically and financially – that are not making it easy for the state (e.g., Race to the Top dollars, working with a consortium of states, finding the right assessment(s) to satisfy all of the states' education groups, etc.). As we make our hopes and concerns known to State Superintendent Evers, DPI, and the SAA, we need to remember all of the factors that are influencing their decisions. With this in mind, we need to present these hopes and concerns with tact and a certain level of understanding regarding the big political picture. Regardless of where you stand on this issue, the key is to make your voice heard. If we just sit and gripe from the sidelines and/or state our case after the decisions have been made, then we are providing a disservice to the populations we serve. If you have any thoughts or comments on this issue that you would like me to take back to the SAA's taskforce, please feel free to email me at petersonj@mail.fortschools.org.

————— **John Peterson, Region 3 Chair**

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