



Newsletter

WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATORS OF SPECIAL SERVICES, LTD.

Winter 2011



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

President’s Message.....1	Region News.....7
Past-President Comments.....4	WCASS Upcoming Training Dates.....9
SAA News.....5	Directory.....10

President’s Message by David Kwiatowski



Staying on course...?

As I sit down to write this article, I find myself with the irresistible urge to boast—maybe even gloat a bit—about all that has gone so well in my first six months as your WCASS President! In previous messages, I have reported on the course that our Executive Board has set for our organization to Go ALL IN for Kids over the two years of my term by:

- 1) Advocating for and Promoting Positive Outcomes for All Children
- 2) Advancing Professional Relevance; and
- 3) Empowering Leadership

I believe we have already made extraordinary progress in each of these areas as evidenced by:

- Our ability to influence state and federal decision-makers to make compliance monitoring more meaningful to real student learning and less taxing on our time and resources better devoted to improving instruction;
- Our recruitment and contracting of a highly qualified and highly motivated champion for students with disabilities and public schools, as our next Executive Director in the person of Mr. Gary Myrah;
- The organization of another exceptional slate of keynote programs, break-out sessions and social and networking activities for our 2011 Winter Conference at the Radisson Paper Valley Inn on February 2-4;
- The planning of an even more exceptional 2011 Spring Conference at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells on May 4-6, 2011, to include a keynote address from Dr. Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at the U.S. Dept. of Education;
- Substantive progress on reasonable legislation and best practice guidelines to ensure the safe and appropriate use of seclusion and restraint, only when necessary to prevent harm to children and adults in public school settings; and
- The completion of the needs assessment and reorganization planning of WCASS regions to overcome the barriers of geography, time restraints and competing schedules that hamper members’ participation in regional activities.

Continues next page

President's Message continued from p. 1

But before I seem too full of myself, I must point out that none of these accomplishments would be possible without the continuous communication and collaboration with and between my executive board members, and the committees they are building around positions, all of which are facilitated and coordinated by our Executive Director, Phil Knobel.

I am also reminded of a lesson taught to me many years ago by my old and very dear friend and mentor Dr. Robert Cavanaugh, about staying on course as an educational leader.

Bob is a member of my personal "Hall of Fame of Educational Leaders"- one of the four "best bosses" that any educator could hope to work for! I have had the very good fortune to work for and with Dr. Cavanaugh in a number of different capacities over the past twenty-eight years. Initially, Bob came to be the superintendent of the Wausaukee School District as I was a rookie Special Education Designee and School Psychologist for his district and two others in a special education consortium. Since that time I have followed him and learned from him as our Agency Administrator at CESA 8 until his retirement from that position in 1998, and as an outstanding interim superintendent serving in four different CESA 8 school districts over the years since. The most recent of those positions (which he claims will be his last) concluded in my home school district in Crivitz yesterday, January 21, 2011. It is so appropriate that the lesson learned from him many years ago is most relevant to my experience today and the message I hope to pass on through this writing. So on with it!

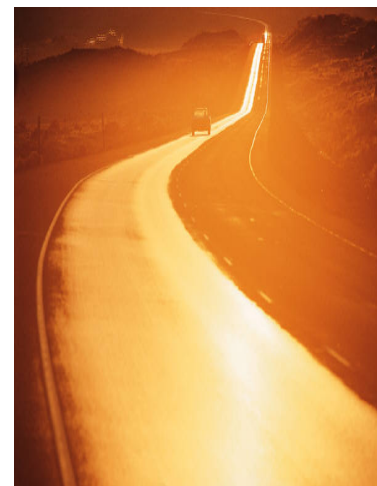
As many effective leaders would, Dr. Cavanaugh often stressed that, since the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, staying on course is imperative for an effective leader. In my younger years, he sometimes needed to remind me that patting yourself on the back requires that you turn, even ever so slightly, to the right or the left (depending on your handedness) causing you to veer off course. He would continue that, just as with huge ocean ships, the most effective means for course correction often is a swift and targeted pressure to the lower aft section, or for mere humans, what he liked to call a KITA, or a Kick In The A _ _ (after-region)! He also pointed out that the same could be effective whenever one becomes distracted by competing interests, or when one hangs their head in shame or discouragement, interfering with their focus forward...beyond the enticements or the difficulties!

Now, Dr. Cavanaugh was not advocating actual physical assault, but rather a jarring jolt back to reality that is best provided by the frank and honest communication of shared principles and priorities and how our behaviors impact on these. And rather than being a force that separates or impedes the recipient from forward progress, a KITA uses the forward momentum of the giver to propel the receiver forward in unison, as a means of initiating collaboration. The reader may notice here that it is clear and continuous communication of our shared priorities and our collaborative efforts toward their accomplishment that has our organization making such exceptional progress currently. And I find that Phil is skilled in the precise administration of the KITA's necessary to move it all along!

As I reflect on this lesson as a mental KITA from my friend and mentor, I realize that despite the extraordinary progress we have made, there is still so much work to do on behalf of children and schools in Wisconsin. And I know that I will at least occasionally require a KITA from you and other members to keep me on course. And as I look around at other actors so important to the success of students and our schools, I believe some targeted pressure well applied to our colleagues in state and federal education departments, as well as in the state capitol would also be in the best interest of KIDS immediately!

Just a few examples that come to mind:

- We have a new Governor and many new state legislators who propose that the major challenges faced by our schools can be overcome without acknowledging the devastating impacts of growing poverty or increasing fair funding to schools taking poverty into account. These new political leaders may benefit from a well-aimed KITA to focus their attention to educational policy on KIDS, not campaign contributors!



President's Message continued from p. 2

- When DPI licensing consultants propose increasing barriers to alternative certifications for certain professions in short supply and high demand, seemingly to appease professional associations or unions, while too many KIDS go unserved or underserved, a well-placed KITA emphasizing practical means to overcome our difficulties in staffing vacant positions for SLP's, Educational Audiologists, O-M Specialists, etc. is in order!
- When increased and superfluous state and federal red-tape hinder or prevent our effective use of increased federal funding to really improve instructional opportunities and outcomes for our students- somebody may benefit from a little well-placed KITA emphasizing the needs and benefits of KIDS!
- When DPI Special Education Team consultants claim that they do not need to visit school buildings or shadow working special educational professionals to know what they need or need to do for corrective action or understand the impact on KIDS- somebody needs a little KITA!
- And especially when DPI consultants feel it is necessary and effective to invoke the intimidating imagery of federal officials escorting educational leaders from their schools in handcuffs to motivate school improvement efforts rather than focusing on the actual needs of KIDS, which are motivating enough...somebody definitely needs a KITA!

In all these cases, the substance of our KITA must be that our shared priority must be KIDS! And, we the members of WCASS, are All IN FOR KIDS...not for appeasing lawyers...nor governmental accountants, and not even parents who are not in for the best for ALL KIDS! We must advocate to give them our best, because me may be the best they have!

Now, what can you as members of WCASS do to help? First of all, please help to keep our Strategic Action Committee – Phil, Gary, Greg or myself informed with the specifics of the realities of your students and your school face! We need your perspectives on the issues that concern you most at any of the local, state, or federal levels to help us to provide substance to the strategic KITA's delivered for the good of KIDS! And please promise that when I need a KITA...don't hesitate! Keep me on course and ALL IN FOR KIDS!!

And as always... Thanks for listening!

~ Dave

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Past-President Comments by Gary Myrah

First, I wish to thank all who have supported me as I applied to be the next executive director for WCASS. Phil has been the WCASS icon for over a decade and has been successful in this role. He has gained the respect of directors throughout the state as well as officials at WDPI and the legislature. When Phil made contact with key people, they knew he was working on behalf of children in Wisconsin.



I am looking forward to becoming your new executive director. Whereas I plan to maintain the stability that Phil has created for WCASS, I am thinking of ways we can improve as well. I am finding that being the chair of the CASE Professional Development committee is providing access to extensive resources that will help our membership. Not only does this provide a wealth of resources for potential topics/speakers for our conferences, it also provides insights on the current developments in our profession.

Also, as we work to improve opportunities for professional development at the national level such as increased webinars, virtual conferences and the possibility of “second life” (use of animated avatars) as avenues to reach members throughout the nation, we will be able to use this within the state as well.

We are also concerned with the developments at the WDPI. It was surprising to read that 10% of the Special Education Department retired before the end of the year. There is continued concern regarding those who remain and decisions they will be facing as they hear how the legislature and governor will make changes to their salary and benefits. Many are also concerned regarding how the change in governing leadership will impact us locally.

It is difficult to predict how severe the impact will be to all of us. A possible positive note is an interest by the “freshman” legislators to learn more about issues and mandates that we as school administrators would like to have changed or improved. This is an interesting time to be entering into my new position. I have never shied away from conflict, and I am hoping the skills that I have gained over the years as a director will help me effectively negotiate on behalf of our membership and the children of Wisconsin.

As I write this article I am watching 60 Minutes as they portray Billy Walters, recognized as one of the greatest gamblers, wagering over a million dollars per week on professional football games, and making significant profits on these wagers. Maybe Governor Walker needs to appoint him to a cabinet position.

So by the time this is distributed to all of you, we will be cheering the Packers onto a victory at the Super bowl. This will hopefully keep people in a positive attitude until at least February. As we face continued turbulent times, I trust we will be able to survive this latest dilemma.

As mentioned before, I am looking forward to the opportunity to move into the next phase of my life and help maintain WCASS as the strong voice for children. This is the time we need to all work closely together. President Dave Kwiatowski has provided great leadership to encourage all of our members to be active at the State and federal level. I am hoping all of you will be able to be active beyond the local level as we face the challenges ahead. I wish all of you a manageable second semester and look forward to seeing you at the Spring Conference.

~ Gary

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**SAA (School Administrator Alliance)
Walker Emphasizes Reform and Flexibility in State of State Message**

**John Forester, SAA
Director of Government Relations**

Governor Scott Walker delivered his first State of the State Message to a joint session of the Legislature on February 1st, declaring “we have an economic and fiscal crisis in this state that demands our immediate attention.”

Noting a potential \$3 billion deficit for the 2011-13 biennium and a more than \$200 million shortfall for the rest of this fiscal year, Walker acknowledged that the budget and budget repair bills that he will introduce in the coming weeks will focus on making the tough decisions now to correct our budget imbalances and lay the foundation for future economic growth.



One area of emphasis was the need to address public employee benefits. “Currently, most state employees pay next to nothing from their salaries toward their pension, while the state’s taxpayers pay more than \$190 million each year on state employees’ behalf. “Similarly, most state workers only pay about 6% of their premium costs for their health care plan.”

“Asking public employees to make a pension payment of just over 5%... and a premium payment of 12%... would save the state more than \$30 million over three months. Most workers outside of government would love a deal like that – particularly if it means saving jobs,” Walker said.

Walker repeatedly returned to the themes of using the budget as an opportunity to right-size government, reform entitlement programs and to provide operational flexibility to local governments.

The SAA is currently working with lawmakers to rebalance the labor-management relationship and to provide other means of operational flexibility for local school districts. The SAA Legislative Committee has adopted a Labor Relations Reform Package, the core of which appears below:

- Align school employee total compensation increases with the annual statewide per pupil adjustments under revenue caps, equal to a five-year rolling average of personal income growth multiplied by the amount of the low revenue ceiling. Districts avoid arbitration if alignment is achieved.

Prescribe cast-forward costing for all employers and include lane movements for teachers. There is no requirement to maintain fringe benefits to have a “QEO”.

- Make health insurance a permissive subject of bargaining.
- Restore the “greatest weight” factor of revenue controls and “greater weight” factor of local economic conditions in the statutory criteria used by arbitrators.
- Prohibit an arbitrator from considering an employer’s fund balance as a reflection of the employer’s ability to pay or to fund the union’s offer.

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SAA Message continued from p. 5

- Prohibit the payment of lane, step and benefit cost increases during contract hiatus to create an incentive to settle.
- Change the following mandatory subjects of bargaining to permissive subjects: preparation time, subcontracting, assignment of duties during the work day, class size, employee evaluations, reductions in force or work hours, the impact of the use of instructional technology, and the calendar of student contact days and employee work days.
- Establish in statute specified misconduct that, if engaged in, would be grounds for discharge without the application of just cause.
- Define “probationary status” for teachers in statute. Probationary teachers must have a minimum of three consecutive years of demonstrated effectiveness to gain non-probationary status.
- Non-probationary teachers who are found to be ineffective in two consecutive annual evaluations (or two within any four year period) shall have their contract non-renewed or be returned to probationary status.
- Educator effectiveness shall take precedence over seniority when making layoffs.
- Repeal the state Family and Medical Leave Act and simply align with the federal law.
- Change the threshold below which the state prevailing wage would not apply for school public works projects from the current \$25,000 to \$250,000.

If you should have any questions regarding the SAA’s work on these issues, please call me at (608) 242-1370.

Thanks for listening and, as always, thank you for your efforts on behalf of Wisconsin school children.



WCASS Region News

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

For information from this region, please contact Mardi Freeman.

CESA #1/WCASS Region #1 have scheduled their meeting dates for the 2010-11 school year. Here are the dates for your calendars:

- March 2, 2011 – CESA #1; TBD
- April 7, 2011 – WCASS Awards/Legal Briefing

Respectfully submitted by Mardi Freeman, WCASS Region #1 Representative.

Region 2 Chair: Marci Thiry ThiryM@mjsd.k12.wi.us

For information from this region, please contact Marci Thiry.

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

For information from this region, please contact John Peterson.

As most of you know, on December 1st, the legislature approved DPI's recommendations for changes to the specific learning disability eligibility criteria. These changes will go into effect on December 1, 2013. The biggest change is not a surprise: the use of response to intervention (RtI) and the sunset of the significant discrepancy clause. What has been a significant surprise is the lack of attention on the instruction we as special educators oversee and deliver in the special education classroom. The focus on RtI in the specific learning disability eligibility criteria will hopefully bring this instructional issue to the forefront of our practice.

In the new SLD criteria, if students experience minimal to no success when receiving extra instructional support via two research based interventions, then they would be eligible for a specific learning disability. In particular, the new SLD criteria defines "insufficient progress" as one of three options that a student experiences while receiving research-based interventions:

1. The academic achievement gap widens.
2. The gap is improving, but too slowly.
3. The gap is improving, but only because of resources that cannot be maintained in general education.

What is fascinating is that in two of these three scenarios, the student's academic achievement is actually improving and the academic achievement gap is actually closing. If you look at the achievement gap in special education at the national level, you will see that at best special educators help maintain the current achievement gap of the student. At worst – and, unfortunately, this happens quite frequently – this achievement gap actually widens. This phenomenon in special education at the national level is known as the "Matthew Effect" – the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Region 3 continued from p. 7

With the Matthew Effect as the status quo at the national level and RtI on the horizon, leaders in special education services will have to ask the question “What instruction will we deliver to students in special education that is considered research based?” A parent at an IEP meeting will hear how their son or daughter responded minimally or not at quick enough rate through two separate research based interventions. If I am that parent sitting at the table, the question I would ask the IEP team who is proposing that my son or daughter receive specific learning disability services is “What are you going to do that has not been attempted already, and what will this look like?” I am not confident that we have taken this issue on at a national or state level.

Instead of putting all of our focus and attention on how we will monitor progress during research based interventions and what assessments we should use, leaders in special education need to be focusing more energy on what the instruction will look like. In short, special educators need be called to task to make special education instruction research based. We’re not there yet.

To move special education instruction in a direction that will make it research based, one route to consider is to start with your local research based interventions in literacy and math that your district is currently using and/or would like to implement. Ideally, these interventions in literacy and math are not canned products but rather delivered by licensed teachers who received proper professional development to deliver the interventions. If students who are academically at risk are making some progress in these interventions, then administrators of special education services should continue this intervention in the special education classroom. In other words, the research-based intervention becomes the special education curriculum.

The benefit of this model is that interventionists and special educators are delivering similar services, speaking the same terminology, using the same assessments, and delivering services that we know the student has made progress in previously. Furthermore, parents have the assurance that the student will receive instruction where they had some level of success and that has research to back its effectiveness.

As WCASS and DPI continue to work together over the course of the next three years to ensure that districts have a model set in place to identify students as having a specific learning disability using RtI, it is my hope that our two organizations also look at the instruction delivered in the special education classroom. Our students deserve much better than the Matthew Effect.

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

For information from this region, please contact Diane Knudsen.



WCASS Upcoming Training Dates**2011****February**

2 2011 WCASS Winter Conference
3 days Radisson Paper Valley Hotel

March

2 Region 1 Meeting
Wednesday CESA #1 – New Address

9 2011 Wisconsin RtI Summit
2 days KI Convention Center

April

7 Region 1 Meeting
Thursday TBD

May

4 WCASS Spring Conference
3 days Chula Vista Resort and Conference Center

Please check the WCASS website for Registration and maps.

<https://m360.wcass.org/frontend/portal/viewcalendar.aspx>

Together We Make Our School A SUCCESS

Show how you care by treating children with respect.

Use every opportunity to guide and inspire students.

Choose to make the most of each day.

Commit to excellence in everything that you do.

Express your praise to students and co-workers for their good deeds.

Share your enthusiasm for the value of education.

Strive to build team spirit among students, parents, and staff.

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