

TEACHERS LEADING THE CHARGE

A RACE AGAINST TIME TO FIX THE LIFETIME
TEACHER LICENSE

In the 2017 – 2018 legislative session, state lawmakers created a lifetime license for teachers. What seemed to be a dream for school teachers quickly turned into a nightmare. The law did not count private school teaching experience towards the lifetime license. To make matters worse, there were only a few days left in the session to get the gap repaired.

WCRIS sprang into action to address the problem, meeting with legislators and DPI staff to develop a solution before the legislature adjourned for the year.

Most importantly, WCRIS alerted its members through the advocacy portal on the WCRIS website. Principals, teachers and parents from across the state responded. WCRIS members sent 1,000 emails to legislators in 10 days, flooding Capitol inboxes. Law makers responded by passing a bill near unanimously in both houses before the legislative session clock ran out.

The Governor signed the bill with the WCRIS provision on April 4, 2018, with WCRIS staff, teachers and boosters in attendance.

Because of the advocacy work of WCRIS and the emails from its members, private school teaching experience now counts towards lifetime licenses.



WCRIS staff and supporters with Gov. Walker

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A SAFER TOMORROW

ENSURING PRIVATE SCHOOLS GET
ACCESS TO SAFETY GRANTS



After another tragic school shooting last Spring in Florida, Governor Scott Walker called for action to secure Wisconsin schools.

The legislature responded with an Extraordinary Session to take up the issue. From the beginning of the Governor's call to action, WCRIS was at work ensuring private schools would be included. The results of that work became law.

Act 143 (the School Safety Plan) created a \$100 million grant program for both public and private schools. The main goal of the program was to establish a security baseline in all Wisconsin schools. Among many other things, the plan also included changes to the state's mandatory reporting laws. It created a new requirement for schools to submit their blueprints, which is being interpreted as floorplans by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The law also created a Wisconsin Office of School Safety (OSS). The office, under the DOJ, is tasked with working with schools and law enforcement agencies to secure Wisconsin schools. Another aspect of the OSS is to provide education to law enforcement agencies and schools on the best practices of school safety. After its creation, WCRIS met with OSS staff multiple times, to express private schools' unique perspective and provide

feedback on the grant application process.

WCRIS continues to work with OSS staff, relaying our schools' questions and concerns, and developing solutions. The OSS staff gave a presentation at the WCRIS August Professional Learning Conference and its director met with the WCRIS Board in September to discuss private school issues.



Left: WCRIS Executive Director, Sharon Schmeling; Center: OSS Interim Director Glenn Rehberg; Right: WCRIS Project Manager, Abbie Pavela

As a result of WCRIS advocacy, private schools received \$6.9 million in school safety upgrades in grant round one. Many schools report being able to improve doors and locks that had long been in need of upgrading.

The DOJ is holding another round of school safety grants. This new grant builds off of the previous round and gives schools a chance to participate, if they have not.

\$6.9 million was awarded for school safety improvements to religious and independent schools, through efforts by WCRIS.

SAVE ON TUITION WITH 529 ACCOUNTS

School tuition payers can now use tax-advantaged 529 savings accounts to pay for K-12 tuition in addition to college tuition, thanks to changes in state and federal tax laws supported by WCRIS.

Through 2018 Act 231, Wisconsin's 529 savings account rules were changed to allow coverage for K-12 tuition expenses. This was first permitted in federal law with the signing of the Federal Tax Cut and Jobs Act in December 2017.

In order to make the federal law effective in Wisconsin, WCRIS worked with state legislators to pass Act 231 and testified in support of it this Spring.

“As you may know, Congress created 529 plans in 1996 and they have been a popular way for families to save for college – public and private. The 529 plans are truly egalitarian in that a family of any means can access the program, not just the wealthy and not just the economically disadvantaged,” said WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling.

By saving money tax-free, parents will have more resources to ensure children get the K-12 education they need before college, she said.

Alongside the 529 rule change, Wisconsin lawmakers passed another provision allowing businesses to make contributions to 529 savings accounts held by their employees and receive tax credits for doing so.

Through Act 197 (SB 75) state lawmakers created an individual and corporate income and franchise tax credit for amounts contributed by an employer into an

employee's 529 savings account. This was passed to help employers recruit employees by offering them a valuable benefit.

Taken together, these two laws can provide substantial financial help to families paying tuition for K-12 schooling. Help spread the word about these benefits by sharing this information with school parents and local businesses.

For more information, go to <http://529.wi.gov/>

2018 WISCONSIN PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR



From left to right: Principal Carisa Smiskey, WCRIS Rep. Daniel Henderson, Teacher of the Year Erika Galewski, Kohl Rep. Kim Marggraf, La Crosse Diocese Superintendent Thomas Reichenbacher.

Third grade teacher Erika Galewski was named Wisconsin Private School Teacher of the Year during an all-school assembly at St. Mary's Elementary in Altoona. At a surprise all-school assembly to announce the award, Galewski was overcome with tearful joy as her family suddenly appeared carrying balloons, flowers and cake. The student body erupted in applause, as she received a Wisconsin shaped recognition plaque from WCRIS.

Galewski was selected from among this year's 14 private school Kohl Teacher Fellowship Award winners. As a Kohl fellow, she received \$6,000 and another \$6,000 for her school. As the winner of the Teacher of the Year award, she was awarded an additional \$3,000, through the generosity of the Kohl Foundation.

NEW LAWS, A NEW HANDBOOK

The 2018-2019 WCRIS Legal Handbook is now available

For over 25 years, the WCRIS Legal Handbook has been Wisconsin's most trusted, one-stop resource for private K-12 school leaders to navigate the vast and often confusing laws and regulations that apply to religious and independent schools.

It is just one of the many services WCRIS provides to help you protect and sustain your private school. An online version of the 2018-19 Legal Handbook with links to the state statutes is available on the WCRIS website member portal for WCRIS members only.

There have been several revisions to state law, which are covered in the new edition. Among many others, there are changes to:

- Mandatory reporting of threats of school violence, sex trafficking, and child exploitation;
- School security requirements under the new School Safety Plan law;
- School safety grants;
- The Early College Credit Program;
- The teacher loan program;
- Teacher licensure;
- Lifesaving skills instruction;
- Emergency administration of anti-opioid drugs and other emergency care;
- The Wisconsin Parental Choice Program and the Special Needs Scholarship Program;
- The civics exam required for graduation.

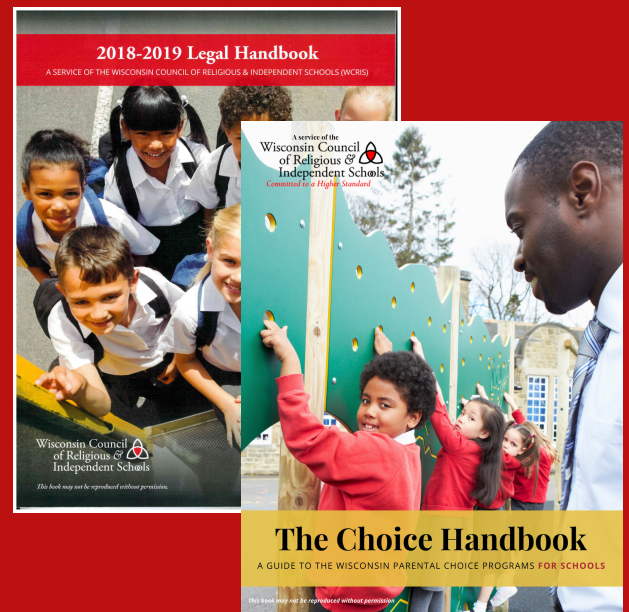
Every WCRIS school received one free copy of the Legal Handbook in May. If you would like more copies, they are available for \$50 for members and \$250 for non-members. Order by contacting WCRIS at wcris.staff@wcris.org.

A GUIDE TO SCHOOL CHOICE

You may be thinking about having your school join a Wisconsin Parental Choice Program, but don't know where to start. You are not alone! WCRIS is releasing a Choice Handbook to help solve that problem. Similar to the WCRIS Legal Handbook, it has details about all the necessary information, laws and statutory requirements that prepare you to participate in a Choice Program. Copies are \$50 for members and \$250 for non-members.

HOW TO ORDER WCRIS PUBLICATIONS

You can contact WCRIS to order any of our publications. You may also purchase additional copies of the Legal Handbook for a reduced rate.



Contact WCRIS at wcris.staff@wcris.org to order.

NEED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Consider attending the WCRIS Administrators Conference on March 8, 2019, at the Ingleside Hotel in Pewaukee. The conference features a legislative update, a presentation on protecting religious freedom for our schools, and workshops on breaking issues of concern to school leaders. This conference keeps administrators up-to-date and offers a chance to network with each other.

The WCRIS Professional Learning Conference for Teachers is on August 9, 2019 at the Glacier Canyon Lodge in the Wisconsin Dells.



The keynote speaker is Cynthia Tobias. She is known for her work titled: The Way They Learn. She speaks to the different styles of learning and how these impact the way we learn. This conference is Title II-A eligible.

BECOME AN ADVOCATE

As an administrator, you have a lot to manage. The last thing you need to worry about is keeping track of confusing legislation affecting private schools.

As part of what WCRIS does for its members, we have an advocacy portal on our website. This feature allows you to send letters to your legislators when action is needed on critical legislation affecting our schools.

In the 2017-18 legislative session, the advocacy portal allowed WCRIS members to speak out and pressure lawmakers to pass a bill that fixed flaws in the teacher licensure process for private school teachers.

Because we know how busy you are, WCRIS promises it won't bother you unless your action is truly necessary. So sign up today!

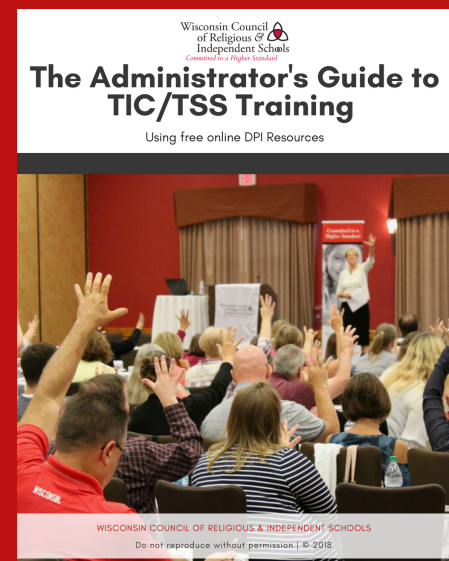
**LEARN MORE AND SIGN UP AT:
WCRIS.ORG/PUBLIC-POLICY/**

TRAUMA TRAINING GUIDE

WCRIS has assembled a free guide to help religious and independent schools conduct the state-required three hour training on Trauma Informed Care/Trauma Sensitive Schools (TIC/TSS) in a way that honors the culture and values of religious and independent schools.

This guide saves principals the time and planning required to figure out how to administer the free training to staff in the most efficient and engaging way possible using the DPI's free online modules.

The guide is found in the Membership Portal of the WCRIS website.



WCRIS PLAYS DEFENSE WITH WIAA CHANGES

Thanks to WCRIS advocacy, the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) Board of Control voted down a plan to address competitive equity that would have hurt private schools.

The Board voted 6-5 against a basketball "Rural/Urban" competitive equity plan initiated by the Board in January. The proposal sought to place schools in Divisions 3, 4 and 5 by enrollment and by U.S. Census data, with classification codes based on proximity to urban areas.

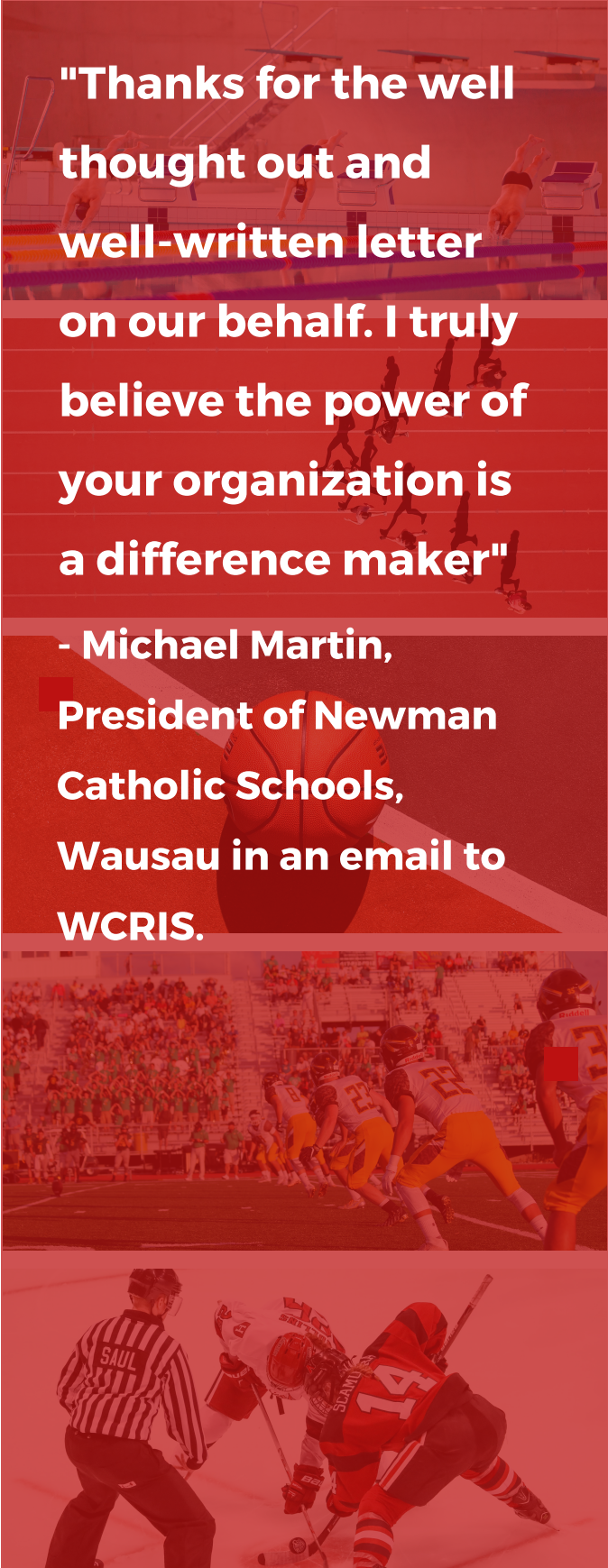
At the request of our schools, WCRIS opposed the plan and urged the Board to reconsider. In a letter before the critical vote, WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling urged the Board to "... delay action on its implementation and take time to review the proposal in light of objective data and an analysis of what it will actually accomplish."

Schmeling's letter outlined how private schools were negatively and disproportionately affected by the proposed change, and she urged the Board to reject it.

The WCRIS letter was a game changer in the debate, according to Michael Martin, President of Newman Catholic Schools in Wausau.

The WIAA Board of Control includes a private school representative who keeps the WCRIS staff and Board apprised of issues affecting private schools. That representative, Ted Knutson of Aquinas Catholic Schools in La Crosse, was invaluable in helping navigate the WIAA Board's process, Schmeling said.

"Thanks to contributions of principals like Ted on various state committees, WCRIS is able to protect our students, schools and interests," Schmeling said.



"Thanks for the well thought out and well-written letter on our behalf. I truly believe the power of your organization is a difference maker"

**- Michael Martin,
President of Newman
Catholic Schools,
Wausau in an email to
WCRIS.**

OMBUDSWHAT?

Private school children have been included in federal education programs for decades. The services they received were often uneven and incomplete compared with their public school counterparts.

But advocacy for private school students by the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) changed all that when the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in 2015. The ESSA requires every state to provide a Private School Ombudsman to ensure the equitable participation of private school students and staff in federal education programs.

Thanks to a unique public-private partnership between WCRIS and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Wisconsin is the first state to have the Ombudsman located at a private school association.

While other states have the Ombudsman buried within a state education agency, Wisconsin has its Ombudsman on staff at WCRIS with experience and knowledge about K-12 religious and independent schools. The Ombudsman is working with the DPI, public school districts, and private schools to ensure the federal law is followed.

WCRIS, in collaboration with the DPI, is using the Ombudsman to focus on providing technical assistance to private schools and public school districts (LEAs) about private school participation in ESSA. This is fostering open communication between these stakeholders, and leading to better services to private schools.

DID YOU KNOW?

WCRIS is the official Wisconsin Chapter of the Council for American Private Education (CAPE)

The first step towards this mission is a monthly Ombudsman eLetter to bring cohesive ESSA information directly to private school administrators and their LEAs. The first edition from our Ombudsman was sent on August 27. These monthly newsletters include FAQs, updates on guidance from the US Department of Education and technical assistance resources for private schools and LEAs to use when working on Title programs together.

An ESSA Needs Assessment will be included in the September edition of the eLetter. You are encouraged to use this assessment as an opportunity to report on your experience with the ESSA, your LEA and consultations. Responses to the assessment helps guide our Ombudsman's work plan for the 2018-19 school year.

Copies of the eLetter and additional resources about the ESSA are available on the Ombudsman page of the WCRIS website. (www.wcris.org)

If you are not receiving the eLetter, or have questions about the ESSA, you can reach the Wisconsin Private School Ombudsman, Abbie Pavela, at (608) 287-1224 or by email at essaombudsman@dpi.wi.gov.

MEET THE OMBUDSMAN

In December, WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling appointed former WCRIS Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Abigail (Abbie) Pavela, as the WCRIS Project Manager and Wisconsin Private School Ombudsman.

Learn more about Abbie and all the WCRIS staff at: www.wcris.org/about-wcris/staff/

WCRIS MEMBERS

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Christian Schools International (CSI)

Catholic Diocese of La Crosse

Catholic Diocese of Green Bay

Catholic Diocese of Superior

Catholic Diocese of Madison

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS):

North and South Wisconsin Districts

Wisconsin Conference of Seventh Day Adventists Schools (WCSDA)

Wisconsin Association of Independent Schools (WAIS)

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools (WELS):

Northern, Western, and Southeastern Wisconsin Districts

SAVE THE DATES:

2019 Leadership Conference -
March 8, 2019 at Ingleside Hotel in
Pewaukee.

2019 Professional Learning
Conference - August 9, 2019 at the
Glacier Canyon Lodge in the
Wisconsin Dells featuring Cynthia
Tobias as our keynote.

Visit www.wcris.org to learn more in
the coming year.