



Under the Capitol Dome

How WCRIS Schools are Faring with New Gov., DPI Head

Divided state government hasn't been too bad for private schools this legislative session (so far).

"The good news is that the state budget process was fairly straight forward and on-time for the first time in several years," said WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling.

"The downside is that normal small items of policy that could have been folded into the bill to clean up existing statutory language, or clarify existing programs were not included," she said, noting this had an impact on a number of issues WCRIS is tracking for its schools.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers introduced an \$83.5 billion 2019-21 Budget in February which the Republican-controlled Legislature trimmed to \$81 billion. It included increases for public education, which triggered automatic increases for the state's various parental Choice programs.

Outside of the budget, WCRIS continues to monitor legislation and educate lawmakers about the impact many other proposed bills may have on private schools. They include:

Proposals addressing school door barricade devices; the minority teacher loan forgiveness program; notice of school safety drills; lunch shaming, virtual learning counting towards teaching hours in inclement weather; reciprocity for teachers with licenses from out-of-state; teacher preparation programs; grants for after-school programs; requirements for participation in the Early College Credit program, efforts to address lead abatement in school drinking water pipes, and more.

"Legislation is moving slowly because lawmakers know they won't get the governor to sign bills into law unless they carry bi-partisan support," Schmeling said.

"That's ushering in an era of cooperation among legislators. But, cooperation takes time."



WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling testifying before the Assembly Committee on Education regarding virtual instruction and snow days.

The legislative session has scheduled floor periods when the legislature can act through late March 2020.

Meanwhile, WCRIS has scheduled a meeting this Fall with newly appointed State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor and the WCRIS Board of Directors to identify issues of common ground that can help improve education for all children.

WCRIS will keep school administrators updated about the development of proposed laws affecting our schools through the weekly Current Events e-letter. If action is needed, WCRIS will alert you accordingly. You can subscribe at wcris.org/news/.

New WCRIS 2020 - 21 Legal Handbook

The 2020-21 WCRIS Legal Handbook will be available early next year. It is the most trusted, one-stop resource for private school leaders to navigate the vast and often confusing laws and regulations that apply to Wisconsin's religious and independent schools.

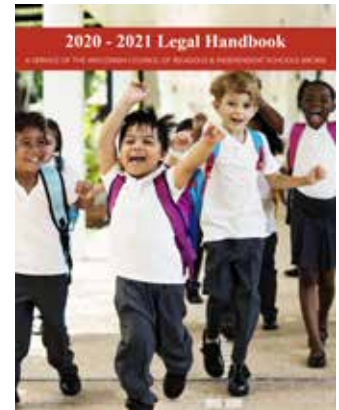
Every WCRIS member school receives one free copy of the Legal Handbook by mail. If you would like more copies, they are available for \$50 per copy for members and \$250 for non-members.

It is just one of the many services WCRIS provides to help you protect and sustain your private school.

The next edition will include new rule changes and clarifications on existing laws that have been made since the last Handbook.

An online version of the 2020-21 Legal Handbook with links to the state statutes will be available in the member portal on the WCRIS website.

Order extra copies by emailing wcris.staff@wcris.org.



Private School Quick Facts

Wisconsin leads the nation in private K-12 student enrollment, with 127,000 private school students. Given that fact, national statistics about private K-12 schools are likely representative of what's happening in the Badger State.

Released this month from the US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics:

- Of private schools, 59 percent reported having at least one student with a formally identified disability;
- Private schools reported that 8 percent of K-12 students had a formally identified disability;
- Of private schools, 19 percent reported they participated in the federal free or reduced price lunch program in the 2017-18 school year;
- Among private schools with any grades 9-12, 56 percent offered dual or concurrent enrollment, 6 percent offered a specialized career academy, 23 percent offered career and technical education courses, 20 percent offered internships outside of school, and 30 percent had block scheduling.

Taken from the August 2019 National Center for Education Statistics report, "Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results from the 2017-18 National Teacher and Principal Survey First Look."

The report can be accessed directly by Googling the title.

Updated School Choice Handbook Coming in 2020



The new edition includes updated clarifications to the law and provides Choice administrators with a better, more detailed understanding of the programs' intricacies.

Last year, WCRIS released the first-ever Choice Handbook to help serve schools in the state's four parental Choice programs.

Schools interested in preordering a \$50 copy of the second edition of the Choice Handbook can do so by contacting WCRIS at wcris.staff@wcris.org.

Who Saves \$1 Billion?

If there were no private schools, Wisconsin state and local taxes would have to rise more than \$1 billion annually to pay for those students' education in public schools.



Teacher Licensure: A Maze of Confusion

Navigating Wisconsin's teacher licensure process is like traversing a haunted corn maze in the dark -- it's a real life nightmare of terror and confusion with no clear end in sight.

No wonder the process deters potential teachers from pursuing the profession.

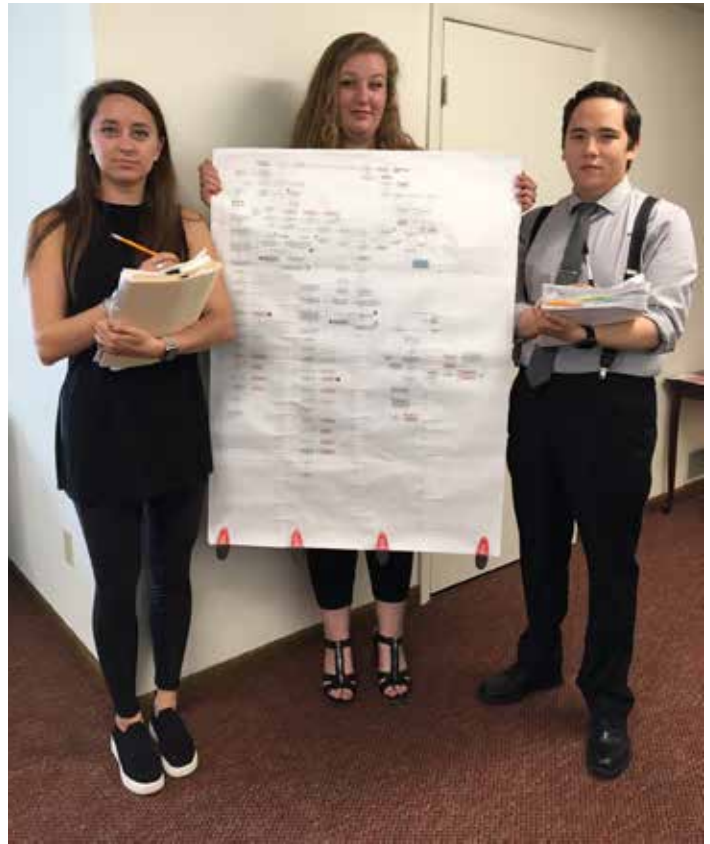
An effort towards simplification was offered via creation of the Lifetime Teacher licenses in 2017. But it went awry because the Legislature also cut DPI staffing in the very department that was charged with processing the licenses. As a result, answers to licensing questions have been slow in coming.

When teacher license bills are introduced, WCRIS has been working to educate lawmakers about the complex and messy system of licensure and advocating wholesale reform, rather than piecemeal changes that are merely band-aids.

Those efforts have been reported in the WCRIS weekly Current Events e-letter, which you can find on the WCRIS website at www.wcris.org/news.

"Every chance we get, we advocate for the Legislature to make the licensure system easier and more cost effective to navigate," said WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling.

"There is growing consensus among legislators that earlier reform efforts only made things worse. But, there are some signals that the teacher shortage is creating an impetus for lawmakers to re-look at Wisconsin's process."



WCRIS staff holds a flow chart showing the maze a potential teacher must navigate to get licensed in just one of the 13 license categories. It's so complicated it requires five feet of paper and small text to illustrate.

Student Immunizations: A Snapshot

Did you ever wonder what happens to all of that immunization data that you are mandated to collect from your students and annually file with the state?

The data gets crunched by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, which is charged by law with reporting it to the state Legislature annually, by July 1.

The latest report shows the current state of child immunization efforts. Consider:

- For the 2018-19 school year, 91.9 percent of students met the state's minimum immunization requirements. That was down 0.4 percent from 92.3 percent the previous year.
- Over the past 20 years, the percentage of students with a waiver for one or more immunizations increased from 1.6 percent in 1997-1998 to 5.3 percent in 2018-2019. Waivers are claimed for personal conviction,

religious or medical reasons.

- Over the past several decades, the percentage of students with religious and medical waivers has remained relatively constant. But, the percentage of students with a personal conviction waiver increased from 1.2 percent in the 1997-98 school year to 4.6 percent for 2017-2018.
- Only 1.1 percent of students waived all immunizations during the 2018-19 school year, a 0.1 percent increase from the last school year.

For more information about your responsibility to help ensure immunization compliance, see page 43 of the WCRIS 2018-19 Legal Handbook.

Source: The Wisconsin Department of Health Services July 1, 2019 annual report to the Legislature.

2019 Private School Teacher of the Year

Catherine Burnett, head art teacher at Pius XI High School in Milwaukee, was named the 2019 Wisconsin Private School Teacher of the Year.

The announcement came during a surprise classroom visit where Catherine received cheers and applause from her students.

She was presented with flowers, champagne, a card from alumni of her program and a check for \$3,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

Catherine is one of the 14 private school teachers to win the Herb Kohl Teacher Fellowship award. Each winner received \$6,000 for themselves and another \$6,000 for their school.

Catherine's hard work and dedication to the arts has raised Pius IX to be one of the top high school art programs in the nation. The program produces high caliber graduates attending prestigious art programs and students who have been national presidential scholar winners.



Catherine Burnett with Milwaukee Alderman Michael Murphy, a former WCRIS school student.

Views on the 2019 WCRIS Summer Teacher Conference

The 2019 WCRIS Professional Learning Conference for private school teachers was a great success, bringing a record 180 teachers from across the state to the Wisconsin Dells for the one-day event.

The conference was abuzz with fresh faces and anticipation for the new school year.

Attendees left feeling ready to enter their classrooms with practical concepts to try and new ideas to explore.



Presenter and Blessed Sacrament Elementary Teacher, Jackie Levondowski, leads a breakout session on reading and writing.

There was ample positive feedback, but a few comments stood out:

"Can't wait to come back next year! I have been teaching over twenty years, and your conference is the best ever!"

"Great keynote and lots of workshop choices!"

"[The] opportunity to grow, improve, and network!"

"Super Organized! :)"

Teachers are already talking about returning next year for the 2020 WCRIS Professional Learning Conference on August 7, in the Wisconsin Dells.

Advocate for Your School

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

One of the many benefits WCRIS provides for its members, is an advocacy portal on our website. It is designed to send letters to your legislator with a personal message about your school and a WCRIS message about 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 will not ask you to take action unless your immediate involvement is truly necessary.

So, please sign up today at www.wcris.org/public-policy/.

Ombudsman Tells of Wins for Private School Staff, Kids

In the 2018-19 school year, the Ombudsman handled many successful negotiations that saw private school students and teachers treated equitably, as federal law requires.

The Ombudsman is charged with being an impartial arbiter of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) while providing support and mediation to both private schools and public school districts. Mediation between these two parties has been beneficial for all.

For example:

- A school in eastern Wisconsin contacted the Ombudsman after a district declined a request to pay a vendor on its behalf for a micro-credentialing platform used for staff professional development. After working with the Ombudsman, the school was able to get its request approved as an eligible Title II-A expense. The school's 2018-19 Title II-A allocation was \$111,441. This victory allowed for a year-long professional development platform for the entire staff.
- The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) contacted the Ombudsman after a district in western Wisconsin and a private school could not reach an agreement on Title I-A services for the 2018-19 school year. The district had requested the private school sign a new Affirmation of Consultation form declining all services for the year. But, after working with the Ombudsman, the private school received Title I services for its selected educationally needy students for the 2018-19 school year and inclusion in additional Title programs. The private school's 2018-19 Title I-A allocation was \$38,283. If the private school had just signed the district's Affirmation Form without asking any questions, it would have been unable to serve these students and its allocation would have been forfeited for the year.

The common pieces of these success stories are:

- The private school's willingness to reach out to the Ombudsman, if something doesn't seem right;
- Private school leaders effort to educate themselves on what the federal law requires for equitable participation of their school's students and staff.

If these schools had given up at the first sign of objection from their district, their students and teachers would have suffered the consequences, with another year of being left behind.



Wisconsin Private School Ombudsman, Abbie Pavela, presents at the WELS EdTech Leadership Conference.

What is the Ombudsman?

Private school children have been included in federal education programs for decades, but in many cases, once the laws were implemented at the local level, private schools were left behind. When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA) was reauthorized in 2015, it included hard-fought protections for private school students to make sure they were actually being included in the programs, as required by Congress. One of those protections was the creation of the Ombudsman position.

Wisconsin is the first and only state to have its Ombudsman located at a private school association, thanks to a path-breaking public-private partnership between WCRIS and the DPI.

While other states have the Ombudsman at the state education agency, Wisconsin has a person on staff at WCRIS. This specialized experience and knowledge about K-12 religious and independent schools enriches collaboration with the DPI, CESA's and public school districts. This ensures that your school's students and staff get equitable participation in federal education programs.

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

2020 Save the Dates

Leadership Conference

March 6

at the Ingleside Hotel in Pewaukee.

Professional Learning Conference

August 7

**at the Glacier Canyon Lodge in the
Wisconsin Dells.**