

Under the Capitol Dome

WCRIS tackles federal issues

Friend of the Court Brief

While the state legislature is on hiatus until January, WCRIS remains busy with federal issues.

In late August, WCRIS signed an amicus brief along with the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) and 52 organizations nationwide to appeal the alarming ruling that merely being a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization makes one a recipient of Federal Financial Assistance, and triggers mandatory compliance with many non-discrimination laws that may violate religious teachings and values.

The ruling was made in two separate courts, one in Maryland on July 21, and one in California on July 25, 2022.

Although the rulings currently do not apply to tax-exempt organizations in Wisconsin, this is a critical issue that needs to be opposed because it could become a nationwide problem. Stay tuned.

Pandemic Aid

Since the start of the pandemic, WCRIS initiated a weekly meeting with the DPI to discuss the issues that are impacting private schools. The meetings now continue bi-monthly.

As the pandemic needs changed, Congress provided \$140 million in federal Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS). WCRIS is working with DPI and CESA 6 to ensure that its members can access over \$140 million in EANS funds until they end in 2023 and 2024.

Contaminated Water

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) now designates private wells that serve more than 15 people as a public water supply. This change has serious impacts on rural schools that use private wells.

When invited through CAPE to comment on the EPA rules, WCRIS was first in the nation to suggest a path forward for the EPA that balances clean water and the needs of private schools.

The rules are under review. Stay tuned.

Strength in Numbers

There are many issues facing private schools this year: staffing shortages; licensing issues; cultural shifts; and, being a recipient of federal financial assistance.

While these issues can be overwhelming, know that you are a part of an influential organization that represents over 600 private schools. Unified, your concerns and voices are amplified through WCRIS.

We need to work together as never before. Thank you for your steadfast membership.

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You Need the WCRIS Legal Handbook Update

WCRIS published an appendix to the 2020-21 WCRIS Legal Handbook in August.

The appendix is designed to update principals on the latest legal information and recommend best practices that have emerged since the WCRIS Legal Handbook was last printed.

In an effort to save WCRIS members' money, the appendix was created instead of printing and mailing a whole new handbook, as in the past. It is only available electronically.

WCRIS members can access the appendix on our website's Member Portal. You can do so by clicking on "Member Login" at the top, right-hand corner of the home page. Then, enter your username (your email address) and password. If you have forgotten your password, you are able to reset it on the website if you have an existing account.

If you have never logged in before, click on the "Sign Up Here" link to create an account. Please allow two business days for WCRIS staff to approve your new account.

We suggest printing the 14-page Appendix and inserting it in your current hard copy of the WCRIS Legal Handbook.

A new edition of the WCRIS Legal Handbook will be printed and published in August 2023. It will include any new laws passed by the Legislature, which convenes in January.

Other Handbooks You Need

The popular WCRIS Choice Handbook addresses the state's School Choice Programs, and provides a deeper look at the laws governing them.

Similarly, the SNSP Handbook covers the state's Special Needs Scholarship Program laws.

You can order a copy of any of the handbooks by contacting our office at wcris.staff@wcris.org or 608-287-1224.

Staff Changes at WCRIS

There has been two exciting staff updates at WCRIS.

Daniel Henderson was promoted to School Programs Coordinator, and will be closely focusing on state programs, such as transportation, school safety and the Choice programs.



Daniel Henderson

He is succeeded by Michelle Murphy who joins WCRIS as its Communications and Outreach Coordinator with experience in writing and editing, website management and event planning for nonprofit associations.



Michelle Murphy

Michelle compiles the weekly Current Events e-letter and is currently planning WCRIS' upcoming March 50th Anniversary and Legislative Day of Action. (See Page 3.)

Murphy is a graduate of Milwaukee-area private schools, and she especially recognizes the important work of WCRIS, as she is married to a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) middle school teacher.

Don't hesitate to contact either for help. We are here to serve!

Working for You in D.C.

Did you know that your membership in WCRIS automatically includes representation in the Council for American Private Education (CAPE)?

CAPE works at the federal level monitoring the issues that matter the most to you. WCRIS is the only official state chapter of CAPE in Wisconsin.

CAPE was instrumental in the creation of the ESSA Ombudsman nationwide. In Wisconsin, the Ombudsman is a WCRIS staff member, thanks to a public-private partnership approved by the-then DPI Superintendent Tony Evers and former Governor Scott Walker. With WCRIS' guidance, the two sides were brought together to improve services for our schools' students and staff.

Learn more at www.wcris.org/about-wcris/membership/.

ESEA

Scaling the Mountain of Rules

Annually, public school districts are required to consult with the private schools located within their boundaries about equitable services available under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The newest version approved by Congress is called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Consultation must be timely and meaningful and be conducted before the district has made any decisions about their own ESSA programs and budgets. Ideally, this means that consultation is occurring in early spring.

Wisconsin's Private School Ombudsman, in collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), has created a new resource to facilitate effective and cooperative consultations between private schools and local public school districts.

The 2022-23 toolkit is now available on the DPI's website by searching: "*Consultation Toolkit for Private School Equitable Participation*" at dpi.wi.gov.

The resource walks private schools and public school districts through the initial and ongoing consultation process required for the equitable participation of private schools in ESSA programs. The consultation section of the toolkit is the first part of an ongoing technical assistance project being facilitated by the Private School Ombudsman/WCRIS Project Manager Abigail Pavela.

Don't hesitate to contact Pavela at the WCRIS office by emailing her at essaombudsman@dpi.wi.gov if you need help with ESSA programs.



Abigail Pavela

Save the Date

Represent Your School at the State Capitol

WCRIS will be hosting a Legislative Day of Action on March 22, 2022, in Madison at the Monona Terrace.

We have an exciting day planned for school leaders!

You'll start the day off with an overview of the current WCRIS legislative agenda, our hopes for the new session and what to expect and how to talk to your legislator.

We'll have an informative and motivating keynote speaker.

After lunch, you will be able to put everything you learned into action by visiting your legislators at the capitol.

This is a great opportunity to not only make your voice heard, but to connect with your local lawmakers. Those connections are critical to your school's success.

Watch for more information and registration details in our Current Events e-letter. Current Events covers all the latest updates from the DPI and U.S. Capitol that you need to know.

All stories are archived on our website so you can always find the information you need. Subscribe at www.wcris.org/news/.

Lunch and Learn Webinars

In the absence of in-person conferences, WCRIS has been hosting hour-long webinars for school leaders on a variety of topics.

The Lunch and Learn webinars have been a success. Over a hundred members have tuned in to webinars about busing, school safety, the choice programs and much more.

WCRIS will host more in the 2022-23 school year. This is just another member benefit that helps make your job easier.

Keep an eye out for the upcoming webinar schedule in Current Events e-letter. Subscribe at www.wcris.org/news/.

Finding the Info You Need

Do you have a question regarding busing? Maybe you want to know how the K-12 State Tax deduction works? Confused about EANS funds?

You can find answers to all those questions and more at www.wcris.org.

WCRIS works daily to ensure that our website is updated with the relevant information needed to operate your school effectively. Visit us today!

WCRIS Member Benefits

Schools that belong to WCRIS receive the following member benefits:

- Government relations services on state and federal issues;
- Technical assistance in accessing state and federal programs by real people in real time. If we don't have the answer, we'll get it for you!
- Access to lawyers who know and care about our schools' unique missions;
- Access to "Current Events," a timely weekly e-letter with WCRIS news from Madison and Washington D.C.;
- A free hard copy of the biennial WCRIS Legal Handbook and Appendix, which compiles all of the state laws that regulate private schools;
- Reduced rates on all WCRIS handbooks (Choice, SNSP, Funding Guide, etc.);
- Sample templates required for state programs;
- Access to principal and teacher professional development events and webinars;
- Membership in and advocacy by the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) in Washington, D.C..

To learn more about your member benefits, go to:

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