

# 2018-2019 Annual Report

*SWSA advocates for the benefit of all students by driving education policies supporting strong public schools to ensure world class practices, economic vitality, and community well-being.*

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**May, 2019**

*“Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance wheel of the social machinery.” Horace Mann, 1848*

I was involved in and worked on my first school referendum (as a community member) in 1999. It failed. That experience, although disheartening, made me quickly realize that although public education is supposed to be an opportunity for all and the “great equalizer”, advocating for resources was going to be critical to ensure all children received a quality education in Wisconsin.

Serving on my local school board for 11 years led me to the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA) and six years ago into the position as the Executive Director for this organization. What I have learned is that the SWSA has an amazing group of passionate leaders working every day to advocate for what’s best for kids. The connections SWSA has made across the state, and now the nation (through our connection with the AASA, the School Superintendents Association) continues to make us stronger and bring more tools, connections, and information to our membership. Our organization is uniquely positioned to advocate as we bring together both superintendents and school board members to discuss how best to advocate for kids in our region and throughout Wisconsin.

SWSA keeps children at the center of our conversation and helps us focus our efforts to ensure their success. I believe, this is the only way we can make sure the organization’s resources are being used most effectively.

SWSA continues to build across the state and nation as we continue our advocacy efforts. Often, we don’t take the time to pause and celebrate our accomplishments; and that is the purpose of our annual report. With our commitment to quality education for kids, I am proud to share the accomplishments throughout the 2018-2019 calendar year. These accomplishments are the result of hard work and dedication from our members as you continue to engage in building relationships with your legislators and community partners.

I would also like to thank the commitment from our Executive Committee and Co-Chairs who were actively engaged and a driving force behind the organization’s significant successes this past year. SWSA would not be where it is today without the incredible dedication from these education leaders.

Please take a moment to thank the following Executive Committee Members:

**Members of the SWSA Executive Committee:**

Mark Hansen, SWSA Co-Chair (Superintendent Elmbrook)

Sharon Muehlfeld, SWSA Co-Chair (School Board Member, Wauwatosa)

Larry Dux, SWSA Co-Chair Elect (School Board Member, Pewaukee)

Region 1 Rep: John Thomsen (Superintendent, Whitefish Bay)

Region 2 Rep: Lisa Elliot (Superintendent, Greenfield)

Region 3 Rep: Faith Vanderhorst (Board Member, Menomonee Falls)

Region 4 Rep: Marty Lexmond (Superintendent West Allis-West Milwaukee)

Region 5 Rep: Chris Thiel (Legislative Policy Director Milwaukee Public Schools)

Blaise Paul, Business Manager for South Milwaukee School District, and SWSA’s fiscal agent

Ramie Zelenkova, SWSA Legislative Liaison

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Finally, I would like to recognize those in our organization who are transitioning to new opportunities:

### **Retirements and Transitions:**

*SWSA recognizes the following members for their significant contributions to the SWSA, their dedication to their communities, and most importantly to the students in their districts.*

- ❖ *Dr. Rita Olson, Superintendent, School District of South Milwaukee. Dr. Olson is retiring from her position as superintendent after working in education for the last 40 years. Dr. Olson has served as Superintendent for the School District of South Milwaukee since 2010 and has been an incredible long-time advocate for kids. SWSA is grateful for her strong voice at our meetings. Best wishes Rita!*
- ❖ *Dr. Tim Culver, Superintendent, Oak Creek-Franklin. Dr. Culver is retiring from a long career in serving students. He joined Oak Creek-Franklin four years ago, and SWSA benefited from his vast experience when he joined us! Thank you for your advocacy and best wishes Tim!*

As we reflect on these past 12 months, I would like to personally thank each of you for your passion, leadership, and willingness to engage in advocacy. This isn't easy work, and often frustrating. We represent over 220,000 children, and if we don't have a voice in the conversation, neither do our kids. Let's keep talking, debating, and ensuring that the best K-12 education policy is enacted in Wisconsin.

SWSA will continue to provide support and leadership opportunities to build capacity and our ability to advocate effectively on behalf of our children and communities.

Most Sincerely,



Terri Phillips  
SWSA Executive Director

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The SWSA's mission is to advocate for the benefit of all students by driving education policies supporting strong public schools to ensure world class practices, economic vitality, and community well-being.

The SWSA supports our mission through the following tiered approach:

- Develop and implement key strategies to advocate for sound education policy
- Leverage research to drive educational practice and advocacy
- Raise the impact of SWSA by identifying and developing mutually beneficial partnerships
- Continue to strengthen the SWSA business model by supporting school districts and their communities

### Accomplishments in the Key Strategic Areas include:

Strategy	Measurable Outcomes
Advocating for sound education policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Actively engaged in increasing financial support and sound education policy for public schools across Wisconsin.</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Testified at the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) hearings in April 2019.</li> <li>b. Provided talking points for the membership and facilitated coordination of member district testimony for the JFC hearings.</li> <li>c. Coordinated and facilitated a meeting with Speaker Vos in April 2019 with all of the education advocacy organizations to ensure that our key priorities were clear as legislators move into caucus for the biennial budget.</li> <li>d. Facilitated a conversation between SWSA members and State Budget Director, Brian Pahnke.</li> <li>e. With the assistance and support from SWSA business managers, coordinated and facilitated Education Academy 101 with a focus on school finance. Over 40 attendees (legislators and staff) attended this half day workshop to improve their understanding before the biennial budget hearings began.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. SWSA spearheaded this workshop and coordinated statewide efforts with the School Administrators Alliance (SAA), Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB), Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WiRSA) and Wisconsin Public Education Network (WPEN).</li> </ol> </li> <li>f. SWSA worked with WiRSA and other education advocates and acted as the central repository for all of the school board resolutions pertaining to an increase in Special Education Reimbursement.</li> <li>g. Coordinated and hosted candidate (now Governor Evers) in October, 2018.</li> <li>h. Invited Senator Darling, Representative Ott, and Senator Johnson's office in to discuss mental health challenges facing communities.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <b><i>Developed a legislative agenda with the SWSA Membership.</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Facilitated several membership conversations to coordinate the needs and legislative position for our 32-member public school districts. Identified key areas for advocacy during the next biennial budget and specific action to be taken.</li> <li>b. Coordinated efforts with other advocacy organizations (SAA, WASB, and WiRSA) across the state to ensure legislative strategic priorities are aligned.</li> <li>c. Provided a legislative document for SWSA members to take back to their own districts and use as a foundation for the development of their school district legislative agendas.</li> <li>d. Developed "talking points" that can be used by all member school districts and provided the opportunity for school districts to edit/add to this document.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. <b><i>Provided SWSA members with expert guidance from our legislative liaison, Ramie Zelenkova.</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ramie has guided the SWSA organization to develop strategy and identify the best use of resources for our advocacy efforts. The SWSA legislative liaison provides timely legislative updates to SWSA members as well as in-person access to legislative contacts.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

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Strategy	Measurable Outcomes
Leveraging research to drive educational practice and advocacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Continued to cultivate our partnership with the Wisconsin Policy Forum to provide access to research and educational opportunities for SWSA members.</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. SWSA plays an active role and serves on the Education Committee with the Public Policy Forum. In addition, a team from the SWSA partners annually meet with the Public Policy Forum research staff to review their research products and identifies ways to improve the value of the information they are providing.</li> <li>b. The relationship between SWSA and the Wisconsin Policy forum gives us the opportunity to drive education policy for the region and state.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <b><i>Partnership with Hanover Research supported advocacy efforts in the of teacher pipeline.</i></b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. During 2018, SWSA worked with Hanover Research and developed a research product entitled, “<i>Best Practices for Teacher Recruitment and Retention</i>”. This literature research was requested by member school districts as a way to expand their practices and tailor their methods for teacher recruitment. Member school districts have taken these key findings back to their districts and communities to best customize teacher recruitment and retention practices.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. This literature research information was also shared with the Deans of the Greater Milwaukee area and led to a productive conversation as to how to coordinate our efforts in this area.</li> </ol> </li> <li>b. SWSA members were able to access the national database of research provided local school districts the opportunity to embed evidence-based research into their decision-making process when exploring new program opportunities for students.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Raise the impact of SWSA by identifying and developing mutually beneficial partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Established strong relationships and partnerships with stakeholders outside of education.</i></b> SWSA realizes that influencing public policy requires bringing other stakeholder groups to the table along with education leaders. Our team often includes business, healthcare, law enforcement, local elected officials and others in our advocacy efforts resulting in increased awareness of the importance of sound education policy and their involvement.</li> <li>2. <b><i>Developed strong relationships and partnerships with other education organizations across the state.</i></b> There is great value to SWSA member districts and advocacy efforts by building relationships across the education continuum. These include the Department of Public Instruction, higher education, other education advocacy organizations such as the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB), Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WIRSA), School Administrators Association (SAA), and others. These strong relationships have helped to develop a well-educated membership capable of strong advocacy to influence public policy.</li> <li>3. <b><i>The SWSA has met with (or invited) these guests over the course of the past year:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tony Evers, State Superintendent and gubernatorial candidate (now Governor)</li> <li>• Jeff Pertl, Senior Policy Analyst, Department of Public Instruction</li> <li>• Brian Pahnke, Assistant State Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction, (and as State Budget Director)</li> <li>• March: Hosted Higher Education Panel and legislative guests</li> <li>• Speaker Vos</li> <li>• Senator Darling</li> <li>• Representative Ott</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Continue to strengthen the SWSA business model by supporting school	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Launched new website to support member districts and the work of the SWSA.</i></b> SWSA is proud to have launched our new website! Although this was an incredibly intensive process, our organization now has a full functioning website that is being used to support our work. The website is regularly updated and houses important information for our membership.</li> <li>2. <b><i>School boards and District Administrators share strategies and best practice when working with their legislators and building strong relationships to influence sound education policy.</i></b> One of</li> </ol>

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Strategy	Measurable Outcomes
districts and their communities	<p>SWSA’s greatest assets is the collegiality among the members and their willingness to share what is working and perhaps more importantly what is not. SWSA often leverages the relationship a legislator has with their school district to build understanding on an issue and influence their position on education policy. This has been extremely evident over the course of the last two budget cycles where education funding has begun to take a priority.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <b><i>School boards and District Administrators share strategies for working with their communities to educate them on the importance of sound education policies.</i></b> A more informed electorate on education policy will continue to build advocates outside of education and influence public policy in Madison.</li> <li>4. <b><i>SWSA has initiated bi-monthly meetings for our “school board” representatives.</i></b> School board members often need a “sounding board” for issues they are facing in their district. Board member representatives from member districts are now meeting on a bi-monthly basis to discuss these topics and utilize their peers to inform their decisions. Board members are finding these discussions (immediately following the SWSA meeting) to be extremely beneficial and are requesting topics for discussion. These meetings are facilitated by the SWSA Executive Director.</li> <li>5. <b><i>SWSA continues to add school districts to the membership.</i></b> SWSA continues to add school districts to our membership! We welcomed Racine Unified this year and they have become an active member in the SWSA and their advocacy role. These new voices add a new dimension to our monthly conversations and our advocacy work.</li> </ol>

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SWSA hosted a discussion with Senator Darling, Representative Ott, and Senator Johnson's office to discuss mental health and school safety issues.

Gubernatorial Candidate, now Governor Evers met with SWSA to discuss important education issues prior to the November, 2018 election.



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SWSA spearheaded Education Academy 101 in March 2019 entitled, Demystifying School Finance. SWSA Business Managers Blaise Paul (South Milwaukee), Shawn Yde (Whitefish Bay), John Gahan (Pewaukee) along with other school leaders across Wisconsin educated legislators and their staff on school finance. The goal was to provide a foundational understanding of current school finance to help inform future policy decisions. Other education stakeholder partners included SAA, WASDA, WiRSA and WPEN.

SWSA hosted the Education Deans of Greater Milwaukee to discuss teacher pipeline issues in Wisconsin specifically focusing on attraction and retention of quality educators.



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School board member Quin Brunette from Whitnall and Brett Hyde from Muskego-Norway, testified at the Joint Finance Committee Hearings in April 2019. Brett is also serving as the current WASB (Wisconsin Association of School Boards) board president.

Brown Deer Superintendent Deb Kerr and her leadership team testified at the April JFC hearings. Deb is currently serving as the incoming president of the AASA, National Superintendent's Association.



Terri Phillips, SWSA Executive Director, Quin Brunette and Brett Hyde testified at the April 2019 Joint Finance Committee hearing in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

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SWSA legislative liaison, Ramie Zelenkova, coordinated a meeting with Speaker Vos in May 2019. Many of the education stakeholder groups in Wisconsin participated including SAA, WASB, WiRSA, and SWSA. This was an important meeting as this team conveyed key budget priorities prior to the Joint Finance Committee making their final recommendations for K-12 education.