

2019-2020 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. www.schoolsalliance.com

May, 2020

“Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.”- William Butler Yeats

“If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow.”- John Dewey

COVID-19... This virus has upended our lives and the lives of our children, teachers, families and communities. I began this annual report with two quotes that we’ve all read; however, I ask you to read them again but through the lens of our current circumstances.

- Our teachers are “lighting the fire” of our children and giving them an opportunity to really explore virtual options and what that means. Educators are guiding this experience and allowing children to push new boundaries. The children are so happy to spend time (albeit virtually) with their educators!
- Our educators are helping our children discover innovative ways to learn and explore! We live in the 21st century and are in the midst of a pandemic. We’ve been changing how we educate children over the past two decades, but this quote from John Dewey seems to mean much more today.

Since early March, SWSA has been working extremely hard to provide you the support you need in a timely manner in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- SWSA immediately created an [SWSA COVID-19 Resource Page](#) and continually updates these resources
- Ramie Zelenkova, our legislative liaison, provides a weekly summary recap report
- We immediately moved our monthly SWSA meeting to a virtual platform hosting 49 participants in April and 52 participants in May. We will continue to host these meetings virtually for the time being.
 - Guests included DPI leadership and Mental Health resources from NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Health)
- SWSA hosted bi-weekly meetings with board members to provide a virtual platform for them to discuss their most pressing challenges with fellow board members from their region
 - Dan Rossmiller from WASB has been attending our bi-weekly meetings and providing clarification on issues for board members
- SWSA is now embarking on a communications strategy utilizing short videos to continue to “tell our story”
- We continue to work closely and coordinate our work with other K-12 advocacy organizations across the state to share information and ensure a consistent message

Although our current focus is on COVID-19 and the health and safety of our kids and our staff, SWSA has spent the past year doing some extraordinary work which is shared throughout this annual report. SWSA members continue to keep children at the center of our conversation and this helps us focus our efforts and resources to ensure their success.

As you read through this annual report and reflect on the accomplishments throughout the 2019-2020 calendar year, I would ask that you take a moment to thank members of our fabulous Executive Committee and our Co-Chairs for their tireless commitment to you and the organization. This team meets at least once per month and are constantly asked to respond frequently to emails regarding legislative positions and other issues that face the organization. SWSA would not be where it is today without the incredible dedication from these education leaders.

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I would also like to personally thank Mark Hansen who has provided his leadership as he has served on the Executive Committee for the past three years in the Co-Chair Elect and in the Co-Chair position. His term ends on June 30, 2020. We are grateful for his passion for education and the children and communities he serves! Thanks Mark!

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

Members of the SWSA Executive Committee:

Mark Hansen, SWSA Co-Chair (Superintendent Elmbrook)

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

Lisa Elliot, SWSA Co-Chair Elect (Superintendent Greenfield)

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

Region 2 Rep: Judy Mueller (Superintendent, Franklin)

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

Region 4 Rep: Jane Barbian (School Board Member, Racine)

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

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. Deborah Kerr, Superintendent of Brown Deer. Deb has served as the AASA President over the past year and has been extremely involved in advocacy at the national level. SWSA has benefitted from her updates and information that has strengthened our local advocacy efforts. Deb, we thank you for your service and wish you the best in your next adventure!*
- ❖ *Dr. Jim Heiden, Superintendent of Cudahy. Jim has been a tireless advocate for children and will be retiring from the Cudahy School District at the end of June. We wish Jim much happiness!*
- ❖ *Dr. Todd Gray, Superintendent of the School District of Waukesha. Todd spent time serving on the Executive Committee and also shares his great knowledge of school finance with the team. His perspective on legislative issues has been invaluable. Thank you for your service and best wishes!*
- ❖ *John Haslam, School Board Member, South Milwaukee. John has served the South Milwaukee School District as a board member for 33 years. In addition, he was one of the "founding fathers" of the SWSA organization serving as one of the first co-chairs of the organization. John also stepped in just a few years ago and served as co-chair completing the term of one of our co-chairs who retired. John, thank you for your service to both your community and the SWSA. We are going to miss you!*

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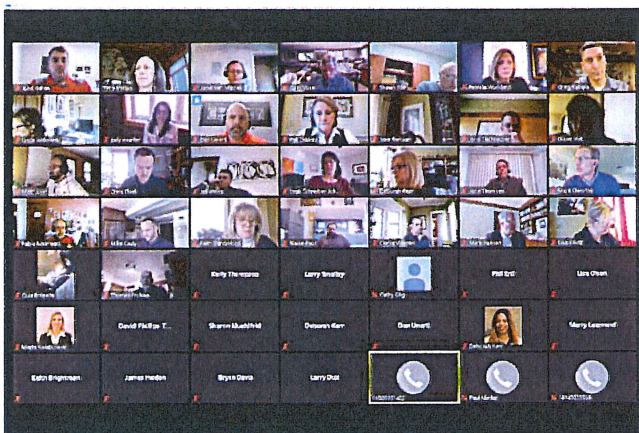
As we reflect on these past 12 months, I would like to personally thank each of you for your passion, leadership, and willingness to engage in advocacy. This isn't easy work, and often frustrating. We represent over 220,000 children, and if we don't have a voice in the conversation, neither do our kids. 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,

Theresa A. Phillips

Terri Phillips
SWSA Executive Director



Our current reality! We still continue to meet and advance the great work of the organization and our school districts!!

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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"> 1. <i>Developed a legislative agenda with the SWSA Membership.</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Each year we review the legislative priorities for the organization and have honed in on six key priority areas. SWSA 2019-2020 Legislative Priorities. With the direction and assistance from the Executive Committee and our legislative liaison, Ramie Zelenkova, we were able to identify these key areas for advocacy. b. Board members have been actively engaged in legislative advocacy by regularly meeting with their legislators, writing letters, and passing board resolutions. This is an area where we can continually improve. We have several speakers and panels planned for 2020-2021 to provide support in the area of legislative advocacy. 2. <i>SWSA continually strategizes with Ramie Zelenkova, (our legislative liaison), to develop legislative priorities and identify the best use of resources for advocacy.</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ramie created the SWSA Bill Tracker <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The SWSA Bill Tracker is an opportunity for districts to take legislative advocacy “into their own hands” and review bills that your districts may want to advocate for or against. ii. We provided training to the organization to build an understanding of how to review bills, supporting documentation, and how to track the progress of these bills. b. Developed a document format to share key legislative talking points to our members. 3. <i>Facilitated Wisconsin K-12 Advocacy Partners work group</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. SWSA has coordinated efforts with other advocacy organizations (SAA, WASB, WiRSA, and WPEN) across the state to ensure legislative strategic priorities are aligned. This definitely has taken some time and effort. 4. <i>Hosted several key guests this year to support advocacy work:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Representative Evan Goyke b. Speaker Vos c. DPI State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor (large group and small group meetings) d. Charles Franklin and Alan Borsuk e. Dr. Rob Asen, UW-Madison to share research on advocacy around Wisconsin f. Invited to participate in Governor’s press releases

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	<p>5. Continued to influence legislation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Tobacco 21 bill (stalled due to COVID-19; however, partnership with the American Heart Association was key here) b. AB702- giving preference to New Berlin for open enrollment; SWSA’s advocacy efforts stalled the advancement of this bill c. AB705/AB779- Interscholastic sports and extracurricular activities; SWSA’s advocacy efforts stalled the advancement of this bill d. Continued advocacy regarding Dyslexia bills e. Supported Peer to Peer Suicide prevention f. Opposed open enrollment expansion
<p>Leveraging research to drive educational practice and advocacy</p>	<p>1. Continued to cultivate our partnership with the Wisconsin Policy Forum to provide access to research and educational opportunities for SWSA members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 identify ways to improve the value of the information they are providing. b. The WI Policy Forum views SWSA as a key stakeholder partner and consults us often as they are developing new research papers. The relationship between SWSA and the Wisconsin Policy forum gives us the opportunity to drive education policy for the region and state. c. As members of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, all SWSA superintendents have been included on their email distribution list and are first to receive new report releases! <p>2. UW-Madison</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. SWSA was asked to participate in research related to community advocacy. b. The primary researcher, Dr. Rob Asen, presented his findings to the full membership in December 2019.
<p>Raise the impact of SWSA by identifying and developing mutually beneficial partnerships</p>	<p>1. Nurtured strong relationships and partnerships with stakeholders outside of education. SWSA realizes that influencing public policy requires bringing other stakeholder groups to the table along with education leaders. SWSA 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.</p> <p>2. Developed strong relationships and partnerships with other education organizations across the state. 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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the focus areas for 2019-2020 was to rebuild relationships with DPI with the new state superintendent and staff. We have successfully done that as have connected with the state superintendent and her staff frequently. • SWSA members have benefited greatly from our relationship with other DPI leadership including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Senior policy advisory, Dee Pettack

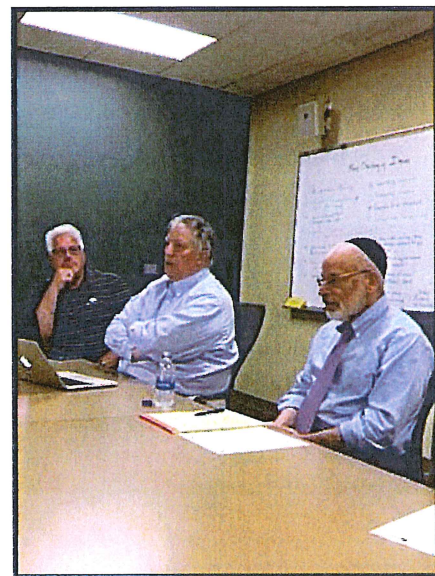
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Assistant State Superintendent and Director for Finance and Management, Bob Soldner iii. DPI Budget Director, Erin Fath
<p>Continue to strengthen the SWSA business model by supporting school districts and their communities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Continued to revise and update website to support member districts and the work of the SWSA.</i> SWSA is proud to have launched our new website in the summer of 2019. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The website is updated frequently to reflect legislative issues, highlighting SWSA member accomplishments, and making information easily accessible for members. 2. <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> One of 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. 3. <i>At the request of SWSA school board representatives, we have begun meeting monthly and discussing key topics to support their role.</i> Board members are finding this discussion (following the SWSA meeting) to be extremely beneficial and are now requesting topics for discussion. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. During the COVID-19 crisis, these meetings were held bi-weekly and will be returning to a monthly meeting beginning June 5, 2020.



SWSA superintendents and board members meet with Charles Franklin and Alan Borsuk to discuss specific challenges facing K-12 education and to review the Marquette poll.



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A team of SWSA members are invited to attend one of the Governor's press conferences.



Speaker Robin Vos joins the SWSA for full membership meeting March 2020. The team shared questions prior to the meeting that Speaker Vos addressed during the meeting.

The DPI State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor meets with the SWSA Membership and also with a small group to discuss issues facing K-12 education.

