

# 2026 SCHOOL BOARD SUMMIT

WAUWATOSA,  
WISCONSIN

APRIL 24  
2026

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Professional Development Training  
for Wisconsin School Board Members

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WISCONSIN INSTITUTE  
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## SCHEDULE

- 8:00 - 8:30** Welcome & Registration
- 8:30 - 8:45** Opening Remarks
- 8:45 - 9:55** **WILL Legal Update:** Key Developments Affecting Wisconsin School Districts
- 9:55 - 10:10** Networking Break
- 10:10 - 11:00** **When Teachers Speak Online:** The First Amendment and the Limits of School Authority
- 11:00 - 11:10** Break
- 11:10 - 12:10** **Free to Learn:** Rethinking Screens, Technology, and Childhood in the Classroom
- 12:10 - 12:30** Lunch Line & Break
- 12:30 - 1:30** **Keynote — Dr. Cade Brumley**  
Transforming Education: Lessons from Louisiana's Reform Efforts
- 1:30 - 2:00** Networking Break
- 2:00 - 3:00** **Break-Out Option One:**  
School Finance 101: Making Dollars and Sense of Your District Budget
- Break-Out Option Two:**  
School Finance 201: Evaluating Fiscal Health and Strategic Planning
- 3:00 - 3:15** Break
- 3:15 - 4:15** **Break-Out Option One:**  
Confronting Classroom Disruption and Teacher Burnout
- Break-Out Option Two:**  
Board Member Speech Under Fire: Know Your Rights and Speak with Confidence
- 4:15** Closing Remarks & Networking

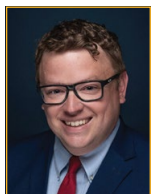
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|-------------|---|
| 8:00 - 8:30 | Welcome & Registration  |
| 8:30 - 8:45 | Opening Remarks   |
| 8:45 - 9:55 | <b>WILL Legal Update:</b> Key Developments Affecting Wisconsin School Districts |

The legal landscape in K-12 education is changing rapidly, and school board members must stay informed. Join three of WILL's Deputy Counsels for a timely session on the legal developments that matter most to your district. From parental rights and Title IX to evolving debates over DEI and Wisconsin-specific issues such as school funding, this session will provide practical legal guidance and actionable insights to help board members navigate today's complex policy environment.



### Dan Lennington

Dan Lennington serves as Managing Vice President and Deputy Counsel, focusing on the Equality Under the Law Project. Dan previously served as the Assistant Deputy Attorney General and Deputy Solicitor General at the Wisconsin Department of Justice, where he argued constitutional law cases before the Wisconsin Supreme Court, the Seventh Circuit, and state and federal trial courts around the state. Before joining the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Dan was an award-winning federal prosecutor in Oklahoma. He is a graduate of Hillsdale College and Valparaiso University School of Law.



### Lucas Vebber

Lucas Vebber serves as Deputy Counsel at WILL. He litigates cases in state and federal court, advancing the cause of freedom here in Wisconsin and beyond. His litigation efforts have won several national awards, and he has been named a Legal All Star by the Wisconsin Law Journal. Before joining WILL, Lucas worked in a variety of roles in Madison, including serving as General Counsel and Executive Director of the Litigation Center at Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, the state's chamber of commerce and manufacturers' association. Prior to that Lucas worked for the state in both the legislative and executive branches. Lucas has a bachelor's degree from Marquette University in Milwaukee and a law degree from the University of Saint Thomas in Minneapolis.



### Luke Berg

Luke Berg is a Deputy Counsel with the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, and he litigates cases involving parental rights, election law, the First Amendment, and separation of powers, among other topics. Before joining WILL over five years ago, he served for nearly four years at the Wisconsin Department of Justice as a Deputy Solicitor General. Berg has argued eleven cases before the Wisconsin Supreme Court and six before the Seventh Circuit. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin - Madison (B.S.) and New York University (J.D.) and served as a law clerk for Judge Diane Sykes of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. He resides in Madison with his wife and three boys.



### Cory Brewer

Cory Brewer serves as Deputy Counsel at WILL. Before joining WILL, Cory worked in private practice as a civil litigation attorney. She now focuses on legal and policy issues related to K-12 education. This includes efforts related to public school reform through the Restoring American Education project and expansion of school choice by empowering families with the freedom to choose the best education for their children. Cory is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Law School, and she received a Bachelor of Arts magna cum laude from Lawrence University, where she played softball and basketball. She lives in Oak Creek with her husband and four children.

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|--------------|------------------|
| 9:55 - 10:10 | Networking Break |
|--------------|------------------|

10:10 - 11:00

## When Teachers Speak Online: The First Amendment and the Limits of School Authority

Teachers' social media activity and public statements have sparked national debates about free speech and professional responsibility. When teachers speak as private citizens on matters of public concern, the First Amendment often protects even offensive or controversial speech. At the same time, school districts have legitimate interests in maintaining trust with parents, ensuring student safety, and preserving an effective learning environment. This session will explore where the law draws these lines, including when schools can discipline teachers for speech outside the classroom, how courts distinguish between private speech and "hired speech" in the classroom, and how school leaders should think about the difference between what is protected and what raises serious questions about professional judgment.



### Daniel Buck

Daniel Buck is a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), director of the Conservative Education Reform Network (CERN), and an affiliate of AEI's James Q. Wilson Program in K-12 Education Studies, where his work focuses on K-12 education, charter schooling, curriculum reform, and school safety and discipline. Before joining AEI, Mr. Buck was a senior fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an assistant principal at Lake County Classical Academy, and a classroom teacher at Hope Christian Schools, Holy Spirit Middle School, and Green Bay Area Public Schools. His work has appeared in the popular press, including The Wall Street Journal, National Affairs, and National Review. Mr. Buck is the author of *What Is Wrong with Our Schools?* (2022). Mr. Buck has a master's degree and a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



### Rick Esenberg

Rick Esenberg is the founder and current President and General Counsel of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, a rapidly expanding law and policy organization headquartered in Milwaukee. Under Rick's leadership, WILL has grown into one of the more active state-based think tanks and litigation centers in the country. Rick is a frequent litigator in state and federal courts and nationally recognized scholar and commentator on constitutional law, particularly the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech and religion. He is one of the leading experts on the Wisconsin Constitution and a frequent advocate before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Rick's work seeks to advance the rule of law and individual liberty, formed by a robust civil society that forms individual and community character, preserving the wisdom of the past and an openness to the future.

11:00 - 11:10

Break

11:10 - 12:10

## Free to Learn: Rethinking Screens, Technology, and Childhood in the Classroom

Technology has become nearly ubiquitous in today's classrooms, from Chromebooks to other digital learning platforms. But what impact is this shift having on student learning, attention, and well-being? The rapid integration of digital technology into students' daily environments has shifted the developmental landscape of childhood, creating behavioral, relational, and mental health challenges that schools are now confronting at earlier grade levels. In this session, participants will explore emerging research on the effects of screen-based learning and how classroom technology is actually being used by students and teachers. The discussion will also examine growing concerns from parents and educators about screen time in schools and consider what school boards and administrators should be thinking about as they evaluate technology policies and the role of screens in supporting student success.



### Nicole Runyon

Nicole Runyon is a psychotherapist, parent coach, and author of the bestselling book *Free To Fly: The Secret To Fostering Independence In The Next Generation*. Nicole is renowned for her expertise in child and adolescent mental health, backed by an extensive 23-year career in the field. Most importantly, she is the mother of 2 children. Nicole's uniqueness lies in the fact that she has an uncanny ability to help adults get into the minds of today's children and better understand them.

Her extensive knowledge of technology's impact on mental health, child development, and the intergenerational variations in parenting has made her a highly sought-after speaker who captivates small and large audiences alike. Her highly interactive talks are filled with life-altering aha-moments, paradigm shifts, and hilarious personal stories that make tackling the thorny topic of parenting more fun. A frequent guest on parenting podcasts, Nicole's invaluable insights have earned her significant recognition, leading to appearances in the media, including Fox News Live, Good Morning America, Psychology Today, Parents, Parade, and Today's Parent, where she shares her expertise on the effects of technology on child and adolescent mental well-being. Motivated by an unwavering passion for supporting children's well-being and debunking the poor parenting advice that's flooded our society, Nicole has dedicated her life's work to empowering parents and educators to help children grow and mature into young adults with purpose, strength, and confidence.

12:10 - 12:30

**Lunch Line & Break**

12:30 - 1:30

**Keynote – Dr. Cade Brumley**  
Transforming Education: Lessons from Louisiana’s Reform Efforts

What does it take to dramatically improve student achievement and rebuild the teaching profession? In recent years, Louisiana has gone from ranking near the bottom nationally in student performance to becoming one of the fastest-improving states in the country. In this keynote address, Dr. Cade Brumley will share how the state achieved these gains through bold reforms focused on literacy, high-quality instructional materials, teacher support, and strong leadership across the education system. Drawing on his experience as State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Brumley will discuss the policies and strategies that helped raise reading scores and strengthen classrooms—and what Wisconsin school board members and local leaders can learn from this turnaround to drive meaningful improvement in their own districts.



**Dr. Cade Brumley**

Dr. Cade Brumley has served as Louisiana State Superintendent of Education since 2020, bringing a “back to basics” approach that has helped drive historic academic gains. Under his leadership, Louisiana has become one of the fastest-improving states in the nation in K-12 education. In 2024, Louisiana earned its highest-ever overall ranking on The Nation’s Report Card, rising to 32nd nationally from 49th in 2019.

1:30 - 2:00

**Networking Break**

2:00 - 3:00

**Break-Out Option One:**  
School Finance 101: Making Dollars and Sense of Your District Budget

Budget decisions are among the most important responsibilities of a school board, and members have both the authority and the duty to actively shape how resources are allocated. This session will introduce the fundamentals of school finance, helping board members understand where district funding comes from, how budgets are built, and the key terms and structures that shape school finances. Participants will learn how to read a district budget, understand revenue limits and major spending categories, and ask the right questions to ensure resources are aligned with student safety, academic achievement, and long-term district needs.



**Dave Trabert**

Dave Trabert is Chief Executive Officer of Kansas Policy Institute and its subsidiaries—Kansas Justice Institute, The Sentinel, and the Kansas School Board Resource Center. He is the lead author of three books: 8 Things to Know about Running for School Board, Giving Kids a Fighting Chance with School Choice, and What Was Really the Matter with the Kansas Tax Plan. He also does research and writes on fiscal policy and education issues.



**Nathalie Burmeister**

Nathalie Burmeister is Associate Counsel at WILL. Nathalie interned at WILL as a law clerk before joining the litigation team. Nathalie received her law degree, cum laude, from the University of Wisconsin Law School. She also holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, summa cum laude, from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. While in law school, Nathalie earned a Certificate in Consumer Health Advocacy and worked in long-term care as a Registered Nurse. She currently lives in the Milwaukee area.

2:00 – 3:00

## Break-Out Option Two: School Finance 201: Evaluating Fiscal Health and Strategic Planning

For experienced board members ready to go beyond the basics, this session will focus on how to evaluate a district's long-term fiscal health and guide strategic financial planning. Participants will learn how to interpret key financial indicators, assess operational efficiency, and establish policies that promote transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources. The session will also examine strategies for managing and reducing district debt while maintaining strong educational outcomes. Drawing on real-world examples, including the approach used by the Kettle Moraine School District, the session will highlight how financial reporting, forecasting, and strategic planning tools can help boards guide decision-making and maintain long-term fiscal stability.



### Dr. John Stellmacher

Dr. John Stellmacher has served as the Chief Financial Officer for the Kettle Moraine School District since 2019. He previously served the Hartford Jt1 School District as the CFO/Assistant Superintendent for 8 years, following 4 years of administrative experience in Northern Wisconsin. John holds a BBA in Finance/Actuarial Science and MSE in School Business Management from UW-Whitewater, and a PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. John served six years on the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials Board of Directors, including the 2020-21 year as Board President and was selected as the 2024 Wisconsin School Business Manager of the Year. An active member of his Community, John is currently a Trustee for St. Charles Catholic Parish/School in Hartland, WI, and enjoys spending time with his family, traveling, coaching youth softball, running, and skiing.



### Bill Hughes

Bill Hughes is the founder of Hughes Strategic. Since 2018, Hughes Strategic supports leaders and organizations, especially schools, districts and networks to accelerate student achievement, fiscal responsibility, engagement, strategy, and targeted philanthropy. Dr. Hughes is a senior advisor and Board Member with School Boards for Academic Excellence. Hughes works with schools and think tanks on a range of topics currently including educator pipeline, Capacity Road Map planning and implementation focusing on student achievement and successful schools, fiscal responsibility, leadership development efforts addressing practicing and aspiring district and network leaders. He continues serves as an advisor to school boards in Wisconsin and other states. Hughes served as Superintendent of the Greendale Schools for sixteen years. During his tenure the district was recognized in Wisconsin and in the nation for outstanding academic achievement and fiscal efficiency. He served as a program director with the Kern Family Foundation managing over \$45,000,000 in grants funding k-12 and higher education leadership development, co-founder/CAO of Seton Catholic Schools; and the Managing Director of Leadership with Schools That Can Milwaukee that included the redesign of a principal master's degree in educational leadership and a MBA. Active in education policy since 2005, working with Governor Doyle and Walker, including co-chair of the K-12 education roundtable transition team and was a member of the Wisconsin Legislative Blue Ribbon Task Force on School Finance.



### Will Flanders

Will Flanders is the Research Director at the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty. Together with the education policy team, Dr. Flanders conducts econometric research on the application of WILL's principles of freedom and liberty to the educational system in Wisconsin. Since joining WILL, he has authored or co-authored reports on the return on investment from charter schools, the effects of Act 10 on the teaching workforce, and the economic benefits of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Dr. Flanders' work has appeared in numerous publications including the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Wisconsin State Journal, Politico, National Review and the Wall Street Journal; as well as in academic publications such as the Journal of School Choice. Dr. Flanders holds a Ph.D. in Political Science with a specialization in American Politics and Public Policy from Florida State University, as well as an M.S. in Political Science and an M.S. in Applied American Politics and Policy from the same school. He earned his B.A. from Valdosta State University in Georgia, his home state.

3:00 - 3:15

Break

3:15 - 4:15

### Break-Out Option One: Confronting Classroom Disruption and Teacher Burnout

Across Wisconsin and the country, schools are facing growing challenges related to classroom disruption and teacher burnout, with many educators citing lack of support for classroom management as a key reason they leave the profession. While these issues are often discussed at the state level, school boards play an important role in shaping policies and expectations that support teachers and maintain safe, orderly classrooms. This session will explore practical steps school boards can take to strengthen classroom environments, including addressing discipline challenges, ensuring consistent administrative support, and adopting policy frameworks that empower teachers while maintaining accountability and transparency. Panelists will also briefly examine proposals such as a Teacher Bill of Rights and discuss how similar principles can be implemented locally through district policies and board leadership.



### Daniel Buck

Daniel Buck is a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), director of the Conservative Education Reform Network (CERN), and an affiliate of AEI's James Q. Wilson Program in K-12 Education Studies, where his work focuses on K-12 education, charter schooling, curriculum reform, and school safety and discipline. Before joining AEI, Mr. Buck was a senior fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an assistant principal at Lake County Classical Academy, and a classroom teacher at Hope Christian Schools, Holy Spirit Middle School, and Green Bay Area Public Schools. His work has appeared in the popular press, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Affairs*, and *National Review*. Mr. Buck is the author of *What Is Wrong with Our Schools?* (2022). Mr. Buck has a master's degree and a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



### Rhyen Staley

Rhyen Staley is the Director of Research for Defending Education (DE). His research and writing on behalf of DE has appeared on Fox News, The Daily Wire, The Blaze, National Review Online, The Hill, Newsweek, The Daily Caller, and The Washington Free Beacon. Staley's work has been referenced in proposed federal legislation, prompted U.S. Senate letters of inquiry, and inspired Congressional hearings. His research has also been cited in numerous reports and publications, including Abigail Shrier's *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up*. He is a third-generation educator with fifteen years of experience as a public and private school teacher. Staley spent over twenty-five years coaching male and female athletes at the middle, high school and college level. He is married to an educator and is the father of two school aged children.



### Lauren Greuel

Lauren Greuel is Associate Counsel at WILL. She focuses on legal and policy issues related to K-12 education in Wisconsin. Lauren returned to Wisconsin this year after receiving her law degree from Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach, VA. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Economy from Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, MI. Lauren worked for WILL from 2018-2020 as a policy intern and is happy to return as an attorney—to continue to fight for an education system that is student-centered and prioritizes the freedom of families to choose the best education for their children.

3:15 - 4:15

### Break-Out Option Two: Board Member Speech Under Fire: Know Your Rights and Speak with Confidence

School board members often find themselves under pressure to stay silent on controversial issues, but they have First Amendment rights and a responsibility to their communities. This session focuses on practical strategies for board members to communicate effectively, including working with the media, handling public inquiries, and engaging with constituents. Participants will learn how to navigate a variety of topics, speak confidently about their positions, and uphold transparency in local governance.



### Alec Zimmerman

Alec Zimmerman has nearly a decade of political communication, messaging, and strategy experience. He has worked alongside public policy leaders and political candidates in some of Wisconsin's most highly contested fights that have garnered local and national attention. As the Communications Director for Senator Ron Johnson during his 2022 reelection campaign, Zimmerman was a strategist in one of the biggest U.S. Senate races in the country. He also served as a trusted communications and messaging advisor for Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch during her time in office and her run for Governor. In 2018, Zimmerman worked as the top Republican communications staffer in the Wisconsin State Senate while working for Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald. Zimmerman also led the Republican Party of Wisconsin's communications efforts during the 2018 midterm cycle.



### Pat Garrett

Pat Garrett serves as the Communications Director for WILL. Pat joins WILL following his time serving as a communications and media strategist for Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, serving in her official office as communications director and then moving on to manage communications and digital media efforts for her landslide re-election victory. During that same election cycle, he served as a campaign communications strategist for the successful campaign to elect Iowa Attorney General, Brenna Bird. Prior to his time in Iowa, Pat worked as a press secretary in the United States Senate, and was the communications director for the Republican Party of Wisconsin in 2016. Pat is a graduate from Marquette University and a proud alumnus of their Les Aspin Center for Government.



### Erin Gamble

Erin Gamble is Associate Counsel at WILL. She previously worked in private practice as a civil defense attorney. She received her law degree from Marquette University Law School. She also served as a law clerk for WILL during her time at Marquette. Erin holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Portland. Prior to law school, she was a legislative correspondent in the United States Senate for Senator Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska). Erin was born and raised in Alaska and followed her familial roots back to Wisconsin. She currently resides with her husband in Germantown.

4:15

### Closing Remarks & Networking

## NOTES

Lined area for taking notes.





