

WiRSA (Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance)

Strong Schools - Strong Communities

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WiRSA Board of Directors Meeting (Virtual) **Wednesday, January 8, 2025 (9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.)**

(Region 1 - CESA 5, 6 & 7) (Region 2, CESA 2, 3 & 4) (Region 3, CESA 10 & 11) (Region 4, CESA 8, 9 & 10)

1. Call to Order – Current President - Paul Fischer at 9:00 am.

- a. Paul Fischer called the meeting to order at 9:01 am.

2. Roll Call - [Here is a WiRSA Region Map](#)

- a. Region 1 - Heather Fish, Sue Today, Jesse Brinkmann
- b. Region 2 - Al Brokopp, Sarah Ploecklman, Gerald Roethel, Paul Fischer
- c. Region 3 - Val Kulesa, Brandon Robinson, Mykala Sygulla, Patrick Galligan
- d. Region 4 - Vince Czahor, Nate Burklund, Betsy Gruszynski
- e. Statewide - Mandy Lang, Dr. Tim Buttles, Diana Bohman, Sally Ladsten

- Paul Fisher took the role call for the board members who were in attendance.

3. Discuss/Approve - Election of Board Officers

- a. President - Brandon Robinson
- b. President-Elect - Nominations
- c. Secretary - Valorie Kulesa (Current)
- d. Treasurer - Sarah Ploeckelman (Current)

- Brandon Robinson is our WiRSA board president for the 2025 calendar year. Our board will need a president-elect for the 2026 school year. Please contact Paul Fischer if you are interested in becoming the president-elect for 2025.

- Motion by Allen Brokopp, second by Sue Today, to approve the election of board members - Motion Carried
 - Presedent-Elect: Patrick Gilligan
 - President: Brandon Robinson
 - Secretary: Valorie Kulesa
 - Treasurer: Sarah Ploeckelman

4. Discuss/ Approve - Congratulate and Recognize Board Members beginning their 2025-2028 WiRSA Term

- a. 2024 [Board Members](#)
- b. 2025 [Board Members](#)

i. Region 1 - Jesse Brinkmann, [School Administrator](#) (Algoma)

2024 President, Paul Fischer - President-Elect, Brandon Robinson - Secretary: Val Kulesa - Treasurer: Sarah Ploecklman
2025 President, Brandon Robinson - President-Elect, (?) - Secretary, (?) - Treasurer, (?)

- ii. **Region 2 - Gerald Roethel, Board of Education (Westby)**
- iii. **Region 3 - Mykala Sygulla, Teacher (Cornell)**
- iv. **Region 4 - Betsy Gruszynski, CESA Member (CESA 9)**

- We want to thank Jesse Brinkman and Gerald Roethel for their continued support on the WiRSA board. We also want to thank Al Betry, Greg Sonnentag, and Patricia Vickman for their service in supporting rural schools and rural education from their time on the board. Please welcome Mykala Ssygulla and Betsy Gruszynski. Mykala is taking over for Greg Sonnentag (Region 3 Teacher Position), and Betsy is taking over for Al Betry (Region 4 CESA Position). We will need an official motion to approve these board member positions.
- Short Bio for **Mykayla Sygulla**: My name is Mykayla Sygulla, and I am looking forward to serving as a WiRSA board member! I currently serve as the school psychologist for the Cornell School District. Prior to this, I have held roles as a school counselor and director of special education. I grew up in Whitehall, WI, where I currently live with my husband and our three daughters, Josie (6), Leigha (3), and Greta (1). When time allows, I enjoy creative hobbies and playing board games with family and friends. My experience as both a student and a professional has been predominantly in rural schools, and I have a deep appreciation for the unique culture and community that I believe can only be attained in small, rural settings. I am grateful for the opportunity to be an advocate for the value that rural schools offer to students and society.
- Short bio for **Betsy Gruszynski**: Thank you for inviting me to join the WiRSA board. Prior to joining CESA 9 in August 2024, I spent 32 years in education, primarily in small rural schools. As is the case with many educators, my career took many twists and turns that I could not have anticipated when it all began. Originally a Family & Consumer Education teacher, from the first cohort to no longer be referred to as Home Economics, my teaching contract was often incrementally cut because of declining enrollment. I went on to take a position in the School District of Elcho in which I taught a few classes while building what is believed to be the first full-time school operated child care center in Wisconsin. For the past 15 years I have worked as an elementary principal, so I have seen many of the challenges that a small district faces during the course of my career. My work at CESA 9 is focused on helping our 22 districts secure staffing and professional development through shared services. My husband (who is the elementary principal in Three Lakes) and I have three adult daughters and two granddaughters.
- Motion by Brandon Robinson, second by Sue Today, to approve the WiRSA board members' terms for Jesse Brinkmann (Region 1), Gerald Rothell (Region 2), Mykala Sygualla (Region 3), and Betsy Gruszynski (Region 4). These terms run through 2028 - Motion Approved

5. **Discuss/Approve - October 29, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

- Motion by Sue Today, second by Heather Fish, to approve October 29, 2024 minutes. Motion Approved

6. **Discuss - Treasurer's Report - (July through December 2024)**

a. [Income & Expenses Overview](#)

- Motion by Brandon Robinson, second by Sue Today, to approve mid-year treasures report. Motion Approved.

7. **New Membership Incentive ([email content being sent out to non-members](#))**

- I plan on updating my database for non-school members and sending this email prior to the WASB convention inviting superintendents to stop by our WiRSA booth.

8. **2025 WiRSA - Conference Planning Committee**

a. WiRSA conference is officially in Stevens Point at the Convention Center

i. 2025 - Thursday, October 30 through Friday, October 31

ii. 2026 - Thursday, October 29 through Friday, October 30

1. Planning Committee Volunteers (6-7) / [Timeline](#)

a. Potential Keynote Speakers

i. Mark D. Mambretti ([Who is Mark Mambretti](#))

ii. Adam Cheeseman ([Who is Adam Cheesman](#))

iii. Curtis Slator ([Picture/Info](#)) ([Who is Curt Slator](#))

- **Note:** I would like to have at least one person from each region on the WiRSA conference planning committee. Our first meeting will focus on keynote speakers, special speakers, and our conference theme. **If you are interested in the WiRSA conference planning committee, please click the small drop-down arrow next to the smiley face and choose Yes. You can make this decision prior to the board meeting.**

b. Region #1

i. Heather Fish :) ▾, Sue Today **Yes ▾**, Jesse Brinkmann :) ▾, Ryan Frye :) ▾

c. Region #2

i. Al Brokopp :) ▾, Sarah Ploecklman **Yes ▾**, Gerald Roethel :) ▾, Paul Fisher :) ▾

d. Region #3

i. Val Kulesa :) ▾, Brandon Robinson **Yes ▾**, Mykala Sygulla **Yes ▾**, Patrick Galligan **Yes ▾**

e. Region #4

i. Vince Czahor :) ▾, Nate Burklund **Yes ▾**, Betsy Gruszynski :) ▾, Stacy Thlusty :) ▾

f. Statewide

i. Mandy Lang :) ▾, Dr. Tim Buttles :) ▾, Diana Bohman :) ▾, Sally Ladsten :) ▾

- **Note:** We like to meet every three weeks to keep the process moving forward. Our first tentatively scheduled meeting is planned for Wednesday, February 5, 2025. One of our first agenda items will be choosing keynote speakers.

9. Scholarship Selection Committee - Student Scholarship Selection Committee Needed (1-2 from each region if possible)

- a. Region #1
 - i. Heather Fish :) ▾, Sue Today :) ▾, Jesse Brinkmann Yes ▾, Ryan Frye :) ▾
 - b. Region #2
 - i. Al Brokopp :) ▾, Sarah Ploecklman Yes ▾, Gerald Roethel :) ▾, Paul Fisher :) ▾
 - c. Region #3
 - i. Val Kulesa Yes ▾, Brandon Robinson :) ▾, Mykala Sygulla Yes ▾, Patrick Galligan :) ▾
 - d. Region #4
 - i. Vince Czahor :) ▾, Nate Burklund :) ▾, Betsy Gruszynski Yes ▾, Stacy Thlusty Yes ▾
 - e. Statewide
 - i. Mandy Lang :) ▾, Dr. Tim Buttles Yes ▾, Diana Bohman :) ▾, Sally Ladsten :) ▾
- Note: I try to make this scholarship review and scoring as efficient as possible. If you are on the committee, you will receive a spreadsheet with school applicants and their essay questions in PDF format. Committee members will need to review the applications and score the applicants. **If you are willing to read and score student scholarships, please click the small drop-down arrow next to the smiley face and choose "Yes."** You can make this decision prior to the board meeting.

Here is a spreadsheet example for one applicant.

	TOTALS			Point Value	Point Value	Point Value	Essay Questions	Point Value	
	Region # 1, 2, 3 & 4		Write-up	8	8	8	20		
Region	Name: Sr. Scholarship Applications 2024	School District	Community Service / Co-Curricular & Extra Curricular / Scholarship - GPA - Class Rank - Special Honors - Awards	Comm/ Civic Service (Point VALUE)	Extra-C urr Activitie s (Point VALUE)	Scholarsh ip, GPA/Clas s Rank, Spec. Honors, Awards, etc. (Point VALUE)	Three Essay Questions: 1) Why Teaching 2) Value of growing up in a rural community 3) Benefits of attending a rural school	Scoring Rubric on Essays	Total Poi nts
1	Student's Name	School	Student Information Link	0	0	0	Student Information Essay Link	0	0

10. Student Teacher Selection Committee Needed (1-2 from each region if possible)

- a. Region #1
 - i. Heather Fish :) ▾, Sue Today :) ▾, Jesse Brinkmann Yes ▾, Ryan Frye :) ▾

2024 President, Paul Fischer - President-Elect, Brandon Robinson - Secretary: Val Kulesa - Treasurer: Sarah Ploecklman
 2025 President, Brandon Robinson - President-Elect, (?) - Secretary, (?) - Treasurer, (?)

- b. Region #2
 - i. Al Brokopp :) ▾, Sarah Ploecklman Yes ▾, Gerald Roethel :) ▾, Paul Fisher :) ▾
- c. Region #3
 - i. Val Kulesa Yes ▾, Brandon Robinson :) ▾, Mykala Sygulla :) ▾, Patrick Galligan Yes ▾
- d. Region #4
 - i. Vince Czahor :) ▾, Nate Burklund :) ▾, Betsy Gruszynski Yes ▾, Stacy Tlusty :) ▾
- e. Statewide
 - i. Mandy Lang :) ▾, Dr. Tim Buttles :) ▾, Diana Bohman :) ▾, Sally Ladsten :) ▾
- Note: If you are interested in the student-teacher scholarship selection committee, please click the small drop-down arrow next to the smiley face and choose Yes. You can make this decision prior to the board meeting.

11. Discuss/approve - Questions for State Superintendent

- Note: We have a new person in the race for state superintendent. Individuals who have filed for Wisconsin's State Superintendent Include Jill Underly, Jeff Wright, and Brittany Kinser. Kinser, who describes herself as a "Blue Dog Democrat" Kinser, of Wauwatosa, has launched Wisconsin Reads, a nonprofit that backs evidence-based literacy practices and the science of reading.
- I can get [these WiRSA questions](#) to the candidates prior to the primary. We may need to address supporting a candidate after the primary. We will have another board meeting if this should be addressed.
- Jeff will ask the WiRSA state superintendent questions of the three candidates. The WiRSA board will not be endorsing anyone during the primary; however, the board may need to reconvene as a board to discuss endorsing a candidate after the primary.

12. Discuss hiring a full-time Lobbyist for part-time WiRSA support.

- Note: The topic of lobbying support for WiRSA has been discussed a number of times over the past few years. Currently, SAA has additional professional contract lobbying support, and SWSA (Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance) has professional contract lobbying support. I believe it is important that WiRSA consider having additional lobbying support & presence in the capital; however, my research shows that it may be challenging to accomplish at this time.
- However, with that said, a contracted lobbyist understands there are 99 Assembly and 33 Senators to work with and because of that, a contracted lobbyist may be a good option.
- Because there are 99 Assembly & 33 Senate legislators, we can't talk to everyone, and contracted lobbyists would know the leadership and who we should be communicating with, and who we need to educate, etc. We would also receive...
 - K-12 organizational support
 - Game plan for needs and who and how to approach legislators

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- Support on executing that game plan
 - Boots on the ground - More visibility for K-12 in the capital
 - Bill or Policy Legislative Support
 - Focus on what a win looks like for your membership?
 - Overall, it is more of a strategic plan.
 - Milwaukee has seven lobbyists.
- I had an opportunity to visit with two lobbyists. One has been there for over 35 years and has great connections in the capital. Normal retainer costs for a lobbyist are between \$4000 and \$6000 a month per year. The first lobbyist came from a rural school and a public school district and would cost about \$4000 per month. Unfortunately, after talking with him, we may have a conflict of interest with his other clients. He did have someone else that he could recommend, and the cost may be less, but I am not sure they would have the educational background or history in the capital that he has.
 - I also had an opportunity to talk with Ramie Zelenkova. Ramie has been a contracted lobbyist with SWSA (Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance) for many years and is well-versed in educational needs and supporting school districts as a lobbyist. There is an opportunity to contract with Ramie at a reduced rate due to the similarity of needs and the economy of scale with the scope of work. In addition, Ramie would also allow Dan Romporti, (Who worked for Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, now Congressman Fitzgerald) to support us if needed.
 - All businesses like to see as much consistency as possible, and lobbyists work on a 12-month contract; however, knowing we are testing the waters and we do not have funds to fully support a lobbyist, Ramie would consider supporting us through this session at \$3000 a month. Ramie is one of the best, and she usually gets between \$5-6,000 a month.
 - If we consider moving forward, the positive is that this work will go over two fiscal years and help us decide if lobbying support is in the best interest of WiRSA.
 - I have asked Ramie if she would be interested in meeting with the entire board or an approved board subgroup to discuss the context of lobbying support and the benefits of contracted lobbying services before we make any decisions, and Ramie said she would welcome the opportunity.
 - After discussion, the board would need to decide not to move forward, or meet as a full board or approve a sub-board to have further discussion with Ramie.
 - The board asked Jeff to set up a meeting with Ramie Z. to discuss the options and services a contracted lobbyist would give to WiRSA. After that meeting, we are looking to survey the membership. We need to pull all the voices, costs, and data together to see if this is a viable option for WiRSA

13. Other Business

- a. Wisconsin's State Education Convention in Madison
 - i. Badges

2024 President, Paul Fischer - President-Elect, Brandon Robinson - Secretary: Val Kulesa - Treasurer: Sarah Ploecklman
 2025 President, Brandon Robinson - President-Elect, (?) - Secretary, (?) - Treasurer, (?)

14. Next WiRSA Board Meeting

- a. Wednesday, April 9, 2024 (10 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.) - Suggestion

Note: Please check your calendars prior to the meeting to see if this date/time works for you.

15. Adjourn-Motion by S. Today, 2nd by J. Brinkmann to adjourn at 10:12 am. Motion carried

Strong Schools, Strong Communities