

The WSPEI Connector

December 2025

Communicating Information and Resources for Wisconsin Families and Educators

☆ We know this month is full of **holiday cheer and bustling activity**. Our December issue of **The Connector** is joining the fun—it's packed with great information, and we're especially excited to share our brand-new **winter and spring workshop schedule**! You will find descriptions, information flyers and registration links below.



Did you hear that recent changes to 529 Savings Plans in legislation allows those funds to be used for K-12 expenses in addition to after high school education expenses? We are excited to share an information packed article from the **Department of Financial Institutions** explaining what 529 Plans are all about.

So go ahead—grab that cup of **hot cocoa**, settle under a **snug blanket**, and dive into these items and more!

Happy reading from the WSPEI Program Team!👋

The WSPEI Program Statewide Learning and Networking Events

WSPEI Statewide Learning and Networking Opportunities

All statewide WSPEI events are **FREE**, will be held virtually on ZOOM, and are open to families, educators, and community agency members. Registration is required.

Workshops are not recorded. If you register, please plan to attend.

Sign up for our [email list](#) for the monthly newsletter and event notifications.

TOPIC SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS

[The Family's Role in the CCR-IEP Process](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

This **2-hour workshop** is aimed at equipping parents and other family members with knowledge and confidence to **actively participate in the IEP process**. For families who have a child/youth between the ages of 3-21 who has an IEP.

Educators are encouraged to participate as well!

We are offering multiple dates during Winter and Spring 2026.

Choose the day and time that works best for you! Content delivered is the same on each day.

- **January 6, 2026** | 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
- **January 12, 2026** | 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
- **April 28, 2026** | 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
- **April 30, 2026** | 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Register for any of the above dates here: [Click to Register](#)

[Finding Children with Disabilities: What School Districts, Families, and Agencies Need to Know](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

This workshop will help participants understand the responsibility of school districts to locate, identify, and evaluate all children suspected of having a disability under IDEA and the Child Find Law.

We will define the rights of families if they believe their child may have a disability requiring special education services and explore resources that track a child's development.

Offered on 2 different dates in January - the content is the same each day, register for the one that works best for you!

- **1/ 20/26** | 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

OR

- **1/ 22/26** | 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

[CLICK to REGISTER](#)

[Recipe for Success: Cooking up a Great Transition Plan](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

Transition planning is a key part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and, in Wisconsin, it begins at age 14. This workshop will give families the **essential tools to prepare for meaningful transition** conversations with their child's IEP team.

Come cook up a successful future with us!

Offered on 2 different dates in February - the content is the same each day, register for the one that works best for you!

- **Tuesday, February 3, 2026**, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

OR

- **Thursday, February 5, 2026**, 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

[Click to Register](#)

[Families As Partners](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

This series of four educational and leadership sessions for families is focused on building relationships with school staff and other supportive individuals in order to enhance student outcomes. Attending all four meetings is strongly encouraged.

- 2/5/26, 2/19/26, 3/5/26, 3/19/26 | 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm

[Click to Register](#)

[Partnering with Schools on Behavior and Discipline for Students with IEPs](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

This workshop will help participants:

- Understand how all policies apply to all children, including those with disabilities;
- Build awareness of IDEA protections for students with disabilities in regard to discipline;
- Explore dispute resolution options in Wisconsin.

April 10, 2026 | 9:00 am-11:00 am

[Click to REGISTER](#)

ON GOING, MONTHLY NETWORK AND SUPPORT MEETINGS

[Family, Youth and Community Engagement Network](#)

(formally known as the Family Engagement Community of Practice & Learning)

A learning community for educators, administrators, statewide agencies, community partners, and families focusing on family engagement-specific topics. Learn from each other and experts in the field!

Meetings are held on the **third Wednesday of every month, September to May, 4:00-5:30 pm.**

*These Network meetings are recorded and shared in an email after the meeting date.

[Link to flyer with meeting dates and topics](#)

Register one time and you will automatically receive the monthly reminder emails.

[Click to REGISTER](#)

[Family Support Community](#)

A monthly learning opportunity designed for families and other caregivers supporting a child(ren) with a disability.

These meetings occur on the **second Wednesday of the month from 7:00 pm -8:00 pm** and the **second Thursday of the month from 12:00 -1:00 pm.**

Our supportive community meetings provide valuable learning opportunities and mutual support. They take place from **September through May.**

Register one time and you will automatically receive the monthly reminder emails.

[Click to REGISTER](#)

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

[The Explosive Child](#)

Dr. Ross Green

If you are the parent of a behaviorally challenging child, this book should help you feel more optimistic about and confident in handling your child's difficulties and restore some sanity to your family.

If you are the child's grandparent, teacher, neighbor, coach, or therapist, this book should, at the least, help you understand.

- 3 sessions on Thursday evenings, 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

- January 15, January 22 & February 5, 2026

[Click to Register](#)

Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher's Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success

Karen Mapp, Ilene Carver,, and Jessica Lander.

In **Powerful Partnerships**, the goal is to strengthen family engagement practices and, in doing so, strengthen classroom success for all students. This work is incredibly impactful. In order for you to achieve the best possible results, one important factor is the strong ties you build with the families and community members that your school serves. Those strong partnerships are important to maximize student learning.

- 1/26/2026 & 2/9/2026 | 4 pm - 5:30 pm

[Click to REGISTER](#)

DROP-IN OFFICE SUPPORT HOUR

WEDNESDAYS from noon-1:00 p.m.

This weekly support hour is a welcoming space to ask a quick question, share a specific concern and receive direct guidance from WSPEI personnel.

Discussions during the Zoom meeting are not recorded and will remain confidential. Our coordinators are trained in confidentiality practices, and breakout rooms will be utilized for privacy. All Wisconsin parents/families of students with an IEP are welcome!

No appointment or registration is necessary. We are here to help you get informed and stay prepared!

Link to Join the Zoom Office Hour

<https://cesa1-k12-wi-us.zoom.us/j/88929377194>

Join by phone:

+1-309-205-3325

+1-312-626-6799

Meeting ID: 889 2937 7194

[Link to FLYER](#) with more information

From the Department of Public Instruction (DPI)

Resource to Share with Families at IEP Meetings

Each year districts across Wisconsin complete the Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey. Over the last several years, about one fourth (25%) of parents report that schools do not provide them with information about one or more community services for their child with an IEP.

To support IEP team conversations about available statewide and community resources, DPI developed [Statewide and Community Resources for Families with Children with Disabilities](#). This one-page printable resource can be shared with families at IEP meetings to help find additional support through family support organizations and county services.

DPI also plans to develop a companion video later this year to help for IEP team facilitators introduce this resource. You can find this and other family engagement resources on the DPI

Survey Summaries for the Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey

The 2024-25 Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey summary is now available. Indicator 8 measures the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.

This family engagement survey is more than a tool for measuring current efforts; it also serves as a resource for planning evidence-based and parent recommended practices to strengthen family engagement in a child's education.

Administrators and educators are encouraged to use the following resources to build beliefs, skills, and systems that support effective family engagement in special education, IEP meetings, and their children's education.

Families are also encouraged to examine these results and see what others across the state feel about their involvement in their child's education and the IEP process.

- [2024-25 Family Engagement Summary](#)
- [2024-25 Detailed Summary Report](#)
- [2024-25 Continuous Improvement Report](#)

These and other resources are located on the DPI [Preparing for the Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey webpage](#).



From the Transition Improvement Grant

You can Assist in Testing the Newly Revised WiTransition App!

Are you a middle or high school student preparing for life after high school?

A family member supporting that journey?

Or an educator helping students plan for their future?

We're excited to invite you to test our newly revised app designed to make post-school planning easier, more engaging, and more personalized than ever!

By joining our testing group, you will:

- Explore the app before it is released
- Share feedback to improve the app
- Help shape a tool that supports Wisconsin students' future goals

Please use this form ([Wi Transition App Tester Sign Up](#)) to participate or contact Pam Jenson at pam.jenson@cesa2.org.

WI FACETS

December Newsletter

WI FACETS is Wisconsin's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) funded through the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. WI FACETS has a large variety of resources, upcoming trainings, and webinar recordings to help families navigate special education. Check out the WI FACETS [Training Calendar](#), WI FACETS [Webinar Recordings](#) as well as WI FACETS [resources webpages](#).

The December Newsletter focuses on Wisconsin's Nationally recognized Special Education Mediation System. A very valuable service for Wisconsin families and educators to assist when disagreements arise.

[December Newsletter English](#)

[December Newsletter Spanish](#)

Important information Wisconsin Families Need to Know!

\$529 College Savings Plans - Saving for a Student's Future, Including Students with a Disability\$

An Article By Chelsea Wunnicke, College Savings Program Finance Officer with the State of Wisconsin, Department of Financial Institutions.

We greatly appreciate Chelsea for bringing this information to WSPEI and our Connector readers!!

Just as there is no "typical" student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), there is no one-size-fits-all path after high school. Some students may be college-bound to a traditional 4-year university, with plans for graduate school or beyond. Other students may opt for a 2-year college to pursue an associate's degree or certificate program.

Registered Apprenticeship programs in Wisconsin have grown to include both the trades and other career pathways like healthcare and information technology. Alternatively, some students may finish their education at high school graduation, with a transition to adulthood that focuses more on daily living responsibilities.

Whatever path the student selects, the [Wisconsin 529 College Savings Program](#) offers families flexible tools to support their child's future. Administered by the State of Wisconsin's Department of Financial Institutions, this program is designed to help families save and invest for future education expenses and includes unique benefits for students with disabilities.

What is a 529 College Savings Plan?

Named for section 529 of the IRS tax code, 529 college savings plans are offered by states to help families save and pay for the cost of future education.

Unlike a standard savings account, funds in a 529 are invested, and any earnings grow tax deferred. Withdrawals are exempt from state and federal taxes when used for Qualified Higher Education Expenses.

Wisconsin offers two options for a 529 plan:

1. [Edvest 529](#), which can be opened at Edvest.com
2. [Tomorrow's Scholar](#), which is available through registered investment advisors and fee-only planners.

Contributions to either plan qualify for a Wisconsin State income tax deduction. For the 2025 tax year, contributions up to \$5,130 per student being saved for can be deducted from state income.

What can 529 funds be used for?

Despite the name, "*Qualified Higher Education Expenses*" include not just **post-secondary education, but also some K-12 expenses.**

For example, recent expansions now allow **529 plan funds** to be used for:

- K-12 tuition,
- Books and curricular materials,
- Tutoring (with certain limits), and
- Educational therapies for students with disabilities (such as occupational, behavioral, physical, and speech-language therapies—when provided by a licensed or accredited practitioner).

Starting **January 1, 2026**, the annual cap for using 529 plan funds on qualified K-12 expenses will be \$20,000 per student (\$10,000 in 2025).

► Keep in mind that Wisconsin has a 365-Day Rule, requiring that funds be kept in the 529 account **for 365 days before withdrawal if you are claiming the Wisconsin income tax deduction.** More information for Wisconsin taxpayers can be found at the Department of Financial Institutions, [WI College Savings Program](#) website.

Follow this [link](#) if you would like to view the technical language for expanded use of 529 funds in the Bill HR 1-SEC. 70413. ADDITIONAL EXPENSES TREATED AS QUALIFIED HIGHER EDUCATION EXPENSES FOR PURPOSES OF 529 ACCOUNTS

Once a student graduates or exits high school, 529 funds can be withdrawn to pay for the costs of their college or post-secondary program, including **tuition, housing and food** (if they are enrolled at least half time), **books, computers, and more.**

Qualifying post-secondary programs include:

- Degree-seeking programs at colleges and universities,
- Certificates,
- Professional credentialing
- Registered Apprenticeship programs

Students are not limited to attending school in Wisconsin, as funds saved in a Wisconsin 529 plan can be used at an accredited institution anywhere in the United States, and at some qualifying educational institutions abroad.

Rollover to ABLE Accounts

An ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) account is a savings and/or investment option for people with disabilities who qualify. If a family has funds saved in a 529 college savings plan, and they later find that an ABLE account would better serve their child's needs, they can easily rollover

funds from a 529 to an ABE account. Upcoming and recorded webinars about ABE accounts can be found at ABE Today: <https://www.abletoday.org/intro>

Learn More

Families and professionals who want to learn more about **Edvest 529** can visit [Edvest.com](https://www.edvest.com) to access FAQs, short videos, webinars, or to book an appointment with an Educational Savings Consultant.

For more **information** about the [Wisconsin College Savings Program](#) or [ABLE](#) accounts, visit the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions website.

Questions can be directed to CollegeSavingsProgram@dfi.wisconsin.gov or (608) 264-7899.

Wisconsin Conferences 📌

[Building the Heart of Successful Schools Conference](#)

Online registration is closed - email wishschools@cesa4.org for late registration options.

DATES: December 11, 2025 with pre-conference sessions on December 10, 2025

LOCATION: Glacier Canyon Conference Center - Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells.

Check out the [BHSS Conference Booklet](#) for keynote speaker and breakout session information!

[Raising Wisconsin's Children Conference 2026](#)

Join Us for the *"Raising Wisconsin's Children Conference: Helping Children Thrive When Life Gets Tough"*

The Raising Wisconsin's Children Conference is a free, virtual event designed for parents, caregivers, educators, and anyone who supports children and families. This year's theme—Helping Children Thrive When Life Gets Tough—focuses on navigating life's challenges with practical tools grounded in science.

Hear from expert speakers who will share research-informed strategies to promote children's emotional well-being, learning, and growth, even during difficult times.

Let's come together to support children through life's ups and downs.

Visit the conference website to explore our speaker lineup and learn more:

<https://go.wisc.edu/raisingwi>

Date and Time: February, 4, 2026 | 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM

Cost: This conference is free!

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Details: You can watch live or up to one month later. The conference recordings will be emailed to you about a week after the conference.

[24th Annual Transition Conference](#)

DATES: February 12-13, 2026

LOCATION: Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Two days with keynote speakers, **Pam Schuller**, and the "Shut Up Sisters", **Patricia Terrasi** and **Gina Gallagher** bring a wealth of knowledge, from different perspectives, regarding the challenges faced in the world of special education. In addition, we will have over 20 breakout sessions to choose from; relevant exhibitors and built in networking time.

Register [HERE](#)

37th Annual Autism Conference - Save the Date

DATES: April 23-25, 2026

LOCATION: Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

The purpose of the Annual Autism Conference is to provide a wide range of information to those within the Autism community. Our goal is to provide relevant information for attendees of all backgrounds, including those who are new to Autism and those who have years of experience. We are looking for dynamic and empowering proposals that include practical strategies and evidence-based practices encompassing issues facing Autistic individuals, their families, and those who support them.

Circles of Life Conference

SAVE THE DATE

Dates: May 14 & 15, 2026

Location: Holiday Inn Stevens Point Convention Center

Registration Opens February 1, 2026

We need a wide variety of presentations to meet the interests of our attendees.

The theme for our 2026 conference is ***Families and Professionals on the Path Together***. We encourage you to submit a presentation proposal reflecting this theme. If possible, include how partnerships and collaborations improve outcomes for all families.

From Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

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BPDD Statement: Promised increase for special education doesn't materialize for schools, students

The state budget did not implement the Governor's original proposal to raise the special education reimbursement rate from 32% to 60% sum sufficient funding:

[Link to Full Article](#)

The Wisconsin Assembly passes legislation that would let teachers decide which students they keep in class:

Full state Assembly passes [AB 613](#) and [AB 614](#)

- [BPDD testimony](#)

What do these bills do:

- Make it easier for teachers to take students out of classrooms if the teacher says the student's behavior is disruptive. Under the bill, the definition of "disruptive incident" is broad and gives a lot of room for the teacher to fit many common behaviors into the definition.
- Add time consuming paperwork requirements that can delay a student's return to the classroom.

- Require the school to notify all parents of every student in the class each time a student is removed from the class and say how the removed student diminished the quality or quantity of instructional time provided to the class.

Action steps you can take:

- Contact your [State Senator](#) with your thoughts on this bill.
- [Contact the Governor](#) with your thoughts on these bills. This helps the Governor decide whether to sign or veto a bill that gets to his desk.

Wisconsin Family Voices

Wisconsin Family Leadership Institute (WiFLI) - Spring 2026 Foundations Training

This series provides the building blocks to successfully extend the advocacy you are already doing to reach beyond your own family, affecting the systems, programs, and services you interact with every day. From Telling your Story workshops to understanding how Boards and Committees work, we'll get you started on your family leadership journey.

For the first time, the Spring 2026 series will mix in-person learning sessions with virtual workshops. We'll begin by getting to know the other WiFLI members, then go virtual for two sessions, and finish up in-person to learn and compare our experiences. Our hope is that this meets more of your learning styles and schedules where you are—Enthusiastic and ready to put ideas into action.

Sessions begin in February 2026.

Visit the [WEBSITE](#) for complete schedule and application information.

Keep on Learning - Webinars for Families and Educators

Children's Wisconsin

"Overview of Triple P Online Parenting Program for Service Providers"

Join us for a **60- minute virtual webinar** to learn all about Triple P Online- a free, evidence-based parent education and support curriculum designed to help families enjoy more positives in their day.

This session will provide an engaging overview of **Triple P Online**, including what it is, how it works, and how it can support the families you serve. You'll learn how to:

- Introduce families to Triple P Online
- Support caregivers as they navigate the program
- Use the platform to reinforce positive parenting skills
- Access resources and referral information

We are offering **two different date and time options** to fit your schedule. Click the link below to register for one of the two options:

- **Wednesday, January 14th 2026 from 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Register [Here](#))**
- **Wednesday, January 21st 2026 from 3:00 PM- 4:00 PM (Register [Here](#))**

Whether you're new to Triple P or looking to strengthen your understanding, this webinar will give you practical takeaways you can immediately use in your work with families.

Rogers Behavioral Health

"Sounding the Alarm on School Avoidance"

Building Parental Awareness and Strategies to Break the Cycle

- Do you have a child or a student struggling or avoiding going to school?
- Is your child spending more time in the nurse's office than in the classroom?
- Is your child afraid to interact with other students or teachers or asking to come home from school early?

While everyone has a rough day or two, when a child falls into a pattern of habitually avoiding or refusing school, it can heighten stress levels and indicate a deeper struggle with mental health. This webinar breaks down the complexities of why children refuse to go to school, identifies symptoms and behaviors, and shares school refusal intervention strategies that educators and parents can use to work together to help kids get back to class.

You can find it on YouTube: [Sounding the Alarm on School Avoidance](#).

Wisconsin Autism Transition Demonstration (WAuTD) Project Kickoff meeting!

The project's goal is to better connect the different systems that help autistic youth as they become adults.

The focus is on autistic people ages 13 to 26 with more challenging health or social needs who need more support than other young people.

Tuesday, December 9, 2025 | Virtual Zoom meeting

12:00 – 1:30 pm

To register:

Visit https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0Uqk9UGpOnzU9bU

To learn more about the project:

Visit [Waisman Center UCEDD Integrated Transition Projects & Resources – University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities – UW–Madison](#)

If you have any questions, please contact Lynn Hrabik at hrabik@wisc.edu or 920-427-5262.

Connect with WSPEI!

We are here to support and assist

Are you looking for information, resources or support about Special Education and IEPs from WSPEI?

Information provided on this form will help us connect you to your local **WSPEI Family-School Partnership Coordinator**: [Click this link for Support Request Form](#)

Bring a Workshop to Your Area! We'd love to partner with you!

Interested in hosting one of our workshops locally? Reach out and let's make it happen.

Email us at: wspei@cesa12.org

Find past newsletters and downloadable pdfs [HERE](#)



The WSPEI Program

Contact

Subscribe

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