

THE WSPEI CONNECTOR

January 2026

Communicating Information and Resources for Wisconsin Families and Educators

🌟 Happy New Year to our Connector readers!

Whether you're looking to master new Special Education concepts or sharpen your leadership and advocacy skills for 2026, this month's newsletter is packed with opportunities.

Check out our new "**Leadership in Action**" workshop (a collaboration with **WI FACETS**), and explore even more ways to lead through events offered by our partners at **Wisconsin Family Voices** and the **WI Board for People with Developmental Disabilities**. A link to the 2026 WI FACETS training calendar is below for you as well.



Here at WSPEI, we hope this new year brings you much joy, abundance and moments of marvel!

THE WSPEI PROGRAM STATEWIDE LEARNING AND NETWORKING EVENTS

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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. Zoom meeting links are sent out one week prior to the first session.

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

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

[Calendar of Events](#)

TOPIC SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS

[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](#)

[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](#)

[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](#)

**** NEW TRAINING****

[Leadership in Action: Finding the Leader in YOU!](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

WSPEI is joining together with our partners at WI FACETS to bring you this 2-part virtual leadership workshop!

Learn about:

- Working in partnerships to effectively communicate with schools
- Building engagement and ensuring relevant parent participation
- Developing structures for convening & working together around issues
- Types of conflict & resolution styles
- Converting challenges into opportunities

February 11 & 18, 2026 | 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

[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](#)

[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.

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

Register for either of these dates here: [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
- **January 15, January 22 & February 5, 2026 | 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.**

[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 | 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**

[Click to REGISTER](#)

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WSPEI in your neighborhood - REGIONAL Training

The Family's Role in the CCR-IEP Process

St. Croix Area

This series will include information and resources that equip parents and other family members to become more confident participants in the IEP process.

Friday, January 23rd | 6pm - 8:30pm | Virtual via ZOOM

Register [HERE](#)

WI DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Stay Up to Date

Want to stay informed?

Visit the [DPI News Room](#)

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Public School Open Enrollment

The open enrollment application period for the 2026-27 school year is February 2 - April 30, 2026 at 4:00pm.

The best way to apply is online (a link to the online application will be available at the top of this page during the application period). Additional information on the regular open enrollment application season can be found on our [applications page](#).

[open enrollment regular application period brochure](#)

[Alternative Open Enrollment Application for the 2025-26 school year](#)

(You must download or save the form prior to completing it electronically. Once the form has been completed, submit it to the school district to which you are applying.)

[Alternative Procedures for Applying for Open Enrollment Brochure, 2025-26](#)

What is Open Enrollment: The inter-district public school open enrollment program allows parents to apply for their children to attend public school in a school district other than the one in which they reside.

The Department of Public Instruction's [Open Enrollment page](#) and [Open Enrollment Special Education webpage](#) provides information and resources for parents who choose to enroll their child in a different district than the resident district.

It is a local school board decision to create open enrollment policies as they relate to students with disabilities and those local school board policies can set limits on the number of students who receive special education services through an IEP are able to be open enrolled in their district. Both the nonresident and resident school districts may deny an application for reasons specified in state law. If an application is denied by either the resident or nonresident school district, the parent may file an appeal with the DPI within 30 days. The DPI is required to affirm the school district's decision unless the DPI determines that the decision was arbitrary or unreasonable.

Contact Us: Email: openenrollment@dpi.wi.gov or call toll-free: [888-245-2732](tel:888-245-2732)

Resources available for open enrollment:

- [Questions and Answers about 2015 Act 55 \(2015-17 Budget\) Open Enrollment Changes for Pupils with Disabilities](#).
- An online presentation, ["Open Enrollment, Reasons for Denial"](#) provides additional information on open enrollment.
- [Public School Open Enrollment Information Bulletin 16-05](#) provides directions on completing open enrollment requirements.
- [Bulletin 16.10: Special Education Space Determination and Reasons for Denial for Open Enrollment](#)

If a parent is denied open enrollment, the parent may appeal an open enrollment decision.

For information on appeals, see the [Public School Open Enrollment Informational Bulletin 19-03](#) related to appeals found on the [Wisconsin DPI Public School Open Enrollment Appeals Information website](#).

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Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey

Each year, the WI Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requires 20% of Wisconsin school districts to take part in the Federal Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey data collection as part of the district's self-assessment. The survey is offered to all parents of children ages 3-17 who are receiving special education services and support through an Individualized Education Program

(IEP). Indicator 8 identifies 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*. The survey is confidential. DPI will use the survey results to improve services to children and youth with IEPs and their families.

To find out if your school district is taking part in the survey, click here: [2025-2026 LEAs/School Districts in Indicator 8 Survey](#).

Interested in learning more about the Indicator 8 Survey?

Go to DPI's Indicator 8 Family Engagement Survey webpage [here](#).

WI FACETS

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January 2026 Newsletter

The January 2026 Newsletter brings our attention to the topic of Transition to adulthood and life after high school. This issue is jam-packed with online Transition resources!

Learn about the role Division of Vocational Rehab(DVR) plays in supporting youth with a disability:

[January Newsletter - English](#)

[January Newsletter - Spanish](#)

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2026 Training Calendar

Are you looking to enhance your knowledge and confidence while supporting a child with a disability? WI FACETS invites **families, caregivers, and professionals** to explore our 2026 calendar of free, expert-led workshops designed to empower and inform you every step of the way.

📅 View and register for upcoming trainings at: www.wifacets.org/training/calendar

[PDF of Training Calendar in English](#)

[PDF of Training Calendar in Spanish](#)

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Leadership In Action

[Leadership in Action: Finding the Leader in YOU!](#)

[Information Flyer in Spanish](#)

WI FACETS and WSPEI are working together to bring you this 2-part virtual leadership workshop!

Learn about:

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- Building engagement and ensuring relevant parent participation
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- Types of conflict & resolution styles
- Converting challenges into opportunities

February 11 & 18, 2026: 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

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Endless Possibilities Conference - Save the Date

2026 WI FACETS Endless Possibilities Conference

Save the Date! Date: August 7, 2026

Location: Waukesha County Technical College (AJN Center), Pewaukee, WI

The annual Endless Possibilities conference invites families and professionals who support students with disabilities to learn and grow together. We encourage open dialogue between families and professionals to discuss positive solutions for all our students with special needs in Wisconsin.

☁ "I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says 'Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.'" - Lewis Carroll

WISCONSIN CONFERENCES

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State Events and Save the Dates

24th Annual WI Transition Conference

Dates: February 12-13, 2026

Location: Kalahari Resort, WI Dells, WI

The conference will have two knowledgeable and humorous keynote speaker presentations. Spend all Thursday morning with the extremely informative and funny, **Pam Schuller** and all Friday morning with the hilarious "**Shut Up Sisters**", **Patricia Terrasi and Gina Gallagher**.

These keynote speakers bring a wealth of knowledge, from different perspectives, regarding the challenges faced in the world of special education. In addition, there are over 20 breakout sessions to choose from, relevant exhibitors, and networking time.

2026 Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin and the Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin Annual Conference

Dates: April 23-25, 2026

Location: Kalahari Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI

REGISTRATION is OPEN

The purpose of the annual conference is to provide a wide range of information to those within the autism community. The goal is to provide relevant information for attendees at all levels, including

those who are new to autism and those who have years of experience.

[Circles of Life Conference](#)

Save the Dates Dates: May 14-15, 2026

Location: Holiday Inn Stevens Point Convention Center, Stevens Point, WI

Circles of Life is Wisconsin's annual conference for families who have children with disabilities and the professionals who support them.

Keynote Speaker: Dr. K Jane Lee

Dr. Lee is the mother of two children, one of whom has severe neurologic impairment from a brain injury at birth. She is a passionate advocate for anti-ableism, and has published a book, *Catastrophic Rupture: A Memoir of Healing*, which invites readers to join her as she shifts from an ableist medical perspective of disability that sees only an impaired body, to the mother's perspective that sees the beauty and value in the person that is her child.

Make Your Impact—Be a Conference Sponsor

[Sponsor Registration](#)

Be an Exhibitor Vendor

[Exhibitor Registration](#)

[2026 WI FACETS Endless Possibilities Conference](#)

Save the Date! Date: August 7, 2026

Location: Waukesha County Technical College (AJN Center), Pewaukee, WI

The annual Endless Possibilities conference invites families and professionals who support students with disabilities to learn and grow together. We encourage open dialogue between families and professionals to discuss positive solutions for all our students with special needs in Wisconsin.

WISCONSIN FAMILY VOICES

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We're looking for a Community Engagement Specialist. Is that you?

Are you energized by connecting with people, enjoy a mix of creative digital work and face-to-face community engagement?

If so, we invite you to apply for our **Community Engagement Specialist (75% FTE)** [position](#).

In this role, you'll be a visible and **trusted connector** - bringing families, professionals, and partners together. From creating engaging social media content and short-form videos, to facilitating learning sessions and representing the organization at community events, your work will directly support families and strengthen support systems across Wisconsin.

As a **valued member of a dynamic team**, this work supports families while elevating their voices in the systems that serve them. You'll occasionally travel throughout Wisconsin, build real relationships, and see the impact of your efforts firsthand.

Please send a letter of interest describing your experience and strengths in these areas with a current resume to Executive Director Danielle Tolzmann, danielle@fvofwi.org no later than February 6, 2026.

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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.

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January 2026 Events

Make 2026 the year you become empowered through high-quality information. Family Voices Learning Sessions cover what you need to know so you understand systems and feel confident speaking up for your family.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Tuesday, January 13, 5:30pm - 6:30pm

What's After High School?

Thursday, January 15, 6:00pm - 7:15pm

An Introduction to the Children's Long-Term Support Program

Wednesday, January 21, 5:30pm - 6:30pm

What's After High School? - Health Care Transition

Wednesday, January 28, 12:00pm - 1:00pm

Thinking About Supported Decision Making

WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Disability Vote Coalition: Lunch n Learn 1/20/26

Absentee and Early Voting Zoom Webinar

Jan. 20, 2026 | 12:00 – 12:45 p.m.

Absentee voting is a convenient way for many people to vote. We'll discuss how to request an absentee ballot for a specific election or the entire year. We will go over early in-person voting. We'll also cover:

- Important election dates
- Your voting rights
- What to do if you have a problem at the polls, and more!

Intended Audience: people with disabilities, family members, caregivers, service providers.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

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Survival Coalition Community Organizing 3-part Training

This 3-part, 9-hour training is free to members of the disability community in Wisconsin who want to explore the principles of collective action to impact issues important to the disability community.

Whether it's cuts to Medicaid and SNAP, the lack of caregivers, quality education, or other issues important to the disability community, this training will give you the connections and skills to have greater impact on public policy.

Session run from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. on the dates below and will not be recorded so participation in ALL THREE sessions is strongly recommended:

- **Session #1 (January 28th):** Learning the basics of power, control, and how to motivate others.
- **Session #2 (February 11th):** Identifying challenges and developing strategies for change.
- **Session #3 (February 25th):** Forming cohesive groups and maximizing strengths for bigger impact

[REGISTER HERE](#)

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Save the Date: Disability Advocacy Day: March 19th 2026

Disability Advocacy Day is a day-long event focused on connecting Self-Advocates with their legislators to talk about issues that matter to them. Join us in-person in Madison on March 19th, 2026 to meet with your elected officials!

Registration will open early in 2026

 **CONNECT WITH WSPEI**



We are here to support and assist! 

Are you looking for support information, or resources 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

Downloadable pdfs of past newsletters can be found [HERE](#)



The WSPEI Program

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