



# THE FORUM

University of Pittsburgh

The Tri-State Area School Study Council Newsletter

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TRI-STATE AREA SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL

*Seeking ways to increase organizational capacity in schools through problem solving, technical service, and staff development so all students will be better prepared to make contributions to both our democratic society and the world community*

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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## 2024-2025 Workshop Calendar

We are excited to see you at a fantastic event slate this year! Please note the venue changes from last year below.

### Annual Holiday Luncheon

Wednesday, January 22, 2025  
Parkway West CTC

### **School Board and Distinguished Educator Banquet**

Thursday, March 20, 2025  
University Club

### **PASA/PSBA Workshop**

Friday, March 21, 2025  
Zoom

### **Dr. Jean E. Winsand Workshop for Women in School Leadership**

Friday, April 11, 2025  
University Club

### **Dr. Samuel Francis School Law Symposium and Special Education Workshop**

Wednesday, June 18, 2025  
Regional Learning Alliance

If you have suggestions for workshops, please feel free to contact us with your ideas!



Thank you to the law firms who contribute to *The Forum* newsletter each issue:

- **Andrews & Price**, *Special Education Alert*
- **Tucker Arensberg Attorneys**, *Education Law Report*
- **Weiss Burkardt Kramer LLC**, *In Brief: School Law Update* (Located on pages 6-7 of *The Forum*)

## **2024 NCAA Update Workshop: In Review**

On October 10th, in collaboration with Pitt Athletics, we hosted the annual NCAA Update Workshop at the incredible Campus View Club in the Petersen Events Center. The event brought together 120 participants as we explored the evolving landscape of college athletics.

The workshop began with a welcome from Dr. Bart Rocco, Director of Tri-State, and Jen Tuscano, Interim Director of Athletics at Pitt. We are grateful to Jen for her opening remarks and helping set the tone for an informative day!

Christina L. Lane, Partner at Maiello Brungo and Maiello, LLP, then presented "The Current Landscape of NIL," offering insights on Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policies. Tyler Wright, Assistant AD for Compliance at Pitt, followed with a deeper dive into how NIL is reshaping the collegiate landscape.

Steven Zyra, Assistant Director at Pitt's Office of Admissions and Financial Aid, and Tilly Sheets, Associate Director at Academic Support Services for Student-Athletes (ASSSA), led a presentation on NCAA Initial Eligibility and Pitt admissions, providing valuable guidance for student-athletes and educators.

The open forum on NCAA hot topics and the evolution of the student-athlete financial model was a highlight. Moderated by Ryan Mitchell, Associate AD for Administration at Pitt, and Emlyn Goodman, Assistant Director of Compliance, this segment fostered an engaging discussion on student-athlete compensation and the broader financial landscape of college sports.

We thank all of our speakers for their dedication and expertise, which made the workshop both enlightening and thought-provoking. We look forward to continuing these important conversations next October!

## **Green Building Alliance**

### **Update from Green Building Alliance**

*Author: Karma Lisa Edwards*

#### **Pennsylvania Solar for Schools**

The Solar for Schools Grant Program is established pursuant to the act of Jul 17, 2024 (P.L.813, No. 68) known as the Solar for Schools Act. This program seeks to reduce the cost of implementing solar energy systems into schools across the Commonwealth and free up funds for educational programs. The Department of Community and Economic Development has established a grant program that school districts, intermediate units, charter schools including cyber, regional, and a school for education of the deaf or the blind, area career and technical schools, specific trade and technical schools, and community colleges can use to fund solar energy projects. These grants will aid in the purchase and installation of equipment, permit fees, energy storage, and utility interconnection. More details can be found by clicking [here](#).

#### **Green Building Alliance - Green Pathways Initiative**

GBA has secured a \$1.48 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to launch its Green Pathways Initiative, aimed at workforce development in Southwestern Pennsylvania. GBA aims to equip students and workers with high performing building and sustainability skills that prepare them for well-paying jobs in the clean energy sector, meeting the growing demand for sustainability expertise. Youth-focused seminars and high school conferences will promote environmental literacy and expose students to career opportunities in green building and sustainability. This initiative will target Allegheny, Beaver, Fayette, Greene, Washington, and Westmoreland counties, providing training and certifications in green building, sustainability and clean energy sectors. GBA will collaborate with regional trade unions, workforce development boards, technical colleges, and high schools to offer job and career training and upskilling opportunities in energy-efficient building operations and sustainable construction. The program will offer industry-recognized credentials such as LEED Green Associate and GPRO Operations & Maintenance to help workers advance in the green building industry. [Learn more by clicking on this link.](#)

GBA aims to engage and support Western PA K12 school administrators to position their district students, teachers, facility personnel and administrators to gain valuable knowledge in high performing buildings and sustainability. To bring these resources to your school and school district, please contact Karma Lisa Edwards at: [karmae@gba.org](mailto:karmae@gba.org).



## Social & Emotional Learning Summit: In Review

The Fall 2024 Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) Summit, held from October 22-24 at the University Club, was a transformative three-day event. It was a powerful collaboration between Tri-State, AASA, the Cook Center for Human Connection, MindUp for Life, and Ripple Effects, aimed at advancing SEL and mental health initiatives within school communities. With nearly 130 participants, including many from out of state, the summit provided an engaging and insightful experience focused on integrating mental health and SEL practices into our schools.

In today's educational landscape, academic achievement alone is not the sole measure of student success. The SEL Summit emphasized that mental health, social and emotional wellness, and interpersonal skills all play pivotal roles in shaping well-rounded, resilient individuals ready to excel both academically and in life. The summit brought district leaders together to explore the latest data, research, and trends related to the mental health needs of students and school communities at large.

The event began with a warm welcome from key leaders, including Dan Bridges, Dawn Bridges, Tobin Novasio, Paul Imhoff, Anne Brown, Bille Rondinelli, John Malloy, and our own Dr. Bart Rocco and Dr. Cassie Quigley. Together, the welcome address introduced thought-provoking questions about how district leaders can effectively advance mental health and SEL initiatives. Throughout the summit, attendees had the opportunity to build a network of support, explore new tools and case studies, and discover actionable strategies to bring back to their districts. The collaboration fostered a space where leaders could learn from one another and strengthen their commitment to cultivating emotionally intelligent, adaptable students.

Keynote speaker Seth Cohen, Chief Impact Officer at Forbes, delivered an inspiring address during the opening dinner. Anne Brown, President and CEO of the Cook Center for Human Connection, led an impactful session titled "Building Bridges: Empowering Schools and Families to Solve the Youth Mental Health Crisis," highlighting the critical role schools play in supporting the mental health of students.

On Wednesday, another standout session featured Gregg Behr and Ryan Rydzewski of the Grable Foundation, who shared lessons from Mister Rogers, providing educators with powerful insights into addressing the emotional needs of students. Their presentation, "What Do You Do With the Feelings You Feel? Lessons from Mister Rogers," resonated deeply with participants, reinforcing the importance of empathy and emotional understanding in education.

Attendees were also inspired by the contributions of Michelle Bartsch, VP of Education at the Cook Center, and Grace Brown, Sr. Manager, Impact & Curriculum at the Cook Center, who led a session on "Leadership and Happiness," focusing on cultivating happiness and building meaningful partnerships within school communities. Jimmer Fredette, founder of the Fredette Family Foundation and 2024 U.S. Olympic athlete, presented "Champions Choose Kindness," which highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of kindness and the value of overcoming adversity.

The summit's final day brought together district leaders for an action-planning session led by Dan Bridges, Don Bridges, Paul Imhoff, and Tobin Novasio, where participants collaborated on strategies to integrate SEL and mental health within MTSS and discussed how to scale these initiatives across districts. This action-oriented approach left attendees feeling empowered with concrete plans to implement in their schools. The summit closed with an uplifting message from Goldie Hawn, Academy Award-winning actress and CEO of MindUp, who spoke about improving the well-being of children and the adults in their lives through social and emotional learning practices.

We are deeply grateful to all of our incredible speakers, participants, and partner organizations for their dedication to advancing SEL and mental health in schools. The energy and enthusiasm shared during the summit demonstrated the profound impact that SEL can have on improving academic performance, increasing graduation rates, and preparing students to face the challenges of today and the future. We look forward to continuing this essential work and are grateful to have been part of this special collaboration that brought together so many passionate leaders and educators!



*Photos from the presentation of Gregg Behr and Ryan Rydzewski*



## Updates to the Pennsylvania School Code: Key Changes for Schools

By: Ron Karls, Esq.



Significant updates to the Pennsylvania School Code will take effect in the 2024-2025 school year. Here's a summary of the key changes you need to know regarding school security, advertising practices, personnel certifications, funding, and more.

### Act 55: School Security Enhancements

Act 55 introduces new requirements for school security. Starting in the 2024-2025 school year, all school entities must have at least one full-time security personnel on duty during school hours. These individuals must complete the Basic School Resource Officer Course from the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) or an equivalent program approved by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD).

**Additionally, schools are annually required to facilitate annual training opportunities for their threat assessment teams and ensure that students, employees, and parents are informed about the team's existence and purpose.**

By June 30, 2025, school safety coordinators must report to their Board of School Directors on the number of security personnel, their assignments, and the training each officer has received.

To assist with funding, a restricted account will be established to reimburse school entities up to \$50,000 for security personnel costs. Applications for this reimbursement should be available after July 1, 2025. Furthermore, \$100 million has been allocated for school safety and mental health grants in the upcoming fiscal year, along with an additional \$20.7 million for targeted school safety grants.

### Act 55: Advertising and Sponsorships

Act 55 also revises advertising practices for public school entities, including charter schools. Schools are now prohibited from advertising tuition or other costs as "free." Instead, they must clarify that these expenses are covered by taxpayer dollars. Starting in the 2024-2025 school year, public school entities must disclose their total expenditures for paid media advertising and sponsorships of public events to the Pennsylvania Department of Education by August 1, 2025. The Department will compile these reports for public access.

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## Tatel, et. al. v. Mount Lebanon School District: Balancing Parent Rights and Compelling State Interests



By: Annemarie K. Harr, Esq.

A recent decision was entered by the Western District Court of Pennsylvania in the Tatel, et. al. v. Mount Lebanon School District case, impacting school district opt-out policies and procedures.

By way of background, the Mt. Lebanon School District had an opt out policy that was consistent with Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania School Code which allowed parents to opt out their students out of curricular material that conflicted with their own religious beliefs. In addition to this written opt out policy, the School District also had a practice of sending notice to allow parents to opt out of other material that would be presented in class. The court pointed to examples that included PG-13 movies, apartheid, Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, an assembly involving a therapy dog, lunch group meetings with a school counselor, PASS surveys, the Scripps Spelling Bee, animal dissection, and video clips from a TV series that involves a homosexual character. In the case at hand, a teacher in the School District decided to read a book about a child who is transgender to her first-grade students. The teacher planned to provide this lesson, and there was no notice sent home in advance advising parents or allowing them to opt their child out of the lesson. During the reading and the resulting discussion with her class, the teacher told the students, "parents make a guess about their children . . . when their children are born . . . parents make a guess whether they're a boy or girl. Sometimes parents are wrong." According to the Plaintiff Parents, the lesson led to confusion amongst their young students and eventually the lawsuit.

The court in this case found that the "crux of this the *continued on next page.*



## Updates to Pennsylvania School Code, *continued*

### Act 55: Personnel Certifications and Qualifications

Changes to personnel certifications include the expansion of eligibility for teacher certification to those authorized to work in the U.S. The deadline for demonstrating satisfactory achievement on basic skills assessments for entry into baccalaureate teacher programs has been extended to June 30, 2025, after a three-year waiver. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Department of Education can now issue intern certifications to individuals with a bachelor's degree and two years of full-time experience in occupational therapy, reducing the previous requirement of four years.

### Act 55: Funding Modifications

The fair funding formula for Pennsylvania schools has been adjusted to incorporate three-year averages for factors such as poverty, concentrated poverty, and household income. School districts are now required to submit their per-pupil tuition rates and the data used for calculations by November 1, 2024, and annually thereafter.

### Act 25: September 11 Remembrance

Each school entity is now required to observe a moment of silence on September 11 annually, allowing students and faculty to reflect on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks. The Pennsylvania Department of Education will also develop a model curriculum on the significance of this day by June 17, 2025.

### Act 82: Rights for Children of Military Families

Finally, Act 82 changes require that children of National Guard and Reserve members receive the same rights and support as those from active-duty military families. This amendment aims to provide equitable treatment for all students in military families. Should you have questions regarding these or other changes affecting school entities, please do not hesitate to reach out to the attorneys at WBK. ♦

## Tatel, et. al. v. MTLSD, *continued*

case is whether the conflicts implicate the Parents' constitutional rights." Here, the court found that due to young age of the children, and the Parents' authority to decide when to discuss transgender topics with their children, the facts of the case do in fact implicate Parents' constitutional rights. As a result, the court used the strict scrutiny test in its review of the case. This means that, in this case and in cases with similar fact patterns, a district must show that its actions were narrowly tailored to serve a compelling governmental interest. In this case, the School District could not show that its action of not providing an opt-out opportunity was related to any compelling governmental interest.

The final order in this matter held that absent a compelling governmental interest, parents have a constitutional right to reasonable and realistic advance notice and the ability to opt their elementary-age children out of noncurricular instruction on transgender topics and to not have requirements for notice and opting out for those topics that are more stringent than those for other sensitive topics. Districts are advised to review their current opt out policy as well as any policies relating to review and establishment of curriculum. As always, our office is available to assist in any way relating to this, or any, matter. ♦

## WBK Happenings

- We are pleased to announce that Weiss Burkardt Kramer has been recognized as a Tier 1 firm in Pittsburgh and as a Best Law Firm in the United States for Education Law in the 2025 Best Law Firms award. Tier 1 recognition is reserved for the highest scoring firms during the annual review process.
- Attorneys Ira Weiss and Jocelyn Kramer have been named as The Best Lawyers in America in the publication's 2025 edition.
- Ronald Karls has joined WBK as a new Associate Attorney. Ron was a former law clerk for the firm and will be assuming the role of our primary Right to Know Law associate in addition to his general education and municipal law practice.
- Attorney Kelly Perkovich was recently named to the position of Secretary for the School and Municipal Law Section of the Allegheny County Bar Association.
- Megan Turnbull was reelected to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association Solicitor Association Board of Directors, representing the W-2 Region.
- Nicole Williams has assumed the role of Managing Attorney.
- Rebecca Berquist has joined the firm as Chief Financial Officer.

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Contact other WBK attorneys by visiting [wbklegal.com](http://wbklegal.com)

*This issue of In Brief: School Law Update is meant to be informational and does not constitute legal advice. Should districts want legal advice on any matter, they should contact their legal counsel or request a legal opinion from Weiss Burkardt Kramer LLC.*



# Women's Law Project

## Message from the Women's Law Project

Regardless of where your political leanings fall, the results of the November election will give educators much to think about and new problems to grapple with.

During President Trump's first term, Title IX regulations were promulgated under then-Secretary Betsy DeVos that made it more difficult for students facing sexual harassment and assault to seek justice against their assailants and to obtain necessary accommodations from their school. These regulations were largely eliminated under President Biden. We expect that regulations similar to the DeVos regulations will be reinstated during President Trump's second term. Educators will be tasked with adapting to the new rules; students victimized by sexual harassment and sexual assault will face renewed obstacles to pursuing justice against their assailants and a safe environment for learning.

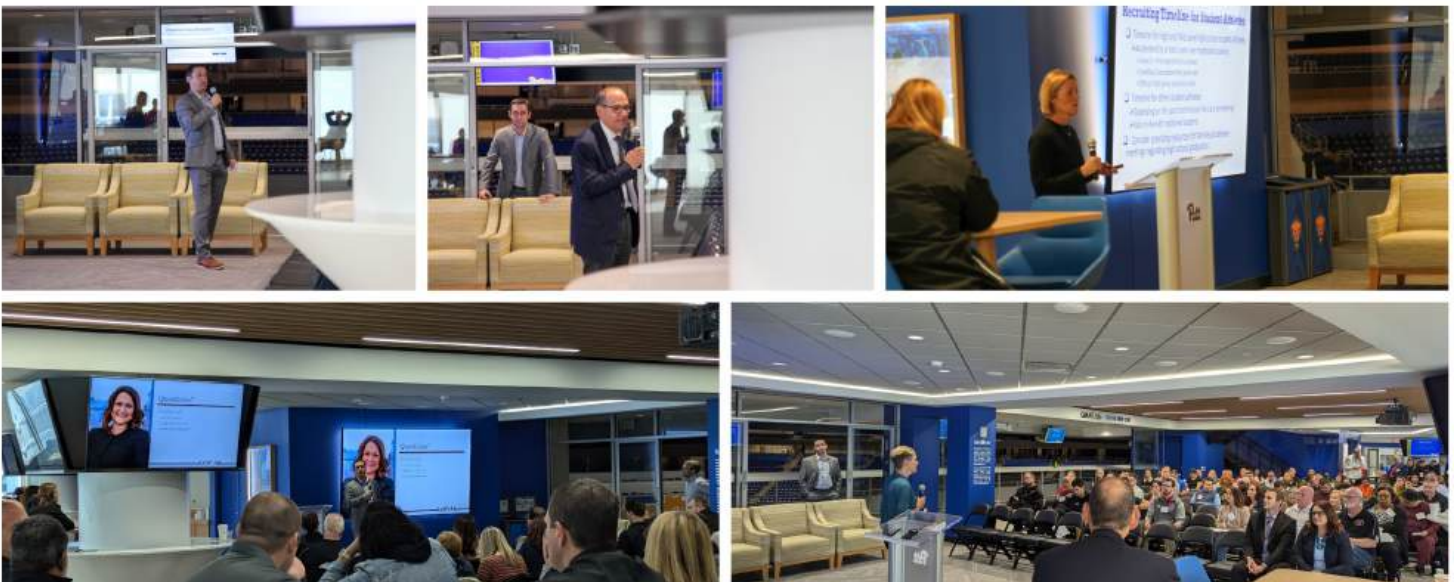
Even larger changes are on the horizon. Project 2025, the encyclopedic policy agenda for a Trump presidency, recommends the elimination of the U.S. Department of Education and the rolling back of students' right to an education free from sex discrimination and gender stereotyping. These initiatives could, if adopted, directly affect trans and gender-nonconforming students' access to school facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms and would threaten their opportunity to participate in school-based athletics. All students could lose the right to an educational environment that is respectful of everyone's gender. Pregnant and lactating students who need accommodations from their school in order to participate fully in educational activities and succeed academically may lose the ground they have recently gained if sex-based anti-discrimination regulations are weakened or repealed. These anticipated policy changes are not a foregone conclusion: educators will have an opportunity to weigh in, and must take every opportunity to fight for a fair and equitable educational environment for their students.

Educators are responsible for the success of all students. The Women's Law Project's mission overlaps with and complements yours in this regard. We will continue to provide legal information and representation to ensure that despite policy changes on the horizon, all students have an educational environment free from violence, harassment, and discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.



[www.womenslawproject.org](http://www.womenslawproject.org)  
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## 2024 NCAA Update Photos





## Tri-State Area School Study Council

Tri-State is governed by an Executive Committee of regional superintendents, intermediate unit executive directors, and career and technical center directors.

Below is the 2024-2025 Executive Committee membership.

### Director

Bart Rocco, University of Pittsburgh

### Officers

President: Michael Loughead, Hampton Township School District  
Vice President: Joseph Guarino, New Brighton Area School District  
Past President: Michelle Miller, South Fayette School District

### Executive Committee

Darby Copeland, Parkway West CTC  
Matthew Curci, Apollo-Ridge School District  
Timothy Gabauer, Mount Pleasant Area School District  
Joseph Guarino, New Brighton Area School District  
David Lehman, Forest Hills School District  
Janell Logue-Belden, Deer Lakes School District  
Michael Lucas, Trinity Area School District  
Donald Martin, Intermediate Unit 1  
Scott Martin, Bentworth School District  
Donna Nugent, Big Beaver Falls Area School District  
Heidi Ondek, Western PA School for Blind Children  
Gennaro Piraino, Franklin Regional School District  
Janet Sardon, West Jefferson Hills School District  
Robert Scherrer, Allegheny Intermediate Unit  
Tracy Vitale, Seneca Valley School District  
Brian White, Butler Area School District

*The Forum is a publication of the Tri-State Area School Study Council. Your comments and suggestions of topics for future publications are always welcome. You may contact us at:*

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