



University of Pittsburgh

THE FORUM

The Tri-State Area School Study Council Newsletter

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Fall 2025

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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

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Our 2026 Events

We are thrilled to share a fantastic upcoming event slate with you in 2026!

Annual Holiday Luncheon

Tuesday, January 13, 2026
Parkway West CTC

NCAA Update

Thursday, February 5, 2026
Petersen Events Center

School Board and Distinguished Educator Banquet

Thursday, March 26, 2026
University Club

PASA/PSBA Workshop

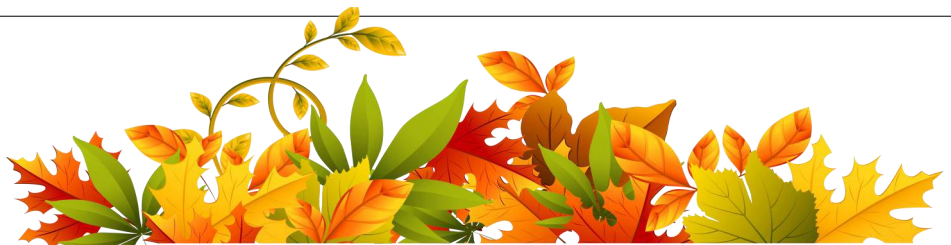
Friday, March 27, 2026
Zoom

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

Friday, April 10, 2026
University Club

Dr. Samuel Francis School Law Symposium and Special Education Workshop

Thursday, June 18, 2026
Regional Learning Alliance



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 4-5 of *The Forum*)

In Review: Empowering Schools Through People & Purpose

On November 12, 2025, the Tri-State Area School Study Council hosted "Empowering Schools Through People & Purpose" in the Student Union Ballroom at the University of Pittsburgh. The event brought together 42 school leaders, administrators, and educators for a full day of professional development focused on two of the most critical challenges facing districts today: recruitment and retention.

The day was structured into two distinct, high-impact sessions, providing attendees with both high-level strategies and practical, on-the-ground tools to build a stronger, more supportive educational community.

Morning Session: Attract, Hire, Retain, and Reward the Best People

The day began with the morning session, "Attract, Hire, Retain, and Reward the Best People," presented by Dr. Ghirmay Alazar, Visiting Assistant Professor in the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading.

Dr. Alazar guided participants through the interconnected strategies of building a positive school culture that not only attracts top talent but also ensures they feel valued and supported from day one. The presentation offered a framework for developing robust support systems and provided attendees with tangible tools, including an Induction Handbook Framework to help create a clear, consistent, and inspiring onboarding experience for new teachers, a Teacher Retention Playbook filled with proven strategies and actionable steps to keep the best educators engaged and thriving, and a Teacher Retention Dashboard designed to track key metrics and insights for strengthening staff satisfaction and organizational culture.



Dr. Alazar presenting

Afternoon Session: New Teacher Mentor Training

Following lunch, the focus shifted to a hands-on training session, "New Teacher Mentor Training," presented by **The Mentoring Partnership**. Facilitators **Kim Yetter**, Education Coordinator, and **Abby Seeley**, Director of Training and Program Development, delivered a dynamic and practical workshop on building and sustaining effective mentorship programs.

Yetter and Seeley shared the organization's proven model, diving deep into the essential qualities of an effective mentor, the specific roles a mentor must play, and the critical stages of the mentor-mentee relationship cycle. Participants engaged in discussions and activities designed to help them refine their own district's mentoring framework.

The session was exceptionally well-received, with attendees praising its immediate utility and engaging delivery.

Tri-State extends its sincere gratitude to Dr. Alazar, Ms. Yetter, and Ms. Seeley for sharing their expertise, and to all the dedicated leaders who participated in this important day of learning and collaboration.

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This was the most valuable professional development I've had on mentoring. The presenters were knowledgeable and engaging."

— Participant Feedback

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The afternoon session on mentorship was fantastic. Practical and immediately useful."

— Participant Feedback

Women's Law Project

Transgender Athletes Are Protected in Pennsylvania

Author: Elizabeth Lester-Abdalla

There has been a lot of coverage recently of two cases that the U.S. Supreme Court is hearing this term regarding transgender female athletes in female sports: *West Virginia v. B.P.J.* and *Little v. Hecox*.

In these cases, two federal circuits ruled in favor of transgender athletes challenging their states' respective bans on transgender girls and women competing in female sports. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals held in *B.P.J.* that West Virginia's ban on transgender girls in female sports violated plaintiff's rights under Title IX and explained that these bans cause not only emotional harm but also expose plaintiff to the risk of unfair competition and physical danger and would exclude plaintiff from competition. In other words, the court recognized that bans that exclude transgender girls from female sports cause the very harms that Title IX was intended to prevent. Similarly, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held in *Hecox* that Idaho's ban discriminates based on sex in violation of federal equal protection rights.

Unlike in *B.P.J.* and *Hecox*, Pennsylvania law does not ban transgender girls from competing in female sports. Instead, schools in Pennsylvania remain bound by the decision in *Doe v. Boyertown Area School District*, in which the Third Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the school district's policy of permitting students to use the bathroom or locker room that aligns with their gender identity. In doing so, the court instructed that "[w]hen transgender students face discrimination in schools, the risk to their wellbeing cannot be overstated—indeed, it can be life threatening" and that prohibiting students from using facilities aligned with their gender identity could itself be a Title IX violation. The Eastern District of Pennsylvania recently relied in part on *Doe in Magalengo v. Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association* when it rejected Title IX and equal protection claims brought by a cisgender high school athlete against the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association and two school districts after plaintiff competed against a transgender female athlete from another school in a high school cross-country race. In dismissing plaintiff's claims, the court reiterated *Doe's* holding that districts have a compelling interest in shielding transgender students from discrimination.

In addition to these federal protections, transgender students and athletes continue to be protected from discrimination under state law. First, our state's non-discrimination law, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA"), makes it clear that transgender individuals have the right not to be discriminated against based on their gender identity. See 43 P.S. § 954(l); 16 Pa. Code § 41.206; 16 Pa. Code § 41.204. If an education institution discriminates against students based on gender identity, they can be held liable for monetary damages under the PHRA. Second, denying transgender students access to athletic opportunities based on their gender identity also runs afoul of the Pennsylvania Constitution's Equal Rights Amendment, which requires that benefits and burdens not be conferred on the basis of sex.

Thus, while we await the Supreme Court's decisions in *B.P.J.* and *Hecox*, it is important that school districts in Pennsylvania continue to uphold their legal obligation, under state and federal law, to protect students from discrimination on the basis of gender identity, including in sports.



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Cooperative Purchasing: What to Know

By: Jocelyn Kramer, Esq.

Under Section 751 of the PA School Code, mandatory bidding is required if construction costs for a "Project", defined as construction, reconstruction, repairs, maintenance or work of any nature, including the introduction of plumbing, heating and ventilating, or lighting systems on any school building or upon any school property, or upon any building or portion of a building leased, exceed \$23,800, subject to inflation index. Generally, competitive bidding requires due public notice, the award of contracts to the "lowest responsible and responsive bidder" for each contract, and "multiple prime contracts" for general construction, mechanical, plumbing and electrical work.

The Commonwealth Procurement Code, 62 Pa C.S. § 1902, allows individual government entities to "piggyback" on cooperative/joint purchasing arrangements. As such, School Districts may purchase items under a cooperative purchasing agreement if (1) the contract was awarded by a public procurement unit; (2) the public procurement unit followed its legally-required procurement process; and (3) the item the School District is purchasing is included in the awarded bid, including any ancillary services.

COSTARS is the Commonwealth's Cooperative Purchasing Program. The Procurement Code authorizes the Pennsylvania Department of General Services ("DGS") to enter into cooperative purchasing contracts solely for the use of Pennsylvania local public procurement units (LPPUs) and Pennsylvania state-affiliated entities. To purchase off of COSTARS contracts, eligible Pennsylvania LPPUs and state-affiliated entities must register to be a COSTARS Member. Once an LPPU or state-affiliated entity is registered, and if eligible, it will receive an approval letter with its member number.

A bidder or contractor offering to provide materials and/or services is referred to as a "Supplier," and may also be referred to as a "vendor." Suppliers are required to register in the PA Supplier Portal to receive a six-digit vendor number as a prerequisite to bidding on statewide or COSTARS-exclusive contracts.

To become a COSTARS supplier, a vendor needs to respond to bidding opportunities published on the DGS COSTARS or PA eMarketplace websites.

A supplier that successfully responds to a contract solicitation may be awarded a contract. Vendors may only sell the products/provide the services listed in their bid and within the scope of the contract. Vendors cannot sell or provide similar products/services.

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Weapons in Schools: New Reporting Requirement for Schools

By: Nicole Williams, Esq.

On November 6, 2025, Governor Shapiro signed into law Senate Bill 246, now Act 44 of 2025, which requires school entities to notify parent/guardians and school staff within 24 hours if a weapon is discovered on school property, at a school-sponsored event or on school transportation. Previously, schools were required to report such incidents to law enforcement and PDE, but not to parents or employees. Now, Section 1303.2-A of the Pennsylvania School Code obligates school entities to notify parents/guardians and school employees of an incident involving the possession of a weapon that violates § 1317.2 of the School Code (Possession of weapons prohibited), 18 Pa.C.S. § 912 (Possession of weapon on school property), or any "locally established policies of the school entity's, nonpublic school's or private school's governing body relating to weapons." Notification to parents/guardians and school employees must occur within 24 hours of the incident, unless circumstances necessitate otherwise, using the method of communication that is most likely to reach the intended audience. The district's notification to parents/guardians shall not contain any identifiable information about that student in compliance with 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, except for the notification of the parent/guardian of the student found in possession of a weapon; however, a school employee who is directly responsible for a student who is found in possession of a weapon may be notified of the student's identity and may be given any records relating to the incident. The notification may be limited to the school employees and parents/guardians of the students enrolled in or attending the building where the incident occurred; however, if that building shares a campus with other school buildings, then the school is required to notify the school employees and parents/guardians of the students in the buildings on the shared campus as well). Finally, when an incident involving the possession of a weapon occurs at a school-sponsored activity or during transportation to or from that activity, the school must notify the school employees and parents/guardians of the students in attendance. The school is not required to notify if the incident is not directly related to



continued on next page.

Weapons in School, continued

the school-sponsored activity or the students and school employees in attendance.

It is important to note that this new reporting requirement does not limit the responsibility of the school to report to local law enforcement, supersede the responsibility to follow school procedures in a disaster response and emergency preparedness plan, or supersede a collective bargaining agreement between the school and an employee organization.

In response to this new requirement, we recommend that districts look at their local definitions of weapons and consider creating a separate category for locally defined weapons. School districts should also consider proactively making parents and guardians aware of the new reporting requirements in an effort to ward off concerns that there is a sudden increase in the number of weapons incidents in their schools.

Should you have any questions regarding this new requirement or best practices moving forward, we encourage you to reach out to your solicitor or contact the attorneys at WBK. ♦

WBK Happenings

- Attorney Elizabeth Sattler spoke at the NBI seminar Pennsylvania Collection Law: The Ultimate Guide on the topic of “How to Comply with the FCDPA, CFPB and State Law.” The seminar was held online on November 19, 2025.
- On January 31, 2026, Attorney Megan Turnbull will be presenting at the Local Government Academy’s Session on Municipal Finance Management and Ethical Leadership to be held at CCAC’s North Campus.
- Attorney Lynne Sherry will be presenting at the ACAPA (Attendance/Child Accounting Professional Association) 2026 legal symposium on the topic of attendance/truancy/residency. The conference is scheduled to take place at the Hotel Hershey on February 9 and 10, 2026.
- Attorney Turnbull and Sattler will be presenting for the Local Government Academy in March 2026 on the topic of Blight Remediation Reimagined.

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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.

Cooperative Purchasing, continued

Certain COSTARS-exclusive contracts enable a supplier to offer ancillary services in conjunction with the products it provides to a purchaser. Ancillary services include but are not limited to: training; asset-tagging; extended warranty; post-warranty support and maintenance; special delivery arrangements; and assembly, installation, and construction activities. Ancillary services being purchased must be offered in the COSTARS contract. All ancillary services must be purchased at the same time as the product. Prior to purchasing ancillary services, we strongly recommend consulting with your solicitor. As a general rule, the closer an activity comes to being a “construction project,” the less likely it is considered within the scope of COSTARS “ancillary services.” The fact that a supplier lists a service as an ancillary service, and includes a corresponding price, does not relieve the supplier or purchasing entity from compliance with all applicable law. Governmental entity purchasers and/or contractors could face penalties or legal consequences if it fails to meet all legal requirements, including but not limited to: Separations Act of 1913, Pennsylvania Prevailing Wage Act, and the School Code.

Finally, the existing COSTARS contract and its terms and conditions control. You may add “business related” terms (e.g., scope of work, timelines) to the contract through the purchase order, if the added terms do not contradict the existing COSTARS contract. Be cautious with purchase orders presented as complete contracts. You must always confirm the vendor has an active COSTARS contract and that they abide by the terms of that contract. The School District is entitled to the benefit of all of the terms and conditions in the existing COSTARS contract, including the maximum price. COSTARS Vendors can offer lower prices. Therefore, it is recommended that COSTARS Members contact 3-4 vendors for a quote, then return to those vendors to negotiate better pricing. The same considerations should be applied for other cooperative purchasing, such as PEPPM.

[COSTARS Member \(Purchaser\) FAQs](#)

[COSTARS Member Brochure](#) • [Guide to COSTARS](#)

[Contracts COSTARS Members’ Quote Kit](#)

Please do not hesitate to reach out to WBK with any questions regarding purchasing and cooperative purchasing. ♦

Green Building Alliance

Green Building Alliance Now Providing No Cost Green Professional Operations & Maintenance for Schools (GPRO for Schools) Training

Author: Destiny Knetzer, Director of Education & Events

Looking to improve the energy efficiency of your schools, lower your utility costs, and reduce illness and absenteeism caused by poor indoor air quality in your building and classroom spaces? Through a generous grant from The Grable Foundation, Green Building Alliance (GBA) is now offering **Green Building Professional (GPRO) Operations & Maintenance for Schools** training at no cost. With a focus on preventative maintenance, GPRO for Schools is specially designed to equip PreK-12 facility and custodial teams with practical, actionable, and affordable strategies for reducing energy and water use, and improving IAQ. GBA provides personalized guidance on improving HVAC systems, ventilation and air filtration; cleaning products; chemical use; pest management; products and finishes; and more.

GBA's expert staff have already provided training to representatives from school districts like Pittsburgh Public, Lower Merion, Crawford Central, Greater Latrobe, Twin Valley, and we can bring virtual or in person GPRO for Schools training to your facility and operations teams!

To learn more about this **free** program, reach out to Destiny Knetzer, GBA Director of Education & Events, at destinyk@gbapgh.org.



Recent Event Photos



Photos from the Empowering Schools Through People & Purpose workshop on November 12, 2025

Call for Nominations: Recognize Excellence in Education

There is still time to recognize the exceptional leaders, educators, and organizations making a lasting impact on our schools and communities. The **2026 Tri-State Award nominations will close on November 30**, and we don't want you to miss the opportunity to celebrate those who exemplify excellence in education.

These honors will be presented at our two cornerstone events: the **77th Annual School Board and Distinguished Educator Banquet** (March 26, 2026) and the **23rd Annual Dr. Jean E. Winsand Workshop for Women in School Leadership** (April 10, 2026).

D. Richard Wynn Distinguished School Board Award

Established in 1988-1989, this award honors Dr. D. Richard Wynn's (Tri-State Executive Secretary, 1974-1980) promotion of the "win-win" process, moving decision-making from conflict to compromise. It honors school organizations (boards and personnel) that demonstrate exemplary practices in addressing important issues and improving schooling for students over at least a two-year period.

Distinguished Educator Award

Established in 1981, this award acknowledges exceptional leadership by practicing administrators, retired educators, and university faculty who have proven a commitment to Tri-State's mission. Nominees should have made contributions to education by supporting Tri-State's goals, providing leadership to professional organizations, or contributing to educational research or publications.

Dr. Jean E. Winsand Distinguished Woman in Education Award

This award honors a woman who has made a significant positive impact and positive difference throughout her career. It is intended to recognize a woman who has demonstrated exemplary leadership and service to others through her activities and initiatives.

Dr. Jean E. Winsand Emerging Woman in Education Award

This award honors a woman who is at an early stage on the path of her leadership career. It is intended to recognize a woman who has already made a significant impact and effected positive change through her leadership activities and initiatives.

Please click or scan the QR codes below to submit your nomination by November 30.



Distinguished Board



Distinguished Educator



Emerging Woman



Distinguished Woman

The Forum is a publication of the Tri-State Area School Study Council. Comments and suggestions for future topics are welcomed. Tri-State can be contacted at tristate@pitt.edu

*The information in **The Forum** is for the general knowledge of the reader.
For more specific information, rely on the advice of your solicitor.*