

Floor Committee #5: Congregational Services—Schools

Subject: Lutheran schools

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 35-46; Lutheran Schools report
Report No. 01

Over the past biennium, WELS Lutheran schools have been richly blessed with historic levels of enrollment across early childhood, elementary, and high school levels. This surge, initially sparked by the pandemic, has largely sustained into the 2024–25 school year, demonstrating the ongoing demand for Christ-centered education. Despite this encouraging growth, the number of school sites has declined due to school closures and mergers, underscoring the importance of strategic planning and support.

One of the most pressing challenges continues to be the teacher and school leader shortage. Each year, nearly 300 teachers are needed to fill vacancies caused by retirements and increased enrollment. Additionally, one in seven schools are without a school leader. We are deeply thankful for the work of the Commission on Lutheran Schools and Martin Luther College in responding to this need. Through a multi-faceted approach—graduating new teachers, welcoming back previously trained WELS educators, and equipping provisionally called teachers from secular backgrounds—our schools are being staffed with capable, mission-driven leaders. In addition, the leadership training programs for principals and early childhood directors, along with ongoing professional development cohorts, are preparing the next generation of school leaders with excellence and care.

We also commend the thoughtful and collaborative work being done on the new theology curriculum project. This initiative reflects a strong commitment to doctrinal fidelity and age-appropriate spiritual instruction. The inclusion of educator feedback and phased development for early childhood, elementary, middle school, and high school ensure that the curriculum will meet the unique needs of every learning level.

Accreditation continues to be a vital measure of quality and accountability in our Lutheran schools. We commend the Commission on Lutheran Schools for continuing to encourage all WELS schools to pursue WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA) as a way to commit to continuous improvement and gospel-focused excellence. We are thankful for the accreditation team's willingness to accommodate different governance models while maintaining rigorous standards. WELSSA's recognition by Wisconsin's YoungStar system is a testament to the program's credibility and benefit to early childhood ministries.

A key outreach initiative, Telling the Next Generation, remains essential. With a significant percentage of students in our schools coming from unchurched families, Telling the Next

Generation provides practical strategies to connect these families to the gospel. Every school is encouraged to develop and implement a clear harvest strategy to reach the lost and make full use of this mission opportunity.

We offer heartfelt thanks to Ms. Cindi Holman for her 14 years of devoted service as national coordinator for early childhood ministries. Her tireless efforts have laid a strong foundation for early childhood education in WELS. As we welcome Ms. Jamie Walta to this role, we urge all early childhood ministry programs to take full advantage of the rich and growing set of resources now available to support and strengthen early childhood ministry.

With gratitude to God, we recognize the many ways he is blessing WELS schools and ask for continued prayers and support as we face challenges and seize opportunities to serve the next generation in faith and excellence.

Teacher Matt Bauer, chairman
Teacher Brian Humann, secretary