



School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin

State Government Affairs Report (spring 2014)

School is out – at least for the State Legislature. The final bell rang in early April for Wisconsin lawmakers, who have adjourned for the 2013-14 session. The Legislature won't reconvene until January 2015.

Legislators across the state have now shifted their focus from lawmaking to campaigning for the upcoming November elections. The School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin is also focused on the fall elections and will be working to build new relationships and strengthen current relationships with candidates running for state office.

However, before SNA-WI looks ahead, it's important to pause and reflect of the Association's legislative efforts over the last year and a half. While the legislative session presented a number of challenges – and some disappointments – it certainly ended on a high note with SNA-WI's successful Legislative Advocacy Day and introduction of the School Food Safety Bill.

Please find below the highlights of the 2013-14 legislative session for SNA-WI:

- **State Budget Bill and School Nutrition Funding:**

During the state budget process, which began in February 2013 and was completed five months later, the SNA-WI Government Affairs Team worked on two critical legislative goals: 1.) Prevent budget cuts to state reimbursement funding for the School Breakfast and Lunch Programs; and 2.) Provide Wisconsin's independent charter schools with access to state reimbursement funding for School Breakfast programs.

While SNA-WI's initiative to extend school breakfast reimbursements to independent charter schools was not added to the final version of the budget bill, the legislation also did not include any budget cuts to state School Breakfast or School Lunch funding – which was a major victory for SNA-WI. It was especially critical given the growing demand for these programs and past state funding reductions. While it's disappointing that funding was not increased, avoiding a funding cut was a step in the right direction.

- **School Food Safety Bill**

The other top priority for SNA-WI during the legislative session was to pursue a proposal to strengthen professional development for the state's school nutrition workforce and enhance school food safety in Wisconsin. As a result, the Association worked with key legislators to introduce the School Food Safety Bill.

The legislation, which was introduced as Assembly Bill 800 and Senate Bill 627, aimed to ensure that school nutrition programs that participate in the National School Lunch Program employ at least one staff member that holds a valid food protection certificate issued by the Department of Health Services. In addition to bringing greater credibility to school nutrition professionals and improving safety in school kitchens, the proposal would give Wisconsin a head start on meeting proposed federal standards for school nutrition workers.

While foodborne illness outbreaks in our schools are rare, the risk of an outbreak is very real. According to the CDC, 23,000 foodborne illnesses were caused by food served in U.S. schools between 1998 and 2007. These outbreaks put children at risk for serious illness, lead to lost classroom and learning time, and create potential liability costs for schools. With over 720,000 student meals served every school day in Wisconsin, the School Food Safety Bill provides an easy, yet proven approach to promoting the safe storage, preparation and serving of school meals.

Unfortunately, the legislative session ended before the SNA-WI Government Affairs Team was able to move the bill through the Legislature, but the Association plans to re-introduce the bill early in the 2015 session. While the delay is not ideal, SNA-WI will have a head start on the issue heading into next year, as a core group of legislators have already been identified as supporters of the initiative.

- **2014 Joint Legislative Advocacy Day**

The determination and enthusiasm of SNA-WI members was on full display in Madison on a chilly day in March when nutrition professionals from across the state descended on the State Capitol to meet with lawmakers on critical school nutrition policies and funding issues.

On March 19, after months of planning, SNA-WI's Joint Legislative Advocacy Day with the Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics became a reality. Over 100 members traveled to Madison to learn about the legislative process and advocate for effective school nutrition policies.

In addition to a comprehensive policy briefing, an overview of the legislative process and learning how to effectively communicate with legislators, the group heard from a number of high-level speakers – including Wisconsin First Lady Tonette Walker, influential legislators and nutrition experts from various state agencies.

Based on firsthand feedback, participating members truly enjoyed the experience. Not only were they able to learn how to have a positive impact on state school nutrition policies, they were able to put that knowledge to good use. In the afternoon, after the presentations were finished and lunch was served, members walked across the street to the State Capitol to meet one-on-one with their legislators.

The meetings had an immediate impact on lawmakers, and they laid the foundation for SNA-WI legislative success moving forward – and into the next legislative session and state budget cycle. In short, the 2014 Joint Legislative Advocacy Day was a tremendous success that allowed SNA-WI members to rub elbows with key decision-makers and put them in position to improve school nutrition programs in Wisconsin.

- **Workplace Wellness Bill** (signed into law)

Another bill supported and lobbied on by SNA-WI was Senate Bill 73, legislation to create a workplace wellness grant program for Wisconsin small businesses. The proposal's intent is to encourage small employers to invest in wellness programs to help improve the health of their employees.

The legislation, which received unanimous support in the Legislature, was signed into law by Gov. Scott Walker on March 13, 2014. Under the \$15 million grant program created by the new law, employers who establish an employee wellness program are eligible for a state grant equal to 30% of their overall costs of implementing the program.

Services that can be offered under eligible wellness programs include nutrition education, weight management and fitness plans. Wellness programs would also be required to provide health risk assessments for participating employees.

Although the legislation does not directly impact SNA-WI or its members, the Association supports the bill as an effective measure to promote healthy lifestyles among K-12 students. Numerous

studies have shown individuals who learn healthy lifestyle habits at the workplace (e.g., a more nutritious diet; increased physical activity; etc.) tend to bring those habits into the home, influencing their school-aged children.

- **Epi-Pen Legislation** (signed into law)

Although SNA-WI never took a position on this bill (SB 375), the Association watched it closely as it moved through the legislative process, as it could have an impact on how student allergic reactions are handled by school districts throughout the state. Under the new law, school districts are authorized to adopt a plan for the management of students who have life threatening allergies. If a school district adopts such a plan, which must be approved by a physician, the plan is required to include the necessary training to administer epinephrine (i.e., an epi-pen) on school grounds.

In addition, the law specifically permits a physician, an advanced practice nurse prescriber, or a physician assistant to prescribe epi-pens in the name of the school that has adopted a student allergy management plan. A school district that adopts a plan may also authorize a school nurse or other designated school personnel to do any of the following on school premises or at a school-sponsored activity:

- Provide an epi-pen to a pupil to self administer in accordance with a prescription specific to the student that is on file with the school nurse.
- Administer an epi-pen to a student in accordance with a prescription specific to the student that is on file with the school nurse.
- Administer an epi-pen to a student who is experiencing a severe allergic reaction, regardless of whether the student has a prescription.

The bill was signed in to law by Gov. Walker on April 8, 2014.

Should you have any questions on any of the above-mentioned legislative issues, please do not hesitate to contact the SNA-WI Government Affairs consultant, Michael Welsh, at mike@hovenconsulting.com.