

West Virginia School Board Association Winter Conference



February 13-14, 2026

Marriott Hotel at Waterfront Place
Morgantown, WV

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Friday, February 13, 2026

First General Session (4 Hours)

1:00 p.m. **Title:** Latest West Virginia Legislature and West Virginia Board of Education Actions Regarding County Boards of Education and County Board of Education Member(s) Actions Regarding Constitutional and Statutory Fiscal Responsibilities

Presenters: Michele L. Blatt, West Virginia Superintendent of Schools
Michele / Uriah Cummings, School Financial Operations Officer

Session Description: State Superintendent Blatt and Mr. Cummings will update members concerning developments relating to county boards of education fiscal responsibilities and accountability, including information concerning county boards of education operating under State Board intervention, consideration of laws relating to fiscal responsibility and accountability as well as prospective develops in this area.

Format: 50-minute presentation; 10 minutes for questions/comments.

2:00 p.m.

Title: “All Economic Development is Local”: Why County Boards of Education are Integral to West Virginia’s Economic Development Efforts

Presenter: Matt Herridge, Secretary of Commerce / West Virginia Department of Commerce

Session Description: Mr. Herridge will continue to address the role of county boards of education—as locally elected school district governors as established by the Legislature—to aid in shaping West Virginia’s economic development efforts. In this training segment, Mr. Herridge will discuss factors that affect economic development and expansion, including the significant percentage of West Virginia working-age adults who lack a high school diploma or High School Equivalency (HSE) and how county boards can partner with the state’s network of 21 CTE centers as well as West Virginia Community and Technical Colleges to engage persons who are on the “economic margins” in our state. Mr. Herridge will also discuss West Virginia’s “working-age underemployment rate” and how county boards, partnering with various county-level agencies, can contribute to employees’ child care, health, and transportation needs. West Virginia School Board Association President-Elect Torie Jackson, EdD (Ritchie), and WWSBA Immediate Past President Jared Billings (Mason) will provide a response to Secretary Herridge’s remarks. Dr. Jackson and Mr. Billings serve as co-chairs of the Association’s Committee on Economic Development.

Format: 45-minute presentation; 15 minutes for panelists’ and conference participants’ response to the secretary’s remarks.

3:00 p.m.

Break

3:15 p.m.

Title: The Evolving Classroom Makeup: Special Education Students

Presenter: Richard S. Boothby, Partner, Bowles Rice LLP

Session Description: There is anecdotal evidence and widespread perception among educators that the percentage of special education students in West Virginia’s traditional public schools—as compared to regular education students—is growing. As the number of school-age children enrolling in non-public schools (learning pods, microschoools, private schools, etc.) and public charter schools increases, can we expect the makeup of traditional public school classrooms to shift in terms of greater percentages of special needs students? If this is the case, how is this “shift” likely to affect student learning, achievement, and discipline? And, within these contexts, what are the policy implications for county boards of education?

Format: 50-minute presentation; 10 minutes for conference participants' questions or comments. (Pre-conference reading includes the Joint Committee on Government Finance/West Virginia Office of the Legislative Auditor Post Audit Division Initial Performance Audit of the WV Department of Education which provides relevant data and statistics. Reference: relating to the Conference topic.)

4:15 p.m.

Title: Discerning 'Final Say' When Interpreting the State's Open Governmental Proceedings Laws ('Sunshine Law') and the West Virginia Ethics Commission Committee on Open Governmental Meetings Advisory Opinions; Related Considerations

Presenter(s): West Virginia Ethics Commission Staff

Session Description: Primary presentation training topics include:

1. The operational aspects of the Ethics Commission in terms of county boards of education, with especial focus on EC Committee on Open Governmental Meetings Advisory Opinions and their interpretation and application.
2. Who—citizens, governmental entities or agencies, or others—is or may be responsible for "enforcement" of Ethics Commission Open Governmental Proceedings Opinions?
3. What is the legal implication or practical legal import of a situation or situations where Open Governmental Proceedings laws have been violated purportedly, as cited in official reports of governmental entities having jurisdictions over county boards of education? Do the reporting entities or agencies have the ability/abilities to initiate a remedy or remedies for the purported violation(s) cited?
4. Or, in answer to the above question, based on these reports, can citizens or others use these reports to seek remedy(ies) for purported violations of Open Governmental Proceedings?
5. If no remedy is sought by responsible persons, as cited in questions 2 and 3 and as outlined in agency reports, do governmental regulatory report findings serve as advisory, or may they, at some time, prove subject to redress by citizens or others?
6. Do Open Governmental Proceedings Laws have standing to be interpreted and applied broadly? What considerations may be taken into account, especially broad application or more refined application by lawyers and others?
7. What resources, including consultation(s) with county board legal counsel, can county boards utilize to ensure greater compliance with Open Governmental Proceedings laws?

8. In terms of application or compliance with EC Open Governmental Proceeding Opinions, does county board legal counsel advice provide county boards greater clarity about how to “apply” Opinions?

Format: 50-minute presentation; 10 minutes for conference participants’ questions or comments.

5:15 p.m. General Session Adjourns

Second General Session (1.50 Hours)

6:30 p.m. **Title: When are County Superintendent Recommendations Required or Not Required? Are There Times County boards Must Abide by a County Superintendent Recommendation?**

Presenter(s): Bowles Rice LLP Legal Team

Session Description: This training segment explores the question of whether county boards of education members are authorized to act only upon the county superintendent’s recommendation(s), given that the county superintendent acts as the CEO of the county board.

Additionally, these are among other considerations that will be explored:

1. **Board's ultimate authority:** The county board of education has the final say on employment and other decisions, acting upon the county superintendent's recommendations.
2. **Overriding a recommendation:** A board can choose to reject a superintendent's nomination for a position, as included in state law and West Virginia Board of Education Rule. What are the practical implications for a county board that chooses to reject a county superintendent personnel recommendation?
3. **Protocols that Enhance Decision-Making:** Given that most county board decision-making is based primarily on the county superintendent’s recommendation, and given the county superintendent’s CEO role with the county board, can the county board and county superintendent establish monitoring and oversight protocols that enhance county decision-making without either the board or the county superintendent engaging in improper role “degradation or abandonment”? **Format:** 50-minute presentation; 10 minutes for questions/comments.

7:30 p.m. General Session Adjourns

Saturday, February 14, 2026

Third General Session (2 Hours)

9:00 a.m. **Title: Update Relating to Population Demographics, Trends, Economic Development and Related Topics**

Presenter: John Deskins, PhD, Director, Bureau of business and Economic Research, Associate Professor of Economics, West Virginia University

Session Description: Dr. Deskins will revisit a WVSBA 2020 Winter Conference Training segment, discussing updated research as well as recent research the BBER has conducted relating to various matters concerning West Virginia public school enrollment trends. He is to present the latter to the West Virginia Legislature Jan. 14 as part of the required annual “Economic Outlook Presentation.”

Format: 50-minute presentation; 10 minutes for questions/comments.

10:00 a.m. **Title: General Discussion Concerning Application of Friday/Saturday Training Segments to County Board Service**

Presenter: Conference participants

Session Description: Conference participant-facilitated discussion relating to ways to implement ideas discussed in Friday training sessions, including Bowles Rice Education Law: Public K-12 Group review of the November Statewide Training regarding county board fiduciary responsibilities and follow-up documents the group is developing.

Format: 50-minute presentation; 10 minutes for questions/comments and declaration of Conference adjournment.

11:00 a.m. Conference Adjournment