

More female
leaders...

...with a gender
pay gap of \$22K

Gender variance
of support staff

Difficulties with
recruitment

Power dynamics
of the 08 license



Low people
in field

Demographics
not aligned

Very few
of color

From banking baskets to balancing school budgets

Lavesa Glover-Verhagen is one of Wisconsin's seven business managers of color. Turn to page 43 to learn more about the unconventional way she entered the profession and her thoughts on making the industry more welcoming.



BREAKING BARRIERS IN WISCONSIN SCHOOL BUSINESS

Turn to page 40 to learn more about investing in equity among our leaders and support staff by gender, race, and pay.

Breaking barriers in Wisconsin school business

Investing in equity among our leaders and support staff by gender, race and pay



Ryan Silvola
WASBO Marketing
& Communications Coordinator

Figure 1: Business managers by race & gender in 2023-24

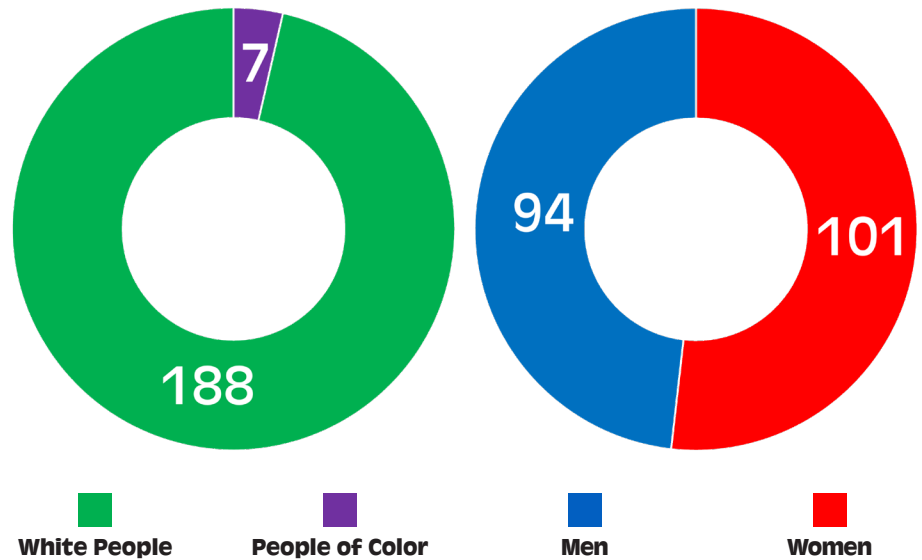


Figure 1 shows Wisconsin business managers by gender and race during the 2023-24 school year. Source: DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Definitions and Methodology Notes & Data References starting on P. 53.

While slightly more than half of all Wisconsin school business managers are women, female business managers, on average, earn about \$22,000 less than their male counterparts.

In terms of overall representation, 2023-24 was the first year where there were noticeably more women serving as business managers as opposed to men, with 51.8% of Wisconsin business managers being women. However, when considering race and ethnicity, the percentage of business managers of color versus their white counterparts has hardly changed at all in the last eight school years. Also, the racial demographics of school staff are

significantly less than the racial demographics of the state of Wisconsin.

After highlighting the wide race and gender gaps among Wisconsin school facility teams in the [December 2024 issue of Taking Care of Business](#), WASBO is now breaking down Wisconsin School Business offices by race and gender using data from the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) [Public All Staff Report](#).

I spoke to nine Wisconsin school

business managers across the state to better understand the awareness of gender compensation gaps among business managers, the gender balance among school business managers, the gender imbalance among school business office professionals, and the overall racial imbalance of all positions in the Wisconsin school business offices. Additionally, I wanted to understand how these gender and racial gaps affected those in the minority and what WASBO could do to address these gaps and structural imbalances.

Editor's Note: All data referenced in this article are drawn from Figures 9-12. The source is the DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Definitions and Methodology Notes & data references starting on P. 53.

The business managers interviewed included three women and one man of color — including Lavesa Glover-Verhagen (who is two or more races), Lynette Coy (who is Hispanic), Nimisha Patel (who is Asian), and George Chironis (who is two or more races) — along with three white women and two white men — including Audra Brooks, Holly Bur, Diane Pertzborn, Ross MacPherson, and Chad Trowbridge.

Business managers by race & gender

The amount of female business managers has increased by 32.9% in the last eight years — from 76 in 2016-17 to 101 in 2023-24 — while the amount of male business managers has decreased by about 13% — from 108 in 2016-17 to 94 in 2023-24. 2021-22 was the first year where there were more female than male business managers (99 women vs. 98 men).

In that same eight years, the total amount of people of color leading Wisconsin business offices has increased by five — from two in 2016-17 to seven in 2023-24 — and the overall amount of business managers in the state increased by 11 (from 184 in 2016-17 to 195 in 2023-24).

When comparing gender and race breakdowns of Wisconsin business managers to superintendents and principals, business managers have the highest percentage of women in the role and the lowest amount of people of color in the role for 2023-24. In 2023-24, the percentage of women serving in these roles was:

- Superintendents: 25.1% (105 out of 419)
- Business Managers: 51.8% (101 out of 195)
- Principals: 49.9% (903 out of 1,809)

Figure 2: Percent of people of color serving in various Wisconsin school administrative roles in 2023-24

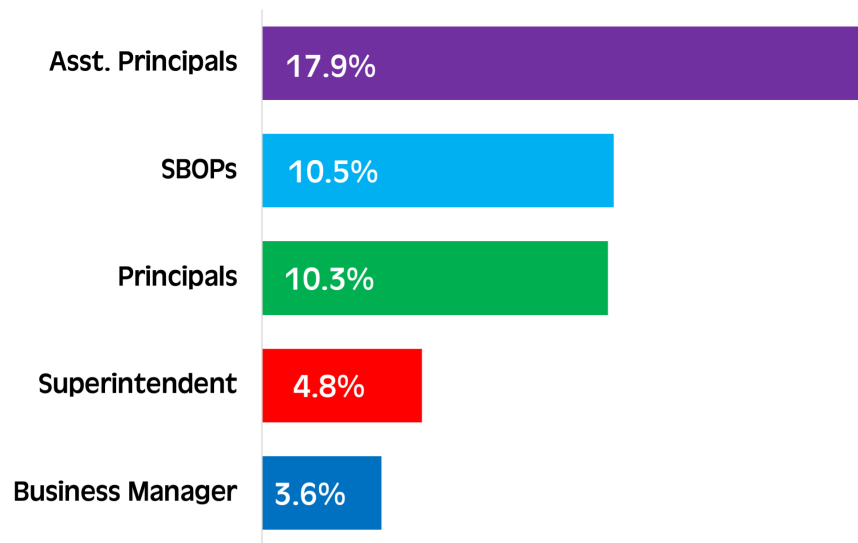
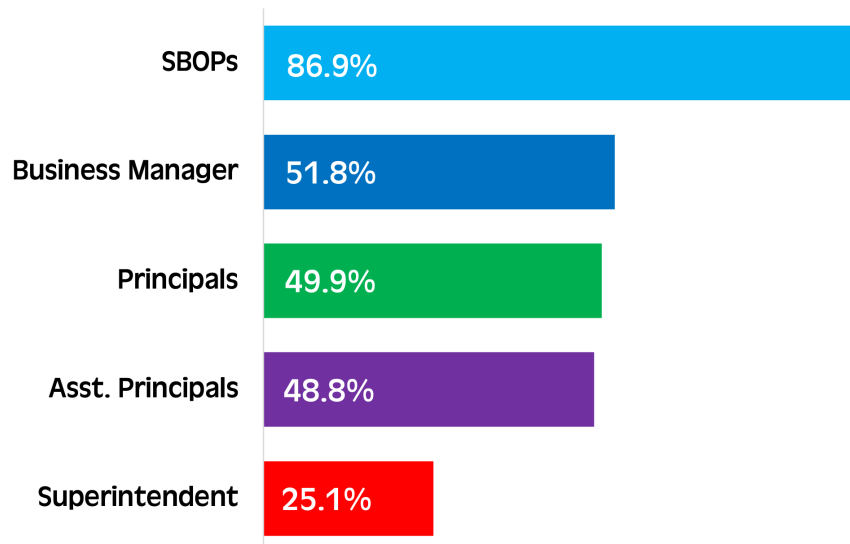


Figure 3: Percent of women serving in various Wisconsin school administrative roles in 2023-24



Figures 2 & 3 show the overall percentage of people of color and women serving as Wisconsin superintendents, business managers, school business office professionals, principals and assistant principals during the 2023-24 school year. Source: DPI's Public All Staff Report.

In 2023-24, the percentage of people of color serving in these roles was:

- Superintendents: 4.8% (20 out of 419)
- Business Managers: 3.6% (7 out of 195)
- Principals: 10.3% (187 out of 1,809)

According to [2024 population estimates from the US Census](#), the population of Wisconsin is about 80% white alone (not Hispanic or Latino), 7% Black, 1% Indigenous, 3% Asian, 2.3% two or more races, and about

Continued on P. 42

Breaking barriers in Wisconsin school business

Continued from P. 41

8% of residents have a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

In terms of overall recruitment, many in the profession believe that while the number of business manager positions has increased, the number of applicants per position has sharply declined. This can make it especially difficult to locate diverse candidates.

Mike Koltes, Director of Business Services for CESA 5, said that generally, most rural districts in his region

typically have 4-5 applicants over a 6-8 week period of posting. Often-times, most of the applicants aren't viable. If there is a hire, Koltes said it's almost always someone new to school finance.

"Over the past four years, this has been the trend," Koltes said. "The fact that CESA 5 — and other CESAs — is supporting between 40-50 districts at any one time is probably another indicator of the overall shortage. Ten years ago, CESAs were supporting very few districts, if any, across the state."

Hilary Cordova, Director of Business Services for CESA 9, said she has noticed the same trends in her region.

School business office professionals by race & gender

When it comes to school business office professionals (SBOP) in Wisconsin, 86.9% of all these positions were held by women as of 2023-24.

This women's majority has largely remained unchanged in the last eight

Continued on P. 46

Figure 4: Business managers by race & gender: 2016-17 to 2023-24

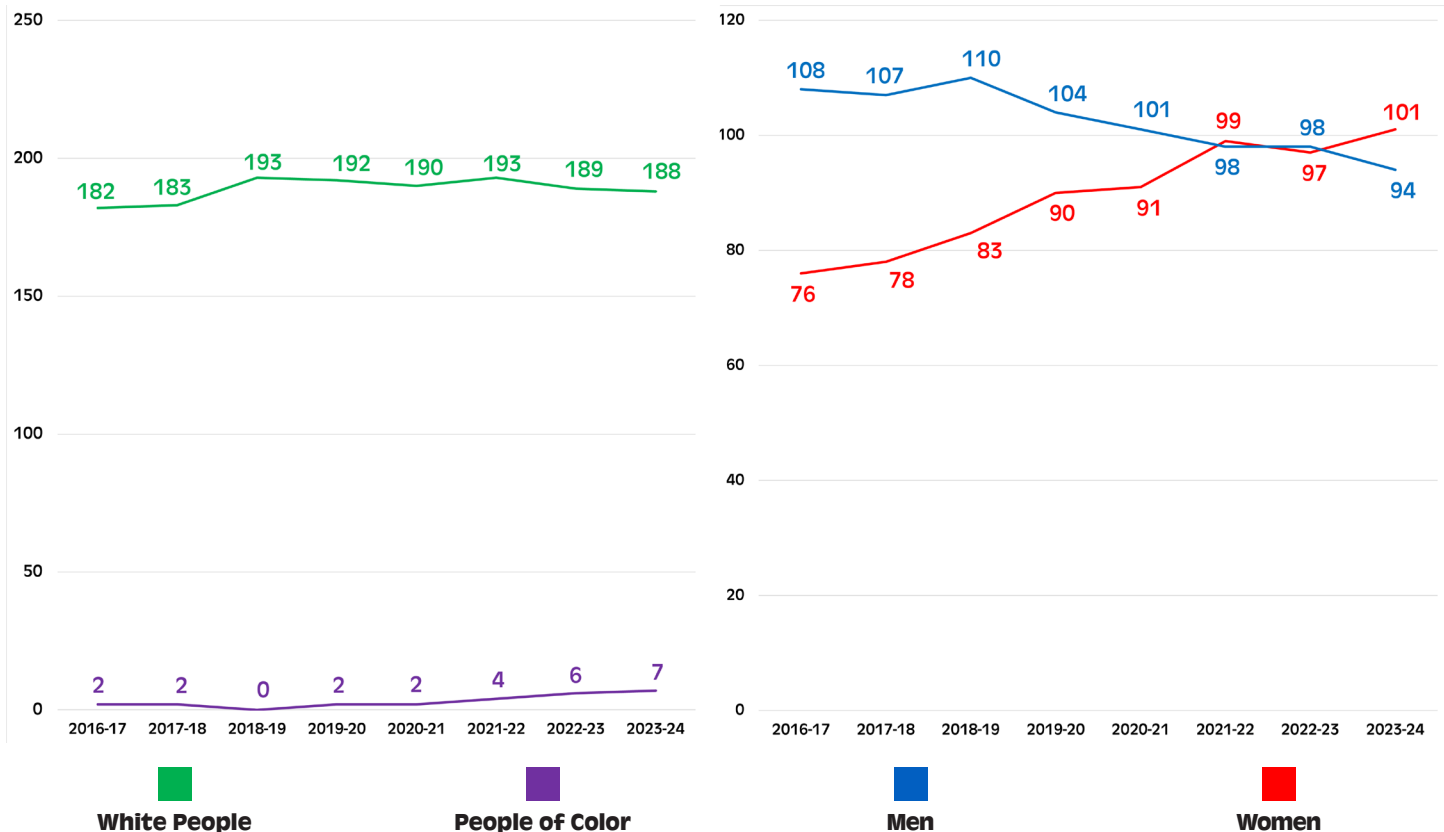


Figure 4 shows Wisconsin business managers by gender and race between the 2016-17 and 2023-24 school years. Source: DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Definitions and Methodology Notes & Data References starting on P. 53.

From banking baskets to balancing school budgets

From playing collegiate & professional basketball to crunching numbers in the school business office, Lavesa Glover-Verhagen's career path has been anything but normal

Long before she was the director of business services

at Seymour Community School District, Glover-Verhagen grew up in Miami, Florida. As a six-foot-three woman with a clear talent for basketball, her skills on the court were noticed when she led her high school to a runner-up finish in the 2005 Florida High School Athletic Association Class 2A championship.

Glover-Verhagen then played collegiately at Wisconsin-Green Bay (2005-09), where she was an All-Horizon League selection as a junior and senior. She led the UW-Green Bay Phoenix in scoring as a senior for a team that went undefeated in conference play, won the league title, and advanced to the NCAA Tournament. Glover-Verhagen finished with 1,054 career points.

When transitioning from Miami to Green Bay, Glover-Verhagen said there was a big culture shock from growing up in a very diverse environment to a more homogeneous, pre-

dominantly white college campus. She is a six-foot-three queer woman who is of two or more races, and it was in college that she first experienced how it felt to be an outsider.

Continued on P. 44



Ryan Silvola
WASBO Marketing &
Communications Coordinator



From banking baskets to balancing school budgets

Continued from P. 43

“As a woman who was competing at the highest level that we could compete at, I still faced judgments, misconceptions, and perceptions of people because of how I looked, which never was a problem growing up,” Glover-Verhagen said.

Years later, those same gendered and racial stereotypes can extend to school business offices. For example, Glover-Verhagen said women often are steered toward support positions, and men strive for leadership positions.

“The tracks for men and women often are different,” Glover-Verhagen said. “I think naturally, for women, there isn't

the same push, or at least that push is not in the same direction as it is for men.”

Glover-Verhagen thanks her wife and mentors for pushing her to be a leader in the field of school business.

From fast breaks to financial statements

After playing professionally in Australia, Poland, and Finland, Glover-Verhagen transitioned to coaching at numerous universities across the country.

She eventually moved back to Green Bay and got a job as an executive assistant for the teaching and learning department.

With support from her former boss Nancy Chartier, Glover-Verhagen discovered a newfound passion for budget development. Chartier then encouraged Glover-Verhagen to obtain a master's degree in organizational leadership and, eventually, her 08 license.

After obtaining her license, it was difficult for Glover-Verhagen to find a job. She credits former Sheboygan Falls district administrator Annalee Bennin (who now serves as district administrator for Franklin Public Schools) for giving Glover-Verhagen her first role as business manager.

“It was other women advocating for me to continue my own growth and pushing me to pursue the things that I love to do,” Glover-Verhagen said. “I didn't know that I was going to love spreadsheets. I didn't know that doing a pivot table was going to be one of my favorite things. I didn't find all of this out until someone opened that door for me.”

Applying for 15 entry-level business manager openings around the state and only landing one interview is one example of how the school business manager field often has felt exclusionary for her, especially as a person of color.

“In every job, I've worked at, I want to believe it's been off of merit completely, but you're surrounded by the added bonus of imposter syndrome,” Glover-Verhagen said. “Then when



Lavessa Glover-Verhagen (right) is all smiles with her wife Sally & her daughter Renlee.

you start the job, and colleagues say, 'you're a DEI hire,' or 'you're going to be good for the district.' Then they find out I'm gay, and then they say 'Oh, even better.' When you are hit with those microaggressions, you start to question why you were hired in the first place. Then you start questioning yourself and your abilities. So, has my identity affected my job prospects? I don't know. Has it affected me in places where I've worked? Absolutely."

As one of Wisconsin's seven business managers of color, Glover-Verhagen said she was surprised to see such few people of color serving in top school administrative roles in Wisconsin. Glover-Verhagen said there often can be a hard balance of promoting people of color to top administrative roles without them being seen as a token hire. Token hiring is a common expression for when an organization hires someone from an underrepresented group to appear diverse, rather than for their qualifications or expertise.

Being one of the few school administrators of color comes with its unique challenges. Glover-Verhagen said this includes feeling as though they have to be the voice of an entire community and taking a much more measured approach when dealing with complex or contentious issues to avoid stereotypes. This extra strain can lead to fatigue.

"One thing I learned through my experiences (as a woman of color) is that you'll hear things that will make you wonder if people hear what they're saying," Glover-Verhagen said. "Then you wonder if you can do this job and question if you'll be heard and respected even if you get to that top level. There's going to be barriers that you see every day. I'm fortunate. I don't experience that on the day-to-day, but I've been a part of places

"As an organization, WASBO is supportive and has helped me professionally grow and feel empowered in my role ... Overall, my experience has been positive. I do feel like the odd girl out sometimes, but I'm also a six-foot-three, half-black woman. I've felt like the odd girl out many times in my life."



Lavesa Glover-Verhagen
Director of Business Services
Seymour Community School District

where I've thought 'If that's really what you think of people, why would anybody want to do that job?'"

As a person who oversees human resources, finance, and facilities in her district, Glover-Verhagen said business managers across the state need to acknowledge the full scope of the role.

"As an organization, WASBO is supportive and has helped me professionally grow and feel empowered in my role. So, while we can talk about things that we feel we can improve, many good things are happening. There are great people in WASBO," Glover-Verhagen said. "There also are not-so-great people, but overall, my experience has been positive. I do feel like the odd girl out sometimes, but I'm also a six-foot-three, half-black woman. I've felt like the odd girl out many times in my life."

Due to the ever-changing profession, Glover-Verhagen encourages WASBO to adopt change management learning to better suit the needs of our business managers and to actively provide a voice to as many members as possible, so they feel empowered to speak their minds. She also thinks alternative pathways to licensure would be

beneficial for bringing in new business managers with accounting experience into the profession.

"We need to continue to bring fresh ideas. We need to acknowledge that our position as business managers is not like it was 30 years ago," Glover-Verhagen said. "We are no longer solely going to be looking at the spreadsheets and the numbers. We need to continue to develop strategies to address these nuances because there are going to be people who have differing ideas or different ways of doing the job. That should be OK, and it doesn't always feel like it's OK."

Overall, Glover-Verhagen said she loves her job and the impact she has. She knows that's why many business managers are in this profession. The goal, echoed by her fellow business managers, should be to have staff members be representative of their communities.

"We just need to continue to build and grow our community. That community, by nature, is exclusive," Glover-Verhagen said. So how do we remove those barriers and allow both women and anybody of color to join the community and have a voice in it?"

Breaking barriers in Wisconsin school business

Figure 5: Wisconsin SBOPs by race & gender in 2023-24

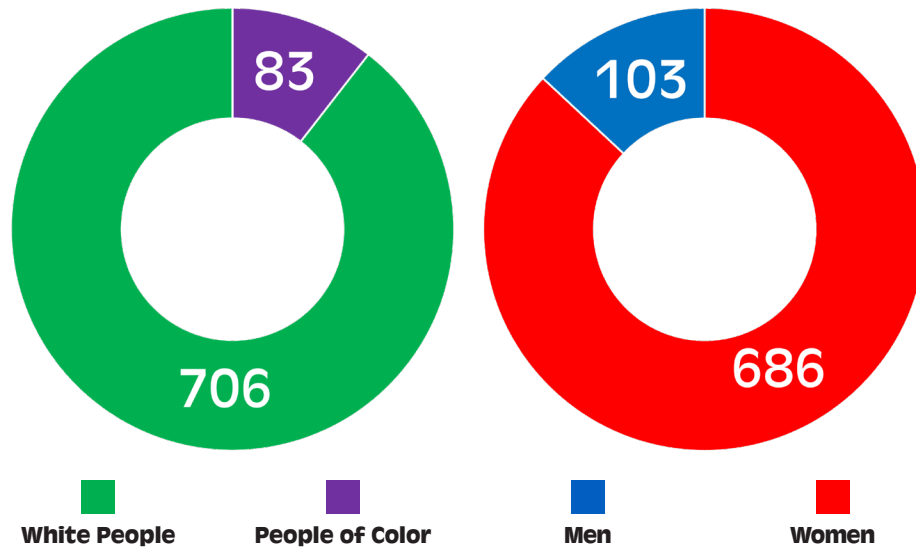


Figure 5 shows clear gender and race gaps among Wisconsin SBOPs in 2023-24. Source: DPI's Public All Staff Report. See more starting on P. 53.

Continued from P. 42

years, with women filling 88.5% of all SBOP roles in 2016-17.

In the last eight years, though the number of male SBOP employees has increased by 22 (from 81 in 2016-17 to 103 in 2023-24), the number of female SBOP employees has increased by 59 (627 in 2016-17 to 686 in 2023-24).

When comparing SBOP employees by race and gender to assistant principals across the state, Wisconsin has a much higher number of women serving as SBOPs and a significantly less amount of people of color serving

Figure 6: School business office professionals by race & gender: 2016-17 to 2023-24

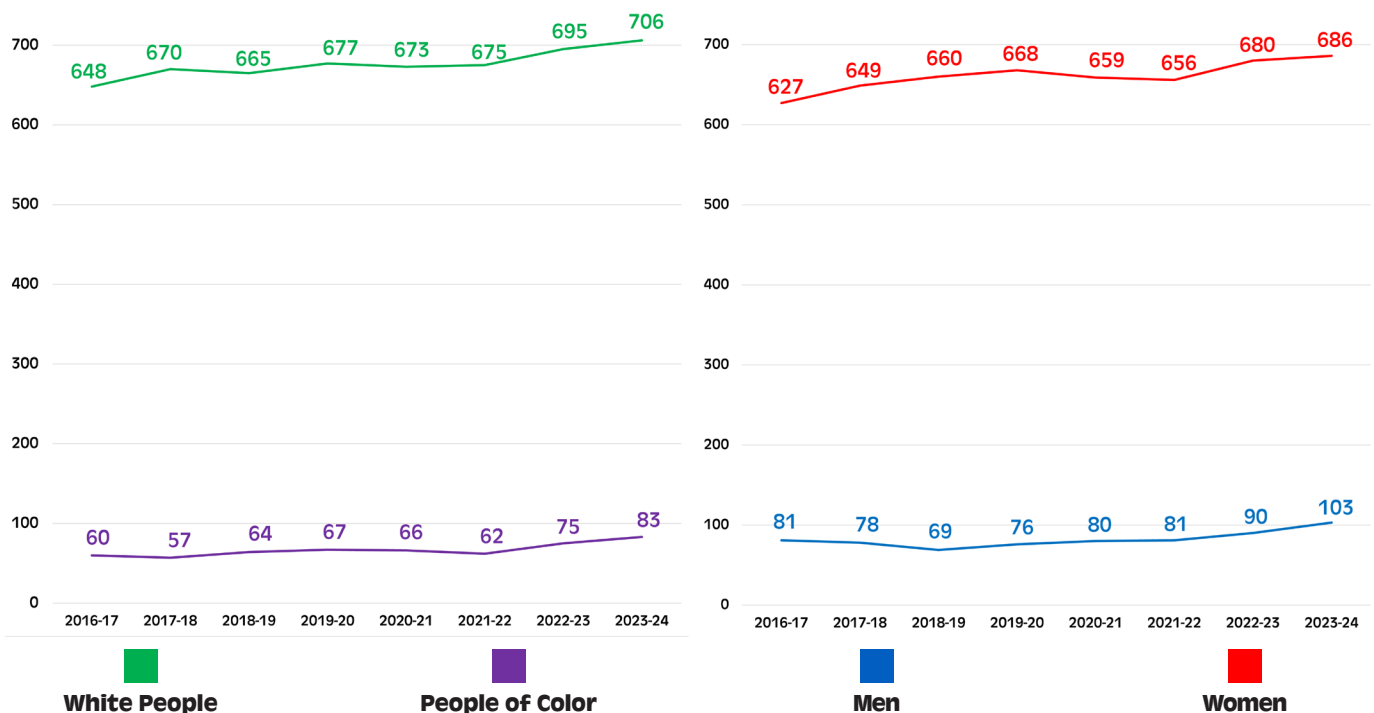


Figure 6 shows clear gender and race gaps among Wisconsin SBOPs between the 2016-17 and 2023-24 school years. Source: DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Definitions and Methodology Notes & Data References starting on P. 53.

as SBOPs. In 2023-24, the percentage of women serving in these roles was:

- Assistant Principals: 48.8% (444 out of 910)
- SBOPs: 86.9% (686 out of 789)

In 2023-24, the percentage of people of color serving in these roles was:

- Assistant Principals: 17.9% (163 out of 910)
- SBOPs: 10.5% (83 out of 789)

Limitations of the DPI's Public All Staff Report

According to a statement from the DPI regarding the Public All Staff Report, staff data is collected annually in the WISEstaff application.

The WISEstaff data collection is a point-in-time collection of all staff members in public schools, charter schools, Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), and State schools as of the 3rd Friday of September and includes assignments for the entire year at that point in time.

All data contained in the following report has been submitted to the Department of Public Instruction by the agencies responsible for hiring the staff. On submittal, these agencies certified the accuracy of the data.

Though the districts certify the accuracy of the data, mistakes may happen.

Lynette Coy, director of finance and facilities for the School District of River Falls, said she was surprised to notice that her administrative team was listed as all-white in a previous report. Coy is a Hispanic woman.

The DPI's current Public All Staff Report combines race and ethnicity into one category, so staff members

Figure 7: Business manager total compensation by gender in 2023-24

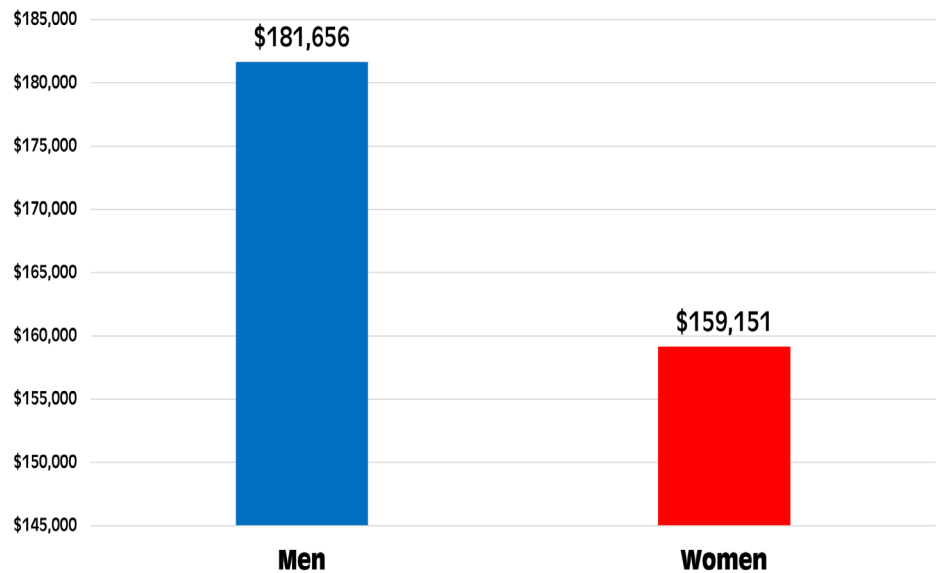


Figure 7 shows clear total compensation gaps between men and women 2023-24 school year. Source: DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Definitions and Methodology Notes & Data References starting on P. 53.

can either be listed as being White or Hispanic. This led to some confusion when her former colleague accidentally filled out the WISEstaff application incorrectly. Lavesa Glover-Verhagen, director of business services for Seymour Community School District, said her race also was incorrectly listed in a previous year's Public Staff Report. She identifies being as of two or more races.

Coy said mistakes may happen with this reporting. Additionally, staff are not required to fill out demographic forms.

However, she said districts are still required to fill in the information for each employee even if they didn't provide the information to the district. This can lead to incorrect information in these reports.

WASBO has done its best to present as accurate data as possible and has reviewed each record.

Women make 88 cents on the dollar

Across the state, women serving as business managers make about \$22,000 less than their male counterparts when comparing total compensation. Overall, this means female business managers make about 88 cents on the dollar statewide. In 2023-24, the average statewide compensation for male business managers is about \$181,000. For women in the same role, the average compensation is about \$159,000.

When comparing business manager salaries by district size using 2023-24 student enrollment data from the DPI, the pay gap varies. In districts with more than 4,000 students, there is very little of a gendered pay gap. On average, males make about \$208,000, and women make about \$207,000. However, the gap gets wider when student enrollment shrinks.

Continued on P. 48

Breaking barriers in Wisconsin school business

Continued from P. 47

In mid-sized districts (as defined in this article as having enrollment between 1,500 and 3,999 students), male business managers make about \$9,000 more than their female counterparts. The average male total compensation is \$183,000, while for women it's \$174,000. Most notably, in small districts that have less than 1,500 students, the gap is about \$20,000. Males' total compensation is about \$154,000. For women, it's about \$134,000.

Holly Burr, Executive Director of Finance for Appleton Area School District, said called the compensation gap “utterly disappointing.”

“Just when we think we have come so far in gender equality,” Burr said. “The

encouraging piece is that it appears that the larger districts are no longer showing this disparity. Hopefully, this is a trend that all districts are moving toward.”

Burr suspects the spread in the smaller districts is likely due to officials seeing the business office position as a bookkeeper, which can be undervalued due to gender roles. The SBOP position, both historically and currently, is female-dominated.

Coy (River Falls) said the compensation information “stings” every time she sees it.

“Our systems, attitudes, and biases that women aren't worth as much as men isn't just a made-up theory. It's in the data,” Coy said. “Although this

percentage is better than the national gender pay gap, it's still obvious that all Wisconsin school districts need to do better.”

Audra Brooks, Director of Business Services for Medford Area Public School District, wasn't surprised to see that gender pay gaps in Wisconsin school business offices follow the national trends of women being paid less than their male counterparts. However, she believes the gaps are lessening with time.

Glover-Verhagen (Seymour) said in a field where it seems that a growing number of Wisconsin business managers are getting closer to retirement or transitioning to another profession, it's up to women to advocate for themselves.

“I think there's been a shift now when it comes to compensation and worth that, naturally, (women) don't engage in,” Glover-Verhagen said. “We're very much appreciative and thankful for what is offered. I think more education on how to advocate for our worth would be valuable.”

Addressing the compensation gap starts with educating others about the importance of the business manager profession, Glover-Verhagen said, and then having services to help business managers negotiate contracts. This could come in the form of sessions at conferences that provide tips to business officials — such as what to look for in contracts or additives to consider putting in contracts — or having legal assistance when reviewing

Figure 8: Business manager total compensation by gender & district enrollment size in 2023-24

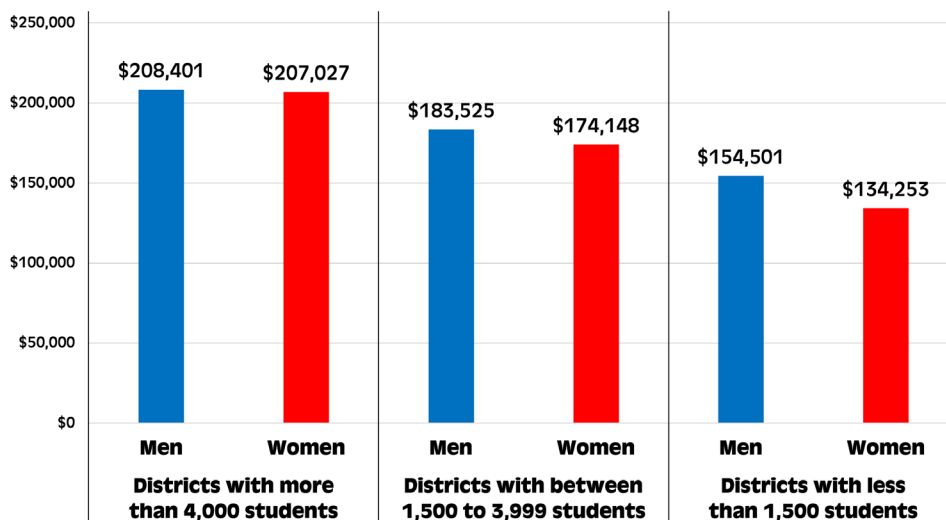


Figure 8 shows vastly different gender pay gaps among business managers in the 2023-24 school year when comparing districts by enrollment size. Sources: DPI's Public All Staff Report & 2023-24 student enrollment data. See more information in Definitions and Methodology Notes & Data References starting on P. 53.

contracts. She said business managers have the added benefit of leverage due to statewide school business office shortages.

Having women supporting each other also is important, Glover-Verhagen said. This is because in the field of school business, having a work-life balance can especially be difficult for women, who often take on caregiver roles within families. For example, Glover-Verhagen had to move districts from Sheboygan Falls to Seymour when the hour commute became too daunting after having a child.

Women's impact on the school business office

One of the reasons more women are entering the school business manager profession could be due to the rise of fully online graduate programs, retired business manager Diane Pertzborn speculates.

Since women often are family caregivers, Pertzborn said that having fully online programs has broadened the number of people who can obtain their 08 licenses. In the last 30 years, she's also seen an increase in the number of women serving as superintendents and school board members.

"When it was all male cigar-smoking school boards, a woman didn't have a chance in hell," Pertzborn said.

When Pertzborn started her career in the school business office back in the 1990s, there were only a few female superintendents across the state. Her first position was payroll coordinator for Rice Lake School District. Though Pertzborn said there were supportive male superintendents, she doubted many of the men in charge would be willing to hire her to lead a

"Our systems, attitudes and biases that women aren't worth as much as men isn't just a made up theory. It's in the data. Although this percentage is better than the national gender pay gap, it's still obvious that all Wisconsin school districts need to do better."



Lynette Coy
Director of Finance and Facilities
School District of River Falls

school business office.

"In my first job at Rice Lake School District, the business manager retired. There was no way they were going to hire a woman," Pertzborn said. "The only woman in a school leadership role was the one of the elementary school principals, but every other job was filled by a man."

Though there has been progress for women in school business, Pertzborn believes women continue to be boxed in by gendered stereotypes.

"The perception is that when a woman says something directly, she is questioned and thought of negatively. A man could say the same thing, and no one thinks twice about it," Pertzborn said. "If a woman came into the office and hardly spoke to anyone, didn't do much, and left for a few hours, people would be negatively gossiping about her. That's likely not the case for most men."

After finishing her graduate education to get her 08 license, Pertzborn moved down south (in Wisconsin), landing her first business manager role in Lodi.

One decade later, when Holly Burr

entered the profession back in 2007, the business manager profession was still male-dominated. Burr started her career serving as both the facility and business manager for a small school district. Back then, as few female business managers as there were, there were virtually no women serving as facilities directors.

Female facility directors in Wisconsin continue to face an uphill battle even today. Learn more about the fight to change perceptions of school facility leaders in the [December 2024 edition of Taking Care of Business](#).

A male-dominated profession wasn't just impacting women. Ross MacPherson, Director of Business Services for Milton School District, describes his first conference in 2005 as "a retirement party for the good old boys."

"I was a bit overwhelmed by how much it was a very tight-knit old guys group. I don't think it's like that anymore," MacPherson said. "I mean, I've been to several conferences since then in that same location, it's much more open. There's much more discussion, collaboration, and a lot more age differences in practitioners. So, I

Continued on P. 50

Breaking barriers in Wisconsin school business

Continued from P. 49

consider that a good thing.”

As a relative newcomer to the school business profession, Nimisha Patel, business manager for Marathon City School District, said that over the last few years, the gender balance of school business office professionals has felt equal but was surprised to see that the number of school business office professionals of color wasn't a better match to statewide demographics.

Barriers to becoming a business manager

While working as one of the few female business managers, Pertzborn also began teaching for the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's School Business Manager (SBM) program. She eventually served as coordinator for the UW-Whitewater's SBM program from 2014-2017.

During those three years, Pertzborn had three people of color start UW-Whitewater's SBM program. None of them completed the program. Pertzborn speculates this was due to numerous factors, including the broad scope, intensity, and cost of the program.

SBM graduate programs generally cost around \$20-30K. Students also could decide to enter other (possibly more lucrative) professions.

Lynette Coy (River Falls) said the cost of SBM programs can be a significant financial barrier for those in the field

who often are supporting families with their careers.

“I was paying for two college educations at the same time, for both my son and my own master's degree,” Coy said. “It's a reality for many. I think that districts could consider a financial investment in people that they see could grow into the position. So, if you have somebody in your office already, perhaps working in a support role that you can see has great potential and has the enthusiasm to perhaps invest in that person.”

In terms of barriers, Glover-Verhagen (Seymore) said she is thankful for having a full-ride basketball scholarship to obtain her Bachelor's degree, because she then didn't have as many financial barriers when she obtained her 08 license and additional degrees. She said this often isn't the case for those interested in joining the business manager profession, as the additional funding needed to secure a Master's degree on top of potential undergraduate loans can be daunting for many.

“If we don't have leaders who can help us realize our full potential and then drive us to the next iteration of what we could be, it's difficult for many to find the strength to advance in their careers,” Glover-Verhagen said.

Power dynamics of the 08 license

In addition to there being a gendered power dynamic, Burr said there often is a power dynamic between business managers who have and do not have an 08 license.

“I had more negative experiences being a person without an 08 license who was doing the same job as the people with an 08 license than I did as a woman in a male-dominated industry,” Burr said. “Now, mind you, that was 18 years ago. However, my experience as someone without a license was that some people didn't want to talk to me. It was not a friendly industry back then.”

Burr praises retired business manager Sue Schnorr, who she said was the first person to treat her “like a decent person.” She also praises Dave Hoh and Tim Prunty, who supported and encouraged her when she served as both a business and facility manager in her first role.

“It's a matter of finding your people, finding your support group, because everybody's still going through that if they don't find the right support in the system, even now,” Burr said.

Burr said this power dynamic can still cause barriers, even if those barriers are internal.

“It can lead to people having doubts like ‘I'm not a full-fledged business manager, because I don't have that. So, I really shouldn't be talking or saying or presenting or doing all this other stuff.’ I know it, and I lived it,” Burr said.

Burr eventually did obtain her 08 license. She said one of the biggest factors in getting her license was career development.

Ross MacPherson (Milton) said he

has seen more staff members get their 08 licenses for this reason.

“I know plenty of HR and buildings and grounds directors who have obtained their 08 licenses just because there's no other recognized certification, and that's a comprehensive way to get ahead,” MacPherson said.

Brooks (Medford) agrees with Burr that there's a stigma associated with not having a 08 license. She was hesitant to run for WASBO's Board of Directors due to her not having an 08 license.

Brooks is currently serving as a WASBO Board Director and is currently running to be WASBO's President alongside fellow director Jeremiah Johnson. **Learn more on P. 20.** She was originally going to enroll in a graduate program until her plans changed due to health reasons.

While Brooks doesn't think business managers necessarily need to have to have their 08 license, she said they need to have support. For her, that meant having Debby Brunett, Director for Baird Public Finance, out to her district to teach her new skills.

Brooks also is a Certified Administrator of School Finance and Operations (SFO). As someone working for a smaller district in a more rural part of the state, Brooks said many districts can't afford to hire a licensed business manager.

Gender variance in leaders versus support staff

Before Lynette Coy (River Falls) started her education career, she applied for a higher position while working at a bank. Though she had the same qualifications as her male counterpart,

“I had more negative experiences being a person without an 08 license who was doing the same job as the people with an 08 license than I did as a woman in a male-dominated industry. Now, mind you, that was 18 years ago. However, my experience as someone without a license was that some people didn't want to talk to me. It was not a friendly industry back then.”



Holly Burr

*Director of Business Services
Appleton Area School District*

she was overlooked.

“I was told that I was compared to a woman who had worked her way up to that position over 18 years,” Coy said. “She didn't come in with the same qualifications I had, but she worked her way up. So, there was almost this expectation that I needed to work my way up, whereas the male counterpart was given the position based on his schooling, which I also had.”

When considering that women hold 86.9% of all Wisconsin school business office professional (SBOP) positions, Coy believes the same “work your way up” logic could apply to women entering the school business office profession.

Based on the SBOP gender data and life experience, Coy said it seems as though men often don't choose to work in the support role. Burr (Appleton) echoes Coy's statement, saying that much of the education industry is still dominated by men.

“You look at business offices and teacher populations,” Burr said. “Paraprofessionals are nearly 100% female. Our teacher population is

about 70% female. However, school administration is the opposite. In a perfect world, all positions would be more equal, regardless of the position. I am very happy to see that business managers are balanced by gender. I'm assuming that's going to continue to progress. Overall, I wish we could get out of the stereotypical roles where the women have to be the secretaries, and the men have to be the maintenance guys. Why?”

Aligning staff & student demographics

Many of the school business officials interviewed for this article expressed the need for our staff demographics should better mirror that of our student demographics.

According to the DPI's [2023-24 student enrollment report](#), Wisconsin students are:

- 66.5% White
- 14% Hispanic
- 8.7% Black
- 5.3% Two or More Races
- 4% Asian
- 1% Indigenous

Continued on P. 52

Breaking barriers in Wisconsin school business

Continued from P. 51

Comparatively, in 2023-24, the percentage of people of color serving in these roles was:

- Superintendents: 4.8%
- Business Managers: 3.6%
- Principals: 10.3%
- Assistant Principals: 17.9%
- SBOPs: 10.5%

Holly Burr (Appleton) said districts across the state struggle to attract people of color to work in education. Burr said some of the reasons could be the salary amount and family ties.

“Education is a tough industry these days,” Burr said. “Though not everyone follows in their parent’s footsteps, a lot of kids do because it’s familiar. Until we get generations of educators of color, it can be difficult to grow that diversity.”

Like so many school districts across the state, her district’s student demographics don’t match that of the staff. She said it’s up to WASBO staff and our members to recruit new school business officials to the profession. “We need to be doing a better job recruiting at college, at the colleges, we’re just kind of waiting for people to fall into this industry, and then we support them,” Burr said. “I don’t know that we’re actively recruiting.”

Recruiting to the profession

When Pertzborn served as the coordinator for UW-Whitewater’s SBM graduate program, she noticed one of

the issues facing the school business manager profession is how unknown the profession — and by extension, SBM graduate programs — is across the state and nation.

“I would say that the lack of exposure to the program is going to lead to the lack of exposure to the license,” Pertzborn said. “If we want to bring more diversity, it will have to be through reaching out to more students across ethnicities.”

Burr (Appleton) also has noticed this. She recently had an accounting intern in her school district who never even thought about taking on a business manager job. Though the intern’s school has speakers who talk about public accounting, Burr said school finance isn’t mentioned.

When recruiting for any school staff position, Chad Trowbridge, Executive Director of Business Services & Finance for Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District, said it would be beneficial for districts to post career opportunities for all positions across the internet — not just in the education-related forums — to attract new people to the profession.

This would be beneficial for all roles, but especially for accountants who are looking to make the job to the school business office. He also expressed potential concerns that younger people generally seem to be changing jobs more frequently than older generations.

“We’re not accustomed to people

entering the education field and then exiting it,” Trowbridge said. “So, I think that is something we do have to be mindful of. Whether that means we focus more on growing our internal people, or if we hire somebody who’s not in education, that has to be a good experience for them to stay in education.”

Recruiting people of color to the profession

Rural school districts often have a difficult time recruiting applicants of color. Trowbridge in Chippewa Falls experiences this struggle.

As an adjunct professor also teaching SBM courses for the UW system, Trowbridge notes that statewide, there appears to be a de-emphasis on graduate credits following Act 10.

Audra Brooks (Medford) said in her rural district, she has never had a single person of color apply for a business office position. This is likely due to socio-economic factors. Even though there are few staff members of color in her district, Brooks said there has been an increase in the number of Hispanic students enrolling in her district. This has brought up numerous conversations about language barriers.

“Our principals and guidance counselors are honing in on trying to make everybody feel welcome and attending to whatever needs they have,” Brooks said.

George Chironis, Business Manager for Lake Geneva Schools, said having

a staff that's reflective of your community is important, especially when it comes to having multi-lingual staffers.

"Your community might have a population that, at times, might be difficult to communicate with if you don't have that support," Chironis said. "Making sure your staff is a reflection of your community is important so that everyone feels welcome."

In terms of business managers of color in our schools, having staff members who look like students benefits the students as well. Glover-Verhagen recalls visiting a middle school in her district where a young student of color gave her a strange look. The student then asked her what her role was with the district. After Glover-Verhagen told her about being a business manager, the student expressed both shock and excitement that a woman with a similar complexion as her had this kind of

leadership position.

"As I walked back to my office, I teared up," Glover-Verhagen said. "You don't realize that even just the way you look or the position that you hold could make such an impact on people, especially people who are a minority within that community."

Conclusion

Wisconsin's school budgets may be (mostly) balanced, but gender and race imbalances remain in school business offices.

Though a majority of business managers across the state are women, female business managers earn about \$22,000 less than their male counterparts. Gender stereotypes still affect those in support staff roles as well, with women filling the vast majority of SBOP roles. Many of the business managers interviewed felt this large

gap was due to the *perception* that women had to *work up to leadership positions*, while men were seen as the *natural leaders*.

When considering race, the racial demographics of Wisconsin school business office staff continue to vastly misalign with the racial demographics of our students.

Additionally, education for school business office professionals at all levels is expensive. For underrepresented groups, there often are even more barriers due to numerous socio-economic factors.

This article is meant to be the first step in investing in equity among Wisconsin's school business leaders and support staff by gender, race, and pay. Now that awareness has been raised, look for WASBO's initial investment strategies in upcoming issues of Taking Care of Business.

Definitions and Methodology Notes

- **DPI's Public All Staff Report:** Data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Public All Staff Report, collected annually in the WISEstaff application. The WISEstaff data collection is a point-in-time collection of all staff members in public schools, charter schools, Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), and State schools as of the Third Friday of September. It includes assignments for the entire year as known at that point in time. All data contained in the following reports have been submitted to the Department of Public Instruction by the agencies responsible for hiring the staff. On submittal, these agencies certified the accuracy of the data. The data lists the gender, race, and ethnicity of each school official.
- **Public School Employees Only:** WASBO eliminated all records of employees who did not work for the 421 public school districts in the state of Wisconsin in order to get an accurate representation of the data.
- **Business Manager:** Data referenced as "Business Manager" is a combination of the Assignment Position "08 - Business Manager" and "06 - Assistant District Administrator" in the [DPI's Public All Staff Report](#). Since each district's administrative team is set up differently, WASBO reviewed — to the best of our ability — each of the records listed under the Assignment Position "06 - Assistant District Administrator" from the school years 2023-24 to 2016-17 to ascertain if that position was responsible for

district finances. The appropriate "Assistant District Administrators" were then combined with the "Business Manager" list. To simplify the data, WASBO decided there could only be one "business manager" in each district. So we then kept the highest-ranking school business office staff member on the "Business Manager" list and reclassified any additional business office staff members as "School Business Office Professionals."

- **School Business Office Professionals:** "School Business Office Professionals" refers to any of the reclassified staff members from Assignment Position "08 - Business Manager" as well as staff members classified as Assignment Position "98 - Other Support Staff" with an Area Code of "9089 - Business Office Professional Staff." The DPI tasks districts to select area code 9089 when district staff are "not part of licensed, administrative, or instructional staff; does not have primary budget or fiscal responsibilities in the school district; includes bookkeepers, accountants, comptroller, budget analyst, etc." However, the Public Assignment Code List does not offer any description for the position Assignment Position "08 - Business Manager" and "06 - Assistant District Administrator" other than the fact that these positions must have a DPI license. This means the District Administrator likely has the primary budget or fiscal responsibilities in many districts. Due to the potential for some districts to have anywhere from

many to zero licensed staff members in the school business office, WASBO believes this is the most effective way to examine this data.

- **Gender & Women:** Until recently, the DPI's data only recognizes two genders, male and female. As this is the only available data, WASBO also will only recognize the male and female genders in this article.
- **Total Compensation:** WASBO defines "total compensation" as the sum of salary plus fringe benefits in each of the records listed in the DPI Public All Staff Report. After following the outlined procedures to obtain the Business Manager and School Business Office Professional lists, WASBO eliminated the handful of records that had no salary and fringe benefits listed in the report. Additionally, any business managers contracted to work less than 196 hours were eliminated. To categorize the different sizes of school districts, the DPI's [2023-24 student enrollment](#) data was used.
- **Defining People of Color and Hispanic:** [DPI's Public All Staff Report](#) classifies "Hispanic/Latino" as a race rather than an ethnicity. This differs from the U.S. Census Bureau, which defines Hispanic and Latino as an ethnicity rather than a race. Due to the DPI referring to "Hispanic/Latino" as a race, WASBO will include the Hispanic/Latino population with the data referring to "People of Color" when referring to data sourced from the DPI.

Data references for this article

Source: DPI Public All Staff Reports & Enrollment Data

Figure 9: Business office roles by gender: 2016-17 to 2023-24

School Year	Position	Women	Men	Total
2023-24	BM	101	94	195
2023-24	SBOP	686	103	789
2022-23	BM	97	98	195
2022-23	SBOP	680	90	770
2021-22	BM	99	98	197
2021-22	SBOP	656	81	737
2020-21	BM	91	101	192
2020-21	SBOPs	659	80	739
2019-20	BM	90	104	194
2019-20	SBOP	668	76	744
2018-19	BM	83	110	193
2018-19	SBOP	660	69	729
2017-18	BM	78	107	185
2017-18	SBOP	649	78	727
2016-17	BM	76	108	184
2016-17	SBOP	627	81	708

Figure 10: Business manager total compensation by gender, race and district enrollment size in 2023-24

Breakdown	Gender	Average Total Compensation
Statewide	Male	\$181,656
	Female	\$159,151
Districts with more than 4,000 students	Male	\$208,401
	Female	\$207,027
Districts between 1,500 & 3,999 students	Male	\$183,525
	Female	\$174,148
Districts with less than 1,500 students	Male	\$154,501
	Female	\$134,253

Figure 9 breaks down business managers (BM) and school business office professionals (SBOP) by gender & school year. Figure 10 shows vastly different gender pay gaps among Wisconsin Business Managers in the 2023-24 school year when comparing districts by enrollment size. Sources: DPI's Public All Staff Report & [2023-24 DPI student enrollment data](#). See more information in Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 54.

Figure 11: Breakdown of Wisconsin school administrative roles by gender & race in 2023-24

Role	Overall Total	Gender			Race							
		F	M	% F	A	H	B	I	2+	Total POC	W	% POC
Superintendents	419	105	314	25.1%	1	9	4	3	3	20	399	4.8%
Business Managers	195	101	94	51.8%	1	4	0	0	2	7	188	3.6%
SBOPs	789	686	103	86.9%	11	41	26	3	2	83	706	10.5%
Principals	1809	903	906	49.9%	12	112	50	7	6	187	1623	10.3%
Assistant Principals	910	444	466	48.8%	9	110	34	4	6	163	746	17.9%

Figure 11 breaks down Wisconsin superintendents, business managers, school business office professionals, principals and assistant principals by gender and race during the 2023-24 school year. See Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 54.

Figure 12: Business office roles by race: 2016-2017 to 2023-24

School Year	Position	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic /Latino	Indigenous People	Two or More Races	Total People of Color	White	Total
2023-24	BMs	1	0	4	0	2	7	188	195
2023-24	SBOPs	11	41	26	3	2	83	706	789
2022-23	BMs	1	0	4	0	1	6	189	195
2022-23	SBOPs	12	35	24	3	1	75	695	770
2021-22	BMs	1	0	2	0	1	4	193	197
2021-22	SBOPs	10	34	15	3	0	62	675	737
2020-21	BMs	0	0	1	0	1	2	190	192
2020-21	SBOPs	12	28	22	4	0	66	673	739
2019-20	BMs	0	0	1	1	0	2	192	194
2019-20	SBOPs	9	33	20	4	1	67	677	744
2018-19	BMs	0	0	0	0	0	0	193	193
2018-19	SBOPs	9	33	17	3	2	64	665	729
2017-18	BMs	0	1	1	0	0	2	183	185
2017-18	SBOPs	9	30	14	2	2	57	670	727
2016-17	BMs	0	1	1	0	0	2	182	184
2016-17	SBOPs	10	31	14	2	3	60	648	708

Figure 12 shows clear race gaps in the number of Wisconsin's business managers (BM) and school business office professionals (SBOP), according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 54.

TRANSPORTATION TIDBITS WEBINAR SERIES



This quarterly webinar series features expert panelists who delve into a wide range of topics, including operations, management, safety & compliance.

WASBO.COM/TIDBITS