

BALANCING THE SCALES

An opportunity to close gender & race gaps in Wisconsin school facilities

'Eye opening'

Eye-opening is how many facility leaders described data highlighting the vast gender & race gaps among Wisconsin facility supervisors and custodians. WASBO interviewed ten facility leaders to better understand the awareness of these gaps, how these gaps effect leaders who are in the minority, and what WASBO can do to lessen these gaps. Learn more on P. 46!

The image of a facility leader

Tracy Peterson knows people don't necessarily picture her when they think of a Buildings and Grounds Director. Despite facing biases, she finally landed the job of her dreams after a lot of work. Learn more on P. 49.



Balancing the scales

An opportunity to close gender & race gaps in Wisconsin school facilities



Ryan Silvola
WASBO Marketing
& Communications Coordinator

Figure 1: Facility supervisors by gender & race in 2023-24

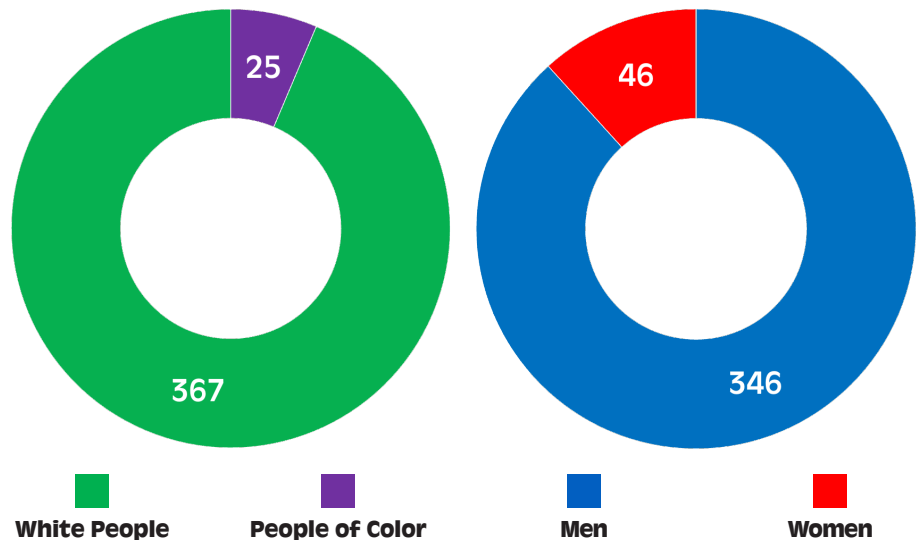


Figure 1 shows clear race and gender gaps among Wisconsin's facility supervisors during the 2023-24 school year, according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. See more information in Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 59.

Eye-opening is how many facility leaders described data highlighting the vast gender & race gaps among Wisconsin facility supervisors and custodians.

While analyzing the decline in the number of Wisconsin facility supervisors & custodians by year in the [August 2024 issue of Taking Care of Business](#), the data — taken from the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) [Public All Staff Report](#) — also highlighted wide gender and race gaps among Wisconsin school facility teams.

I spoke to ten school facility leaders — including six white women, three white men, and one white man with an ethnic background of Hispanic — to better understand the awareness of these gaps, how these gaps effect school facility leaders who are in the

minority, and what WASBO can do to lessen these gaps.

Based on these interviews, the gender and race gaps have led to the perpetuation of stereotypes and can have negative impacts district culture and employee moral for school facility leaders, especially those who are not white men.

Of the 25 people of color working as school facility supervisors in 2023-24, only two are current members and three are former WASBO members.

Due to there being so few school facility leaders of color in the state,

finding additional voices to speak on how race gaps effect them was challenging.

The DPI's staff data (summarized in Figures 5 & 6 on P. 58-59) shows pronounced gender and race gaps among custodians employed in Wisconsin school districts over the last eight school years.

In 2023-24, 27% of Wisconsin custodians are women and 17% of Wisconsin custodians are people of color. The gaps are much wider among facility supervisors, with about 88% male and 94% white.

Editor's Note: All data referenced in this article are drawn from Figures 5 & 6, which is from the DPI's Public All Staff Report. See Figures 5 & 6 as well as Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 58-59.

Figure 2: Facility supervisors by gender & race: 2016-17 to 2023-24

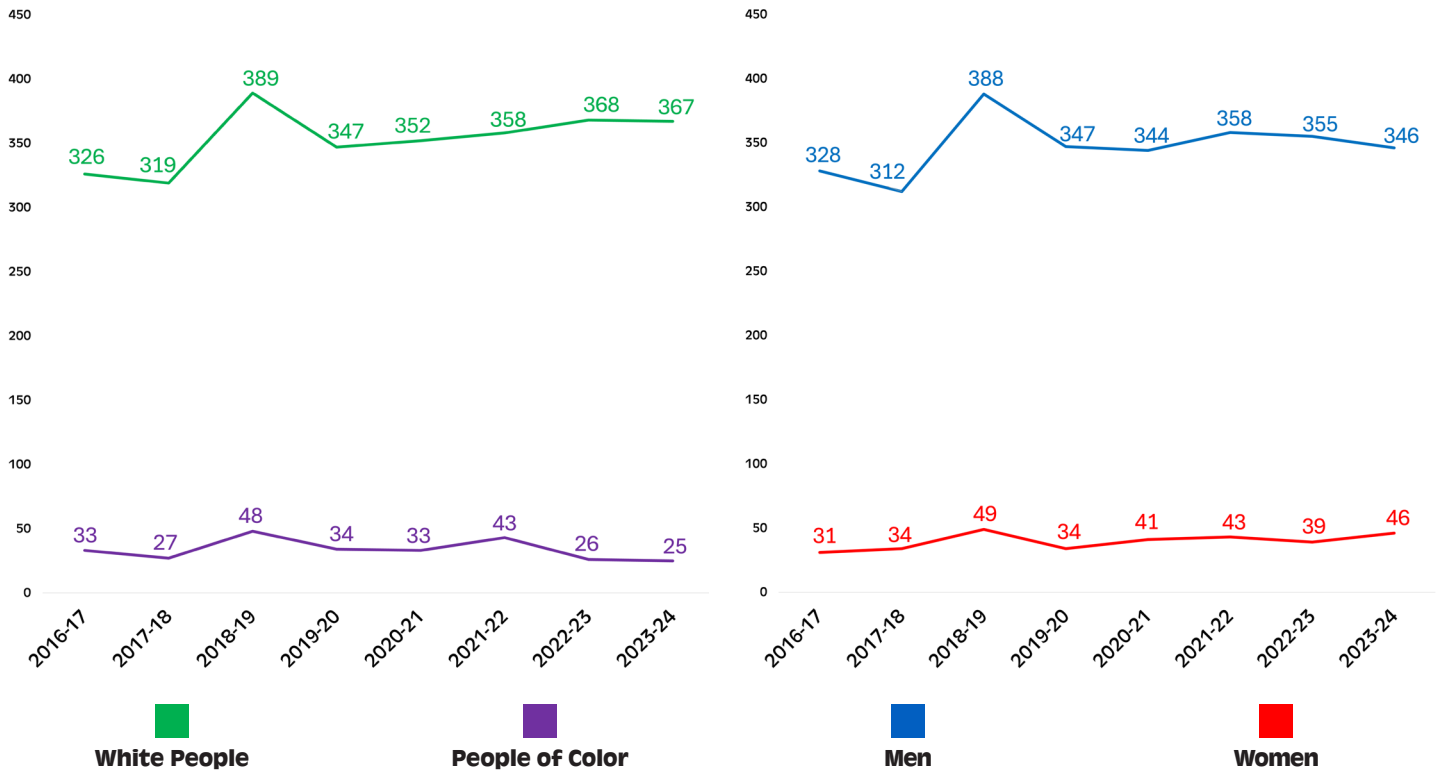


Figure 2 shows clear gender race and gaps among Wisconsin's facility supervisors between the 2016-17 and 2023-24 school years, according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. See more information in Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 59.

Gender and race gaps among Wisconsin school facility supervisors

About 12% of Wisconsin's total school facility supervisors are women and about 6% are people of color, according to 2023-24 data in DPI's [Public All Staff Report](#).

The wide racial and gender gaps among school facility supervisors have largely remained the same over the last eight school years.

To put the gender and race gaps into perspective, [according to 2023 US Census data](#), Wisconsin is almost evenly split between male and female.

Also, Wisconsin's overall population is almost 80% white. Among WASBO members, 49% of all current dis-

trict professional members are women. This would include all members directly employed by a school district.

When segmenting WASBO school facilities officials based on job title, about 12% of those members are women, which perfectly aligns with the [DPI's 2023-24 Public All Staff Report](#).

In the last eight school years, the highest number of women school facility supervisors was 49 (out of a total of 437 facility supervisors) in 2018-19, and the lowest was 31 (out of a total of 359 facility supervisors) in 2016-2017.

In 2023-24, there were 46 female school facility supervisors out of a total of 392 facility supervisors.

The number of people of color serving

as Wisconsin Facility Supervisors has mostly declined since 2018-2019.

This is true except from 2021-22, which saw an increase of 10 people of color from 2020-21. There were 33 people of color serving as facility supervisors (out of a total of 385 supervisors) in 2020-21. In 2021-22, there were 43 facility supervisors of color (out of 401 total supervisors).

There was then a sharp decrease the following school year. In 2022-23, there were 26 facility supervisors of color out of a total of 394 supervisors.

Most of this three-year fluctuation is largely due to the number of black men and women serving as facility supervisors at that time. The reason for this fluctuation among black men and women is unclear.

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Gender & race gaps among Wisconsin custodians

Wisconsin has seen a consistent increase in the number of people of color serving as custodians for the last seven years, rising about 38 percent from 2017-18 (945 custodians of color) to 2023-24 (1,304 custodians of color). Meanwhile, the number of women serving as custodians has fluctuated but has decreased slightly from 2,099 in 2016-17 to 2,063 in 2023-24, a downtick of 1.7%.

In terms of racial differences among custodians, women and people of color appear to be underrepresented

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Figure 3: Custodians by gender & race in 2023-24

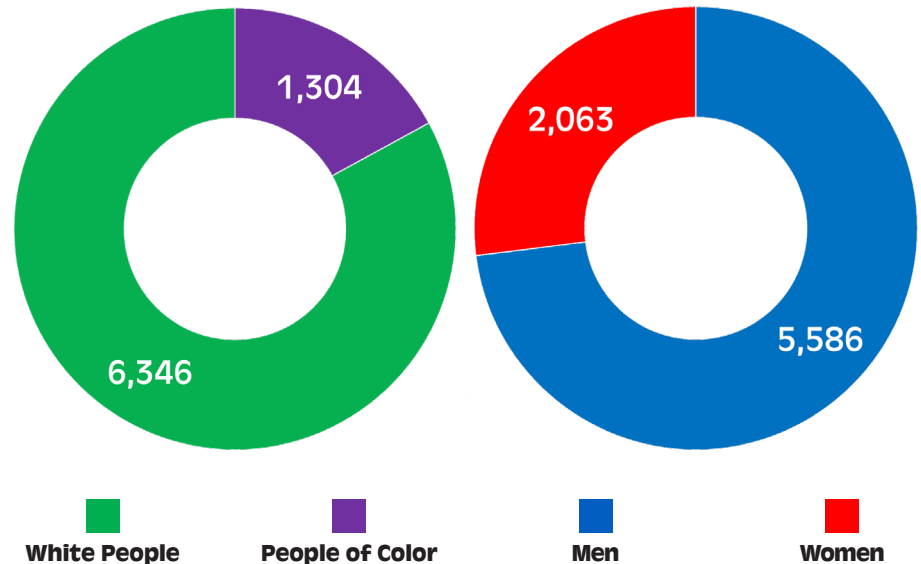


Figure 3 shows clear race and gender gaps among Wisconsin's custodians during the 2023-24 school year, according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. See more information in Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 59.

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

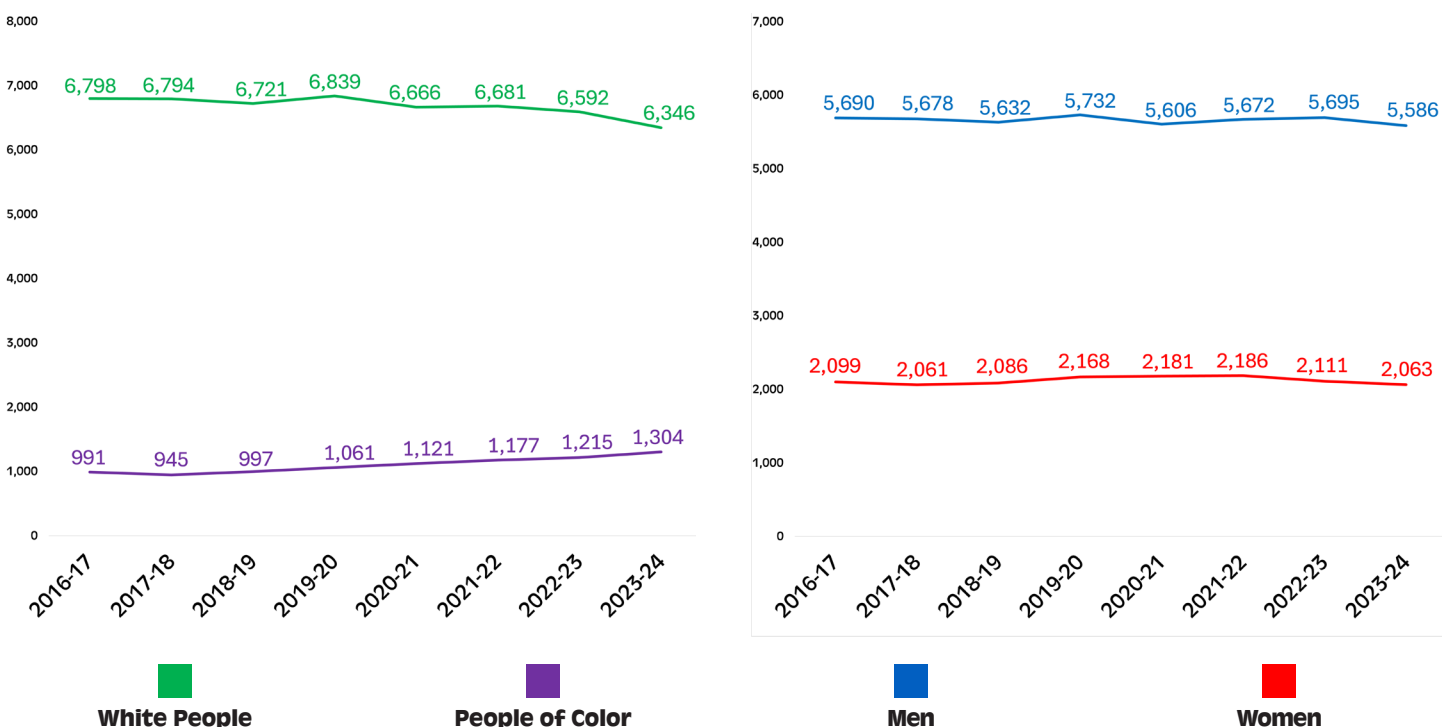


Figure 4 shows clear gender race and gaps among Wisconsin's custodians between the 2016-17 and 2023-24 school years, according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. See more information in Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 59.

The image of a facilities leader



Tracy Peterson knows people don't necessarily picture her when they think of a Buildings and Grounds Director

Ryan Silvola

WASBO Marketing & Communications Coordinator

Many people likely picture stereotypical older white male when thinking about a school facility director. As a woman, Tracy Peterson believes that's a stereotype that keeps many women from believing they can reach the facility supervisor level.

Peterson serves as Buildings and Grounds (B&G) Director for both Hartford Union High School District & Holy Hill Area School District.

"I think many women become complacent in their

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The image of a facilities leader

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positions, especially if they also have younger children. I'm the caretaker, so I have all the doctor's appointments," Peterson said. "I'm taking them to soccer practice. Being able to fulfill the role as a mother and as a leader is a challenge, but it is possible."

Peterson was recruited by Oconomowoc Area School District's B&G Director Greg Maroo in 2017. Before that, she was the facility maintenance coordinator for the YMCA.

After growing her leadership skills for three years in Oconomowoc, she was ready for the next level. She began applying for facility director-level positions in 2020.

It took three years of looking to land at Hartford Union High School. The reason? She believes it was a mixture

"I think many women become complacent in their positions, especially if they also have younger children. I'm the caretaker. I have all the doctor's appointments. I'm taking them to soccer practice. Being able to fulfill the role as a mother and as a leader is a challenge, but it is possible."



Tracy Peterson

*Buildings and Grounds Director
Hartford Union High School District
& Holy Hill Area School District*

of COVID chaos and the possibility of gender bias in the hiring process.

"I felt that I was overlooked because I am a woman," Peterson said. "I felt I had better qualifications and more experience, but both male and female superintendents and business directors overlooked me as a director. I feel

that I had to work twice as hard to get to where I am than what any man ever had to do."

A few months into successfully serving as the B&G Director for months at Hartford Union, she was asked to additionally oversee Holy Hill Area School District.

From left to right: Tracy Peterson (Buildings and Grounds Director for both Hartford Union High School District & Holy Hill Area School District) is pictured here with her Holy Hill Area School District Team: Craig Reese (Friess Lake Elementary Custodian), Tom Haas (Friess Lake Elementary Custodian), John Sickels (Holy Hill Area School District Maintenance) and Rachel Schroeder (Richfield Middle School Custodian).





Tracy Peterson (center) is pictured here with her Hartford Union High School crew, including (left to right) Alan Ojala (Lead Custodian), Tim Hegy (Maintenance Technician), Joe Dobrat (Custodian), Ethan Bidwell (Custodian), Jake Savana (Custodian), Mike Horst (Head Groundskeeper), Gary Dietenberger (Custodian), and Dan Retzlaff (Custodian).

“I’m very appreciative for our superintendent, Jeff Walters,” Peterson said. “He saw my potential as a leader.”

Despite overseeing facilities districts in two districts, other people’s biases still affect her role. Just weeks ago, Peterson and her female lead custodian met with a plumber and her general contractor. During the discussion about a bathroom renovation project, the plumber asked why no one from the district’s facility department was in attendance. Peterson describes the plumber as “looking like a deer in the headlights” with a “bright red face,” when he was informed the two women in front of him were key part of the district’s facilities department.

“He apologized to us for that comment, but contractors can be biased when they doubt my knowledge and skills,” Peterson said. “I’m obviously here, and I know my stuff.”

Though many women may be intimidated by the balance between being a

“I felt that I was overlooked because I am a woman. I felt I had better qualifications and more experience, but both male and female superintendents & business directors overlooked me as a director. I feel that I had to work twice as hard to get to where I am than what any man ever had to do.”

Tracy Peterson

mom and a B&G supervisor, Peterson said it’s possible if you have support at work or home.

However, Peterson knows many women don’t feel like they have support at home. She encourages those women to look for resources within their families, work organizations, and community.

“With strong women in these leadership roles, it’s going to open more doors for other women,” Peterson said. “When they see us out, they’ll know that you can be a mom and

a leader at the same time. A lot of people don’t think we have the capabilities, but we do. I’m hoping more school districts see us and take us more seriously. The more of us that get into these roles, the more normal it’s going to become.”

Peterson’s message to women looking to move up to a facilities supervisor role is “to never give up.”

“I had to work a lot harder and educate myself a lot more than most males in this role, but you can do it,” Peterson said.

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in Wisconsin. In 2023-24, about 27% of Wisconsin custodians were women and 17% of Wisconsin custodians were people of color (compared to the state as a whole, which has about 50% women and 20% people of color, [according to 2023 US Census data](#)).

Intentional strategies needed

Crissie Escobedo, custodial and operations supervisor for the Kenosha Unified School District, said the gender and race gaps in both facility supervisor & custodian roles is noticeable.

“This has been a point of discussion among my peers and highlights the need for intentional strategies to address these disparities,” Escobedo said.

As a woman, she said her identity certainly has influenced her career, both positively and negatively.

“While I have faced challenges and biases in advancing to a supervisory position in a predominantly male environment, my identity has also reinforced my commitment to advocating for greater diversity and inclusion within our field,” Escobedo said.

To close these gender and race gaps in Wisconsin school facilities, Escobedo said districts, associations, and stakeholders must implement policies and mentorship programs while providing professional development that “actively promotes diversity and inclusion in

hiring and advancement for underrepresented groups.”

“Larger districts may have more resources and initiatives to address diversity issues, but gaps are present in both large and small districts,” Escobedo said. “Smaller districts might face more pronounced challenges due to fewer opportunities and less focus on diversity policies.”

At the School District of Greenfield, **Gage Johnson**, facility operations manager and safety coordinator, called the data eye-opening. Johnson has strived to make his facility staff as diverse as possible while hiring the most skilled candidates. Without that diversity, Johnson said districts are missing out on different perspectives.

While at the 2024 Midwest Facility Masters Conference, WASBO conducted a focus group of women leaders in Wisconsin school facilities. Each of the women said they continue to face biases even when in leadership positions, but they're hopeful things will change in the future.

Olivia Gill, custodial operations supervisor for Pewaukee School District, started her career as a groundskeeper. Her prior knowledge of facilities and operations coming into the position — such as knowing how to repair a small engine — was shocking to many of her male coworkers.

Gill is the first woman to serve as operations supervisor in her district. She is the third person in that role, and she greatly enjoys being a voice for the

women in her department who may not always feel heard or respected by their male counterparts.

Carol Dufek, manager of buildings and grounds (B&G) for the School District of South Milwaukee, came to the school district after serving as a facility director (and other roles) for Marquette University for 30 years. When she started in South Milwaukee five years ago, she was shocked to learn her district only had one female head custodian at that time.

“It took time to build trust with a lot of the guys on my team, because they weren't sure if I was the best candidate,” Dufek said. “I had to prove myself to them.”

Becky Heins, maintenance director for Platteville School District, said she grew up with three-quarters of her staff in Platteville. Even though she's been their boss for more than 25 years, many of her male employees still struggle with her gender. She finds it frustrating that some of her male employees will overlook Heins — even though she is their boss and has the answers they need — and will instead ask a male coworker.

Dufek said it's difficult for women — who might have the ambition to become a supervisor — to move up without support from top school leaders.

“I think the respect for women isn't always there,” Dufek said. “I was very lucky. I had a very supportive building and grounds manager when I came in as operations supervisor.”

When her boss left, she was the only woman interviewed for the director position. Dufek said one of her male coworkers also interviewing for the position was baffled when the district selected her over him.

“My head of maintenance was on the interview crew and said there wasn’t any doubt in anyone’s mind that I was the best person for the job,” Dufek said. “I felt that support then, but not everyone is as lucky.”

Jake Hernandez, director of buildings, grounds & safety for East Troy Community School District, says a person’s history, gender, race, childhood (and adult) support systems, socioeconomic class, and additional environmental factors can influence their career ambitions.

Hernandez identifies as white with an ethnic background of Hispanic. Hernandez credits much of his career ambitions to his hard-working parents, acknowledging that not everyone has the same story as him.

Growing up in Texas, Hernandez got a firsthand look at why some minority populations might not feel like they’re in a position to ask for more resources.

Years ago, he remembers seeing undocumented workers living in the partially finished homes they were building. He would hear the construction work starting early in the day and going late into the evening.

A few weeks later, the construction campus would be empty and silent. That is, until those newly deported migrants would make their way back to Texas to work.

“I saw people being taken advantage of,” Hernandez said. “A migrant per-

“There often is a lack of role models or mentors for women and minorities in these positions, which can make it harder for individuals to envision and pursue careers in this field.”



Crissie Escobedo
Custodial Supervisor
Kenosha Unified
School District

son comes here, and they have a very high level of agreeableness. You could tell them that you’re going to pay them \$5 an hour. They’re going to say yes because they just want to work.”

On payday, Hernandez said there would be incredibly long lines at gas stations, where many of the migrants would be using the Western Union machines to send money back to Mexico.

Now, Hernandez often observes a sense of entitlement among younger generations given the additional resources and opportunities that exist today. He also acknowledges that workplace biases and discrimination can still exist in the workplace.

While Hernandez never has experienced a lack of opportunity, from a young age, he did have to learn how to navigate life while inheriting white skin from his German and Irish mother and a Hispanic heritage from his Mexican father.

He has faced some bias due to his heritage, but he said it has been inconsequential to his work and life.

“I’m guessing people who are white and have white last names maybe

don’t experience people raising an eyebrow at non-white names,” Hernandez said.

He encourages those who are a part of minority groups to not let others take away their power. It also helps to not give in to fear, listen to other’s perspectives, and educate those who may be ignorant.

“You take what you can from the people that you value, and you give no value or power to the people who are bringing negativity into your life,” Hernandez said.

Having dealt with a few instances of ignorance in his career, Hernandez’s strategy has been to take the time to educate and change people’s perceived notions of him.

“When I lived in New Berlin, I was followed a couple of times by the police. It happened a few times until they got to know who I was,” Hernandez said. “It’s a reality that all different races of people are bigoted for all kinds of reasons. It’s ugly. It’s unnecessary. We’re all just trying to exist.”

Overall, Hernandez believes in equality of opportunity.

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“In my opinion, it’s just a matter of picking up the tools and having the drive to be a better you,” Hernandez said. “Whether that means going from assistant custodian to head custodian or facility director, have a plan. Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.”

A sprinkle of women

Tracy Peterson, B&G director for both Hartford Union High School District & Holy Hill Area School District, and Dufek (South Milwaukee) said there were only “a sprinkle of women” when they attended their first Midwest Facility Masters Conference. In 2024, although the dial hasn’t been moved that much, some progress has been made.

In Mukwonago, **Andy Wegner**, who serves as director of operations, B&G, and safety for the district, said attendees of WASBO facilities-related conferences are overwhelmingly male, and only three to four women attend WASBO’s unofficial (but very large) Milwaukee Metropolitan Regional Facilities Group meetings.

Anecdotally, when women business managers and WASBO staffers speak about WASBO, they often talk about how WASBO formerly was a “good old boy’s club.”

Over the last 20 or so years, WASBO’s business officials have welcomed more women. When segmenting active WASBO members by title, 67% of District Professional members working in the business office are women. However, when segmenting

WASBO school facilities officials based on job title, only about 12% of WASBO’s active District Professional school facility members are women. For the women interviewed at the focus group, facilities conferences can still feel exclusionary for women.

At the 2024 Midwest Facility Masters Conference last month, Dufek (South Milwaukee) described walking the exhibit hall with her male predecessor.

“We’d be talking, and vendors would go right to him and bypass me altogether,” Dufek said. “And so, it’s still (feels exclusionary) in the vendor area.”

Peterson took it one step further and did an experiment in the vendor area with one of her male lead custodians. Many vendors assumed her male employee was in charge.

“Many women might feel an intimidation factor when walking into a room of older men,” Peterson said.

Most, if not all, of the women interviewed also have been met with inappropriate behavior — such as offensive jokes, racist and sexist remarks, and more — at dinners with vendors and male colleagues. Since then, the women interviewed have declined to participate in such activities.

Since starting his facilities career and joining WASBO 24 years ago, **Pat Finnemore** remembers attending his first WASBO Conference. The Kenosha Unified School District director of facilities remembers walking into a room of old white men who, he

said, seemed to judge him for being a young white man in his 30s.

“Now, I think WASBO is a much younger crowd with a lot more women than we once had, but the facilities world is progressing slower,” Finnemore said. “I do love the fact that we’ve been able to find some great women leaders.”

In his district, Finnemore said this includes Crissie Escobedo and Laurie Krueger, custodial supervisor and one of WASBO’s first female facility supervisors.

Escobedo encourages WASBO to advocate for the implementation of inclusive hiring practices, provide scholarships and financial assistance for minority and female candidates, and invest in leadership training programs.

“Establishing diversity task forces to continuously monitor and address these disparities would also be beneficial,” Escobedo said.

Facility leaders manage school finance, too!

Dufek (South Milwaukee) said she benefited from the learning offered as a part of WASBO’s Facilities Manager Core Certification. At her level, though, she needs to understand school finances to be more effective and efficient in her role.

When her predecessor spoke to her about the role, he told her that mechanical knowledge is important. However, her role is more focused on overall facilities management. There-

fore, he encouraged Dufek to learn more about school finances.

Women should follow this advice when considering moving up to facilities supervisory positions, Dufek said, telling a story about a woman in her department who has been intimidated into thinking she doesn't know enough to advance in her career.

"The young lady I want to bring up told me that she doesn't know about 'in-depth plumbing,'" Dufek said of her South Milwaukee facility crew member. "She said 'I can change a gasket. I can turn off the water. I can fix a leak, but the guys make it sound like it's so much more.' I can't speak for everyone, but to get to be an operations supervisor or a buildings and grounds manager in my area, it's that business side of things. It's being able to get before the board and sell my department, tell our story, and not get budget cuts."

Like custodians, the work and responsibilities of different district facilities supervisors can vary depending on the district.

Connie Kesler, operations supervisor, works for Suring Public School District, a district with one school and 300 students. Along with facility budgeting, Kesler also does maintenance, roof inspections, and more. This is all with a staff of one day custodian, two full-time night custodians, and a part-time custodian.

Unfortunately, due to tight budgets, Kesler said her district previously decided to defer facility maintenance. With one older building in the district, the costs of deferring maintenance have now increased. Maintenance needs that have become urgent include needing to replace two water

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Tracy Peterson

Buildings and Grounds Director

*Hartford Union High School District
& Holy Hill Area School District*

heaters, a freezer, a cooler, a chiller, and possibly new ventilation systems. Given shrinking budgets and a desire to cut costs, convincing stakeholders of what she said are necessities has been an ongoing challenge.

Kesler relies on data to explain facilities needs clearly and simply. She said this has been effective in debunking any doubts about her authority and expertise due to her gender. Kesler is thankful to her superintendent for encouraging her to apply for her position and for continuing to provide support and learning resources.

Inspiring students

The women facility leaders interviewed said students seeing women do the facility work in schools has a positive effect on them. This seems especially influential for girls and young women.

Gill (Pewaukee) said girls have come up to her while working in her district's elementary school. The students then ask if she's the woman they see on the lawn mower, golf cart, or working on the soccer field.

"They thought it was so cool, and

they never realized who I was," Gill said. "It was great to see all of these young girls who were inspired by the work I was doing."

While working in Oconomowoc, Peterson had lunch outside with her crew while the kids were at recess. A little girl ran up to them and asked each member of her team to explain what they did. When she got to asking what Peterson does, her crew members informed the little girl that she was their boss.

"This little girl's face just lit up," Peterson said. "She said 'What? Wow! That's so awesome!' She just could not believe that I'm in charge of all these grown adult men."

Peterson, who now is at Holy Hill & Hartford Union, said her work in a male-dominated field also influenced her daughters to try new, typically male-dominated activities. For example, both of her daughters are wrestlers, and Peterson is the wrestling coach.

"My oldest said she would never have tried joining wrestling had she not

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seen me breaking the barriers as a woman,” Peterson said.

As women in the field, Dufek (South Milwaukee) said it’s up to us to help grow the next generation of women leaders in school facilities.

Many of WASBO’s established women facility supervisors mentor younger women and encourage them to attend WASBO Conferences.

At Hartford Union High School and Holy Hill Area School District, Peterson started a youth apprenticeship program. She’s appreciated working with so many young students and showing them all the many facets of school facility maintenance.

Gill encourages WASBO to create more intentional programming and networking for women, and Dufek would like to see more women being WASBO keynote speakers.

To bring more women into leadership roles, Dufek and Peterson have successfully led multiple women in leadership sessions and roundtables at WASBO conferences. Dufek encourages men to join these conversations while prioritizing women’s voices. This is because, as Peterson said, women in male-dominated roles often feel talked over.

Gender stereotypes in younger generations may be changing, Dufek said, as some of her male staff members are the primary caregivers of their children during the day and don’t express certain biases.

Recruiting women and people of color

Just like bus drivers, teachers, and many more school positions, facilities departments are all too familiar with staffing shortages. Escobedo said challenges particular to recruiting women and people of color include biases in the recruitment process, a lack of awareness of these roles among women and minorities, and limited access to necessary training and educational resources.

“There also is often a lack of role models or mentors for women and minorities in these positions, which can make it harder for individuals to envision and pursue careers in this field,” Escobedo said.

Escobedo said significant lifting requirements, such as 75 pounds at Kenosha Unified, may dissuade women from applying for positions.

Dufek said her district saw many of her part-timers (who previously retired and used their part-time custodian job for some extra money) quit at the start of the pandemic for a number of reasons.

One particularly difficult challenge for school district recruitment efforts is budget constraints that make it difficult to offer compensation that can compete with the higher pay offered for similar skill sets in the private sector.

“I had an employee say they could make \$25 an hour at Target,” Dufek said. I looked at her and said, ‘Yes, you can, and I hope you like working

weekends, not knowing your schedule day to day, and having no vacation and no benefits.’ Then she came back and said that she’s staying, because they don’t offer insurance.”

Additionally, certain communities face structural barriers. For Dufek, one of these inequalities is that although her district is close to the City of Milwaukee, it isn’t on a bus line. This means that many probable hires are ruled because applicants lack reliable transportation.

Both the promise of more money as well as structural barriers have made it difficult for Dufek to promote district staff to potential leadership positions. Johnson (Greenfield) said his candidates – many of which are people of color coming from Milwaukee — also often come up against similar structural barriers, such as transportation, childcare, and more.

Heins (Platteville) said one of the continued effects of the COVID pandemic has been that part-time employees aren’t waiting — or can’t afford to wait — for the full-time position to open.

To close these gaps, Peterson (Hartford Union & Holy Hill) said that the way districts recruit custodians and staff needs to change. Many districts use Wisconsin Education Career Access Network (WECAN), which is the employment job sit for K-12 Wisconsin schools. While WECAN is great for recruiting school administrators and teachers, might not be as effective for recruiting facilities staff.

Since starting in Kenosha Unified School District as its director of facilities 24 years ago, Pat Finnemore has tried — at least in recruitment/hiring for entry-level positions — to mirror the racial demographics of his community. When starting at Kenosha, he said Kenosha was roughly 30% people of color, but that there was only a handful of people of color on his team back then. Finnemore praises his former human resources director, who 15 years ago, successfully recruited minority applicants by getting the word out in churches and through other organizations.

Since then, he has found that reaching out to community members, posting on Indeed, and other means have kept the district facility team's demographic numbers consistently representative of the wider community. He said many fathers, daughters, brothers, and sisters of all races work together. Finnemore reviews his district's demographic information every six months or so.

"I don't think school districts, for most positions, generally reflect the make-up of a community," Finnemore said. "From my perspective, I think they are heavily weighted towards white employees. Our district is no different. I think, you know, in all honesty, I think our custodial team is the most diverse group in our district, and I'm not 100% sure why that is."

Due to the subliminal nature of managing school facilities, Hernandez (East Troy) said there isn't a lot of room for recognition.

"(School facility staff) are in a position where people don't really know what you do and often are not invested in wanting to know what you do," Hernandez said. "If you're not getting

"(School facility staff) are in a position where people don't really know what you do and often are not invested in wanting to know what you do. If you're not getting complaints, that means you did everything right."



Jake Hernandez

*Director of Buildings & Grounds/Safety
East Troy Community
School District*

complaints, that means you did everything right."

Instead, Hernandez encourages his team to "revel in the silence."

Gill also has found success in communicating to part-timers the importance of making sure our schools are being cleaned and taken care of around the clock.

"For some of these kids, school is the best place for them to be. I hope every student has a great place to go home to, but we don't know that's always true for every student," Gill said. "One reason to stay late at work is to have these conversations with part-time night custodians to put purpose behind what they do."

WASBO's step forward

In recognition of the gender and racial disparities that persist in school districts' facilities teams; the challenges such disparities create for staff and leadership; the benefits of having a diverse and representative facilities staff; and the barriers to recruiting and promoting women and people of color in facilities roles, WASBO is launching three initiatives during the

2024-25 school year:

- Scholarship for Future Women School Facility Leaders,
- Women of WASBO Facility Leader Network
- Lead Custodian Academy

WASBO Scholarship for Women School Facility Leaders

Starting this year, WASBO is offering an annual scholarship to women seeking to obtain their Facility Manager Core Certification.

The WASBO Scholarship for Future Women School Facility Leaders is an annual scholarship that first will be awarded at the 2025 Facilities Management Conference.

The recipient is expected to attend the Facilities Management Conference, Spring Conference, Fall Conference, and Midwest Facility Masters Conference to ensure they complete the Core Certification within a year.

Other conferences can be substituted if needed, but the participant must complete the program within 1.5 years and must have supervisory support from their superintendent.

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Balancing the scales

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Applicants must be employed in a Wisconsin school district to apply for and be awarded the scholarship. For more information on and to apply for the 2025 WASBO Scholarship for Future Women School Facility Leaders, please visit wasbo.com/WFS.

Women of WASBO Facility Leader Network

WASBO is also excited to announce the launch of the Women of WASBO Facility Leader Network. This new initiative aims to provide support & networking opportunities for women leaders in school facilities manage-

ment roles. The network will meet virtually approximately every 6 weeks.

It will offer a platform for women to share experiences, discuss challenges, and develop strategies for success in this traditionally male-dominated field. These regular meetings will foster a sense of community and empower women to advance their careers in facilities management leadership.

Whether you're an experienced facilities director or aspiring to move into a leadership role, this network is designed to help you grow and thrive. To learn more and join the network, please contact WASBO's Director of

Professional Development, Danielle Bosanec, at danielle.bosanec@wasbo.com.

Lead Custodian Academy Coming Summer 2025

In an effort to develop and support the next generation of facilities leaders, WASBO is proud to introduce the Lead Custodian Academy, set to debut this summer!

This comprehensive two-day program will be offered in conjunction with the custodian conferences, providing an excellent opportunity for professional development. The academy is designed for individuals interested in pursuing

Figure 5: Facility supervisors & custodians by race: 2016-2017 to 2023-24

School Year	Position	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic /Latino	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Total People of Color	White	Total
2023 - 24	Facility Supervisor	3	9	10	2	0	1	25	367	392
2023 - 24	Custodian	80	674	440	59	5	46	1304	6346	7650
2022 - 23	Facility Supervisor	3	11	10	1	0	1	26	368	394
2022 - 23	Custodian	82	624	397	59	5	48	1215	6592	7807
2021 - 22	Facility Supervisor	3	26	9	3	0	2	43	358	401
2021 - 22	Custodian	74	662	348	51	7	35	1177	6681	7858
2020 - 21	Facility Supervisor	3	18	8	2	0	2	33	352	385
2020 - 21	Custodian	72	642	319	49	6	33	1121	6666	7787
2019 - 20	Facility Supervisor	2	24	5	2	0	1	34	347	381
2019 - 20	Custodian	76	615	277	54	4	35	1061	6839	7900
2018 - 19	Facility Supervisor	5	20	19	3	0	1	48	389	437
2018 - 19	Custodian	67	593	254	47	4	32	997	6721	7718
2017 - 18	Facility Supervisor	0	18	6	2	0	1	27	319	346
2017 - 18	Custodian	58	572	229	54	7	25	945	6794	7739
2016 - 17	Facility Supervisor	5	19	6	2	0	1	33	326	359
2016 - 17	Custodian	48	623	231	54	9	26	991	6798	7789

Figure 6 shows clear race gaps in the number of Wisconsin's School facility supervisors as well as custodians, according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. For more information, see Definitions and Methodology Notes on P. 59.

a lead custodian position, equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge needed to not only secure the job but excel in the role.

Participants will engage in sessions, discussions, and collaborations covering a wide range of topics, including leadership skills, team management, advanced cleaning techniques, budget management, and effective communication strategies. By investing in this training, WASBO aims to enhance the quality of facility management in schools across Wisconsin and create a pipeline of skilled professionals ready to step into leadership roles.

More information is coming soon!

Upcoming Academy dates are:

- June 24-25, 2025- Location: Oregon School District
- July 22-23, 2025- Location: Amery School District

WASBO's future research

WASBO will further examine business officials by race & gender in the next issue of Taking Care of Business.

Figure 6: Facility supervisors & custodians by gender: 2016-2017 to 2023-24

School Year	Position	Men	Women	Total
2023-24	Facility Supervisor	346	46	392
2023-24	Custodian	5586	2063	7650*
2022-23	Facility Supervisor	355	39	394
2022-23	Custodian	5695	2111	7807*
2021-22	Facility Supervisor	358	43	401
2021-22	Custodian	5672	2186	7858
2020-21	Facility Supervisor	344	41	385
2020-21	Custodian	5606	2181	7787
2019-20	Facility Supervisor	347	34	381
2019-20	Custodian	5732	2168	7900
2018-19	Facility Supervisor	388	49	437
2018-19	Custodian	5632	2086	7718
2017-18	Facility Supervisor	312	34	346
2017-18	Custodian	5678	2061	7739
2016-17	Facility Supervisor	328	31	359
2016-17	Custodian	5690	2099	7789

Figure 6 shows the clear gender gaps in the number of Wisconsin's School facility supervisors as well as custodians, according to DPI's Public All Staff Report. For more information, see Definitions and Methodology Notes below.

*In both the 2023-24 & 2022-23 school years, one custodian identified as non-binary (noted as "X" in the report). This is why there is one additional custodian listed in each school year.

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.
- **Custodians:** Data from the [DPI's Public All Staff Report](#) states that districts should use Position Code 98 – Other Support Staff and Area Code 9072 – Plant Maintenance and Operational Personnel. The DPI asks schools

to report all school facility team members — including janitorial staff, groundskeepers, maintenance crew members, etc. — with Position Code 98. Wisconsin school districts lack uniformity regarding titles and their terminology, so, to simplify the data, WASBO will refer to all facility team members in a non-supervisory role as “Custodians.”

- **Facility Supervisor:** Data from [DPI's Public All Staff Report](#) states that districts should use Position Code 99 - Other Professional Staff in a Non-Instructional role and Area Code 9072 — Plant Maintenance and Operational Personnel. The DPI asks schools to report with position 99 if for supervisor/coordinator of buildings, grounds, and custodial positions. Wisconsin school districts lack uniformity regarding titles and their terminology, so — to simplify the data — WASBO will refer to all school facility team members in a supervisory role as “Facility Supervisors.”
- **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 besides the last two school years as noted above in Figure 6.

- **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.
- **WASBO's Current Membership:** Current WASBO Members is defined as having dues paid through at least the end of the fiscal year (which ends June 30, 2025) as of November 11, 2024.