

## **As the Calendar Turns, WSCA is Turning the Page on a New Year!**

Gregg Curtis; Government Relations Committee Chair

On Wednesday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, President of the United States Barak Obama made a historic visit to Wisconsin to talk about education. One of the purposes of his appearance was to lay out the criteria for qualifying for a slice of the 4.35 billion dollar educational pie that is the "Race to the Top." Not unknown to most people in the audience and across the state was the fact that by essence of a "firewall" law prohibiting educators' evaluations to be tied to student performance on standardized tests, our state would not be eligible to apply for these competitive grants. Apparently, when the President of the United States speaks, Wisconsin politicians listen; and within two days a bill was passed which altered the previous statute, thereby satisfying one of the criteria President Obama outlined in his presentation.

Traditionally the Wisconsin School Counselor Association has not been politically active. As some of you may know, that changed in 2009. Last March 20+ WSCA board members, school counselors, school counseling graduate students, and school counseling educators converged on Madison's capitol building for the first WSCA Day on the Hill. Those who attended remember being well-received by the state's legislators or their assistants and being enthusiastic in our conversations with the state officials. We spent the morning in training for meetings with our representatives and the afternoon in individual meetings with our respective legislators. Following the meetings we gathered for a short de-briefing and celebrated the opportunities we had to educate officials about what school counselors in Wisconsin do with and for students.

I am proud to announce WSCA's 2010 Day on the Hill has been set for Wednesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>. The time is right for us to continue the educational process begun last year and to move forward in communicating our support for state and federal legislation which affects how Wisconsin school counselors work with students. Please take advantage of this early notice and make plans to join us in Madison. There will be a formal session at February's 2010 WSCA Conference presenting more information and we will gather the names of anyone interested in participating this spring.

Additionally, I am equally proud to say that WSCA has made its first ever public endorsement of federal legislation. The "Student Breakfast and Education Improvement Act of 2009" was introduced July 21, 2009, by Senators Feingold and Kohl with the support of five co-sponsors. Universal free breakfast programs, especially if they are provided during the school day, have proven to be one of the most successful ways to increase participation and help ensure more students are getting a nutritious breakfast and are better prepared to learn. The purpose of the bill is to provide federally funded competitive grants for schools with at least 65% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. This money could be used for a number of things, including: establishing or expanding school breakfast programs which contain nutritional education, increasing participation in school breakfast programs, or providing breakfast during the school day. WSCA sent a letter to Senators Kohl and Feingold communicating our support for their bill.

Finally, the Government Relations Committee is working to establish its own active link on the WSCA webpage. On it we hope to provide members with opportunities to find out who

represents them at both state and national levels, investigate state and federal legislation that deals with educational and school counseling issues, and keep abreast of the various projects the committee is involved with. We are eager to welcome new committee members, and we invite you to join us as we turn the page! If you are interested, please contact me or any of the committee members!