

WASB not renewing membership in national organization

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The Wisconsin Association of School Boards has voted not to renew membership in the national organization over concerns about its governance structure, fiscal management, and “failure to prioritize and serve state school board associations.”

In a message to lawmakers late Monday, the WASB wrote many of its concerns “pre-date last fall’s events,” when the National School Boards Association sent a letter to President Biden seeking help from the federal government in response to threats of violence and intimidation aimed at school board members. The letter added some of the actions could be classified as “domestic terrorism” or hate crimes.

The group later apologized to members, but the WASB in November withdrew from participation in the national organization’s programs, activities and lobbying efforts. The WASB couldn’t terminate its membership at the time because it had already paid dues and there was no mechanism for a refund, the state organization said at the time.

In Monday’s message, the WASB wrote those actions “needlessly harmed school board relationships and inflamed partisan tensions.”

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The WASB Board of Directors voted on Friday not to renew its membership for the 2022-23 school year, and more than half of the nation’s state school board organizations have distanced themselves from the NSBA or dropped their membership.

The WASB is looking for an alternative national association, though it wrote in the message it wasn’t precluding NSBA membership in the future.

“Our support for parent and community input is unwavering,” the message read. “We realize that we are partners with our parents and community members and that the great majority of the interactions with our constituents are cordial, collaborative and thoughtful. We understand that important policy decisions can be passionately discussed, but in a manner that reinforces the basic tenet of public schools — local control of students’ education.”