

# Association of Wisconsin School Administrators: Executive director leaves lasting legacy in Wisconsin public education

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MADISON, WI — Charles R. “Chuck” Hilston, executive director Emeritus of the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA), passed away Friday, July 21, 2023.

“Chuck spent his entire career advocating and serving as a voice for school children and educators,” said Jim Lynch, AWSA Executive Director. “We are forever grateful for his work, the principles under which AWSA was formed, and the foundation he built that has allowed our organization to do incredible things over the years.”

In 1978, in an effort to better and more efficiently serve students, the Wisconsin Secondary School Administrators Association (WSSAA) and the Wisconsin Association of Elementary School Principals (WESPA) merged to form AWSA. Hilston was appointed the association’s first executive director and served in that role until his retirement in 1996. During that time, he served on numerous commissions, committees, and task forces aimed at supporting and improving public education in Wisconsin.

Prior to his time at AWSA, Hilston was an elementary school teacher in Wyandotte, Michigan, and a principal at Franklin Elementary School in Van Wert, Ohio. He also was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, serving two years of active duty during the Korean War.

In 1965, Hilston transitioned from working in schools to serving students and

educators through various roles in professional associations, his first as executive secretary of the Ohio Education Association. He then moved to the national level with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, serving as director of professional relations. It was in this role that he helped several states organize independent principals associations with paid professional staff, one of which was WSSAA. Hilston was appointed executive secretary of WSSAA in 1970.

“On behalf of the entire Hilston family, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the many notes and gestures of condolence we have received from so many and are moved to see how many lives our father touched,” said Chuck’s children, Wayne, Steve, and Amy (Thering). “He was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather who played such a prominent role in all our lives. He was a man of great character who lived his life based on values centered around honesty, compassion, generosity and service to others deeply rooted in his faith. He was living proof that a strong heart filled with love of family, friends, and dedication to bettering the world around you will lead to a life well lived. His journey is complete now, and we will be forever grateful for all he taught us. As our dad was fond of saying, ‘It’s not goodbye. It’s just farewell until we see each other again.’”

“Chuck’s impact on public schools and the legacy he built during his time as executive director of AWSA was both inspirational and immeasurable,” said Lynch. “He was a visionary whose dedication, passion, and wisdom will continue to guide the work of our association.”

Please see Chuck’s obituary for information about the Memorial service planned for September 23 in Madison.