



**Dr. Walter Leipart, Ph.D.
School District of Gilman
Gilman, WI**

INTRODUCTION

Walter Leipart is a transformational leader focused on developing the behaviors and mindsets that support the achievement of both personal and collective goals. Walter's purpose in life is to spark passion in others to reach their goals in learning and life. When working with individuals and teams, Walter creates environments focused on success by communicating the why behind what we do, engaging teams in the work, modeling what results look like, establishing how results are achieved, and recognizing the accomplishments of others.

Walter has been a School Superintendent since 2008 and has focused on increasing opportunities for rural schools, creating personalized learning environments where students are engaged in the development and outcomes of their learning, bringing all stakeholders together, and ensuring every voice is heard to create positive change in schools. Under Walter's leadership, he brought multiple stakeholders together to develop a project-based learning virtual school with a focus on a customized learning pathway for every student. Not all stakeholders were invested right away, but through honoring the voices of every group and a commitment to achieving results, Walter demonstrated finesse and agility in his words and actions to turn doubt into confidence. His service to others is recognized by the school leaders, staff, students, and communities he has worked with throughout his career as a practitioner and administrator.

Education

Walter received his Ph.D. in Leadership, for the advancement of Learning, and Service from Cardinal Stritch University, where his research focused on behaviors and mindsets of successful individuals and teams. Other educational degrees and trainings include a post-master's in the superintendency, a master's in school leadership, a master's in professional development, and a BA in secondary education with an emphasis in history, government, and psychology.

Walter's skills include knowledge of the behaviors and mindsets of successful individuals, organizational development, community development, strategic planning, public relations, employee engagement, leadership and staff development, human capital administration, financial leadership, project management, and charter school development and authorization.

Experience

This isn't Walter's first time in Gilman. He is a graduate of Gilman High School, and since his return to Gilman in 2017, Walter has facilitated three (3) operational referendum campaigns, multiple facilities and energy efficiency projects, including a solar panel project that even led to student workforce readiness activities. He also provided the leadership to develop a project-based learning virtual school that has led to a significant revenue stream that, combined with efficiency projects and sound fiscal practice, is positively impacting the district's budget by hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

Walter has inspired others in his community and across the state with an innovative approach to strategic planning. Instead of asking individuals to contribute to a district strategic plan, he engaged the community in a community strategic plan where the school and the community created shared goals and action plans to create a vibrant community, increase community engagement and volunteerism, and embrace the quality of life possible in a rural community. This work has resulted in businesses being created, storefronts being revitalized, increased housing opportunities, and a revived passion to serve and volunteer throughout the community. This place-based and asset-based approach has led to a higher level of confidence in the school and organizations in the community.

Before returning to Gilman, Walter served as a superintendent in both small and large rural school districts in Wisconsin and South Dakota. Other educational experiences include serving as a high school principal and social science teacher. Before entering the education field, Walter's work experience included residential construction and logging. Each of these experiences taught him the value of hard work, determination, the power of dreaming big, and chasing those dreams until you turn them into reality.

Outstanding Achievement(s)

Featured presentations

Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance Conference

- Instructional Coaching
- Teacher-Powered School
- Revitalizing a Community Vision of Hope and Opportunity – Community Strategic Planning
- Creating an Environment of Success in Our Schools
- Four Key Strategies to Ensure You Achieve Your District Goals
- Solar Makes Sense: Energy Efficiency Project

Wisconsin State Education Convention

- Solar Makes Sense: Energy Efficiency Project

National Rural Education Association Conference

- Revitalizing a Community Vision of Hope and Opportunity – Community Strategic Planning

Midwestern Educational Research Association Conference

- What Behaviors and Mindsets Support Self-Efficacy
- How Behaviors and Mindsets Support Self-Efficacy

American Educational Research Association National Conference

- How to Ensure You Implement Behaviors and Mindsets that Support Self-Efficacy

Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau

- School Finance and Local District Story

Wisconsin Economic Development Summit 2025

- Design Gilman: How a Village and Its Students are Unlocking Wisconsin's Rural Future

Research Topics

- Evidence-Based Leadership
- Environments of Success and Highly Effective Organizations
- Behaviors and Mindsets that Support Self-Efficacy
- Collective Efficacy of Leaders, Teachers, and Learners
- Student Engagement
- Redefining Readiness
- Implementation Science

AN INTERVIEW

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

Today's superintendent must be agile in their approach to leadership, learning, and service.

Leadership requires a superintendent to be relatable to a wide range of stakeholders, from students to parents, grandparents, young families, empty nesters, retirees, the farmer, the laborer, the business owner, the doctor, and anyone else who calls your community home. Being relatable builds trust and confidence in the school.

Learning is ongoing. By the time something is released or a new approach is implemented, something new has already been developed to take its place. Superintendents need to remain sharp and informed of what is coming next and be a champion of lifelong learning. Learning also leads to awareness. Learn about your people and your community, it deepens your understanding of where they're coming from, what is important to them, and how you can best serve.

Service is our calling. Service also brings happiness and joy to you and those around you. We have tough jobs with demanding responsibilities, but in the few moments we volunteer and serve others, we fill our stores of energy to make it through the challenging times. Service demonstrates that you care about the school, community, and those around you.

What new understandings did you acquire after two or three years on the job?

Early in my career, I learned a vital lesson about the limitations of top-down mandates. I introduced a school-wide character education program to address escalating student issues, assuming the curriculum alone would drive change. It didn't. The initiative failed, not for lack of quality or effort, but because it lacked a coherent strategy and, more importantly, the genuine buy-in from those tasked with its delivery.

What I learned is that successful implementation requires more than a mandate; it demands clarity and connection. Before enforcing compliance, we must build understanding by gathering feedback from those on the front lines. A strategic plan only works when it includes the training and time necessary for mastery. Ultimately, leadership is about alignment: we must communicate the 'why' behind our actions and ensure our mindset reflects our goals. After all, our thoughts drive our actions, and our actions dictate our results.

Share an idea to use or something you've learned with your colleagues.

I want to share with my colleagues the importance of building empowered teams. Empowered team members actively influence strategic results, fostering higher levels of engagement and performance. When my teachers and staff had an active voice and took an active role in creating the climate and culture of our school, our school transformed. We empowered our teachers and staff to use their talents and strengths to help create the learning and work environment. The Gilman school and community believe “we are empowered to make anything possible.”

We started by identifying our core beliefs.

1. Take 100% responsibility for our roles and what we have control over, such as our thoughts, speech, and actions.
2. Preserve what has been successful.
3. Believe in us and our abilities to transfer past success to new opportunities.
4. Set goals.
5. Collaborate, accept feedback, and keep our agreements.
6. Be reflective.
7. Be a problem solver.
8. Embrace mutual respect and positive intent in our interactions and communication.
9. Contribute our individual talents and strengths to our learning community.
10. Honor each other’s distinctive voices, experiences, and backgrounds.
11. Provide a safe and inclusive physical, social, and emotional environment in our school.

The results of creating an empowered team were the development of a personalized learning virtual school, math workshops, a literacy-focused instructional coaching program, early childhood play-based learning centers, a student-led business, and a K-20 maker space where students and community members create and interact with one another.

We have learned that anything is possible when we focus on our core beliefs and create an empowered school.

Submitted by:

Walter Leipart,

April 16, 2026

Name/Signature

Date