



## Valuing and Supporting Educators

**W**hat makes a strong education system? Quality educators? Equitable funding? Modern schools? Community support? All of the above?

This summer, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) released a study that examined high-performing school systems in countries around the world. The goal of the study was to identify key elements that lead to strong education systems and encourage states to implement them in the U.S.

The findings from this study are described in greater detail in this issue of *Wisconsin School News* in the article “Learning from High Performers” (page 10). Among other factors, the study found that countries with high-performing education systems value and support their educators.

Unfortunately, in the U.S., we are seeing more and more evidence that paints a poor picture for how we value our teachers. A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute found that the wages of public school teachers in the U.S. were 17 percent lower than comparable college-educated professionals. More surprisingly, the average weekly wages for public teachers (inflation adjusted) actually decreased \$30 per week from 1996 to 2015. Statistics like these send the wrong message to our educators and to those who may be

considering entering the profession.

A report released in September from the Learning Policy Institute, which examined the nation’s teacher shortage trend, found that it is not just about money. The top reason given by teachers for leaving was dissatisfaction with the profession. They cited reasons such as lack of support, large class sizes, assessments and accountability measures, and lack of autonomy among others.

The Institute’s recommendations for combatting the teacher shortage are in line with those of the NCSL study of high-performing education systems. Educators need to be supported and respected by their school districts and state policy makers to be successful. Teacher pay is an issue — particularly in attracting highly qualified individuals to the profession — but equally important is providing professional development and support to educators and emphasizing their value and importance in our education system.

In addition to valuing educators, the NCSL study found that countries with high-performing education systems have a long-term vision and an evidenced-based strategic plan that sets goals and priorities and benchmarks practices and outcomes against those of high-performing countries and high-performing states. A long-term vision for education in Wisconsin is something that our state

and many others are lacking. This is certainly something that has been at the top of my mind and, perhaps, the release of the NCSL study will renew talks to establish a unified, long-term vision for education in Wisconsin.

The leadership and visioning work that you — our school board members and administrators — do is tremendously important. This month, we will be honoring our school boards as part of Wisconsin School Board Appreciation Week (Oct. 2-8). This special week is a time to build awareness and understanding of the vital function an elected board of education plays in our communities. We encourage school districts to recognize their school boards and publicly thank them for their leadership.

In addition, we are in the middle of the WASB Regional Meetings. These events give you an opportunity to network with other school board members, hear a feature presentation on the school board’s role in continuous improvement and receive an update on the WASB’s activities and plans. I have enjoyed meeting with you and look forward to talking with more of you this month as I travel around the state. I especially enjoy hearing about the great work taking place in our public schools. While we have work to do, Wisconsin is a great place to be a student. ■

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