



2015 Mineral Point grads
Jane Dickler and
Bryce Fitzsimmons.

A Day to Celebrate Education

Graduation day gives school board members a special opportunity to reflect on public education in their communities

Shelby Anderson

One of the highlights of this time of year in our schools is graduation day. Not only is it a celebration of students and the culmination of their public K-12 school careers, it also brings together school board members, administrators, staff and entire communities.

For school board members, graduation is a special day. Most of the school board's work takes place in the board meeting room. Graduation day gives board members an opportunity to reflect and celebrate the role they have had in promoting student success.

"School board members are the Rosie the Riveters of public education," says Patrick Sherman, who

serves on both the Genoa City J2 and Lake Geneva school boards. "We are not on the front lines and seldom receive praise or glory. But our efforts on setting policy and approving course work that raise student achievement, ensuring every child is successful, are integral to graduation day."

Amy Mason, school board president in the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District, also sees graduation day as an opportunity to recognize the work of the district and, of course, the students.

"For me, it's a time of celebration," she says. "Our students' years of hard work have culminated in them receiving their diploma, and it's a

celebration of the time and effort our staff has spent providing them with a top-notch education."

Jan Berg, president of the DeForest Area School District, is always impressed with how much graduation day means to the community. One year, during her graduation day speech, she asked people to raise their hands if they were community members who didn't have children, grandchildren, etc., graduating that day.

"There were more hands raised in that group than you would have thought," she said. "Community members were there to see that class of students graduate because this is an event that is important to the community as a whole."

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— Amy Mason, school board president,
Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District

Mason has gotten the same impression at her district's graduation ceremonies.

"We have a very tight-knit community in Chippewa Falls, and our graduation day reflects that," she said. "The gymnasium is packed with family and friends who have come to help graduates savor their success and send them off to embark on the next chapter of their life."

The importance of education is on full display at graduation day. Sherman remembers one year he received a call from a veteran who had been a senior in high school in 1944. The man never graduated because he enlisted to serve in the armed forces for World War II. The man had heard about recently passed legislation that allowed veterans to receive a diploma

if they left school to enlist in the armed forces.

"I offered him two options — this could be done at a board meeting or he could take part in that year's graduation ceremony, cap and gown and all," Sherman said. "He choose to take part in the full ceremony. It was a very special graduation day. I introduced him as 'the last graduate of the class of 1945 and the first graduate of the class of 1998.'"

This year's graduation day will be especially meaningful to Mason.

"One of my very favorite things about being a school board member is getting to see the students walk across the stage and accept their diploma," she said. "I've had the wonderful opportunity to hand our students their diploma. This year's graduation will be bittersweet for



Mineral Point School Board
President Larry Steffes
congratulates 2015 graduate
Elise Powers.

me, as I'll have the very special privilege of giving my son his diploma."

Sherman has also had the opportunity to give his three children their diplomas.

"Having served on a school board for over 25 years, it was my honor to hand each of my three children their diplomas and hug them on stage," Sherman said. "There are few greater feelings than those moments." ■



Photo courtesy of DeForest Area High School Yearbook