



Be the Best You Can Be

WASB can help new and experienced board members lead their district to success

Greetings fellow school board members, new and old! This being the April edition of *Wisconsin School News*, I extend hearty congratulations to our newly elected board members. You are to be commended for stepping up to the plate. And equally hearty congratulations to our re-elected readers. You are to be especially commended for re-upping! Why especially commended? Because research shows that length of service on a school board is one factor that makes a difference in student achievement, and one three-year term is not enough.

The research, by Dr. Michael Ford of UW-Oshkosh and Dr. Douglas Ihrke of UW-Milwaukee shows that boards comprised of experienced members, who have served five years or more and follow the guiding principles of the Key Work of School Boards, have a positive impact on reading proficiency scores among their students. So new members, now you know: if you're "in it to win it," set your sights on running for at least one more term!

Speaking of being in it to win it, I have yet to meet a school board member who ran for election to help make their district mediocre. We're all in it because we want to help make our district the best it can be, for our stu-

dents and community. That requires that we work to be the best board members we can be. A school board comprised of members committed to being the best board members they can be (including staying on for at least five years!), is an irresistible force for success in education.

To that end, I urge you to take advantage of the resources the WASB offers to help us become the best board members we can be.

Shortly after the April election, WASB holds New School Board Member Gatherings around the state to provide you with important information to help you start off on the right foot. In fact, if you were newly elected, you may have received this copy of *Wisconsin School News* at one of those meetings.

Other upcoming opportunities for growth include the Spring Academy Workshops, held in May at various CESA offices around the state, and the Summer Leadership Institute in July in Green Bay. These conferences provide both new and experienced school board members with valuable information to help you give it your best. That's one of the two purposes for which the WASB exists: Governance — helping you be the best board member you can be, and helping your board be the best board it can be.

The other purpose for which the WASB exists is Advocacy — representing school boards statewide by lobbying in the state capitol, and coaching individual board members to be in contact with their local legislators. We call these two purposes, Governance and Advocacy, the two "pillars" of the mission of the WASB. They are pillars, but they're not completely separate from each other. Good governance includes a measure of advocacy by each board member, and successful advocacy makes good governance more achievable.

A final word to all fellow school board members, new or experienced: bear in mind the paramount importance of trust for the success of your school board and school district. In fact, trust is a must for our entire school system. To counter the tendency toward splintering and fragmentation, school boards must win the trust of all stakeholders, from district parents to the legislature. Resolve to build a culture of high trust in your district, beginning with winning the trust of your board colleagues and superintendent. The book, "The Speed of Trust" by Stephen Covey is a good resource. Be in it to win it! ■

Stu Olson is the WASB president and president of the Shell Lake school board.

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