



Forward Together

Thank you to all of our teachers, administrators, staff and board members who have been working hard these past few months to maintain the focus on a positive school culture in our buildings and providing safe learning environments where all of our students can grow and reach their potential.

It's been a difficult election season and our schools have not been immune from emotions running high. I commend everyone who has been working with our young people to allow them to express their beliefs while ensuring respect for our diversity. Public schools are the cornerstone of our democracy. It is in our public schools that we all come together — different races, ethnicities, religions, genders and social-economic statuses — to learn about each other and how to work together. Our diversity is our strength.

As always, there are challenges in front of us, but together, we go forward.

We don't know yet what the future holds for K-12 education policy in our country with President-elect Donald Trump. Although there could be a significant attempt to advance privatization under a Trump presidency and a Republican Congress, federal involvement in

education policy could be diminished, bringing greater control back to states and local communities. Whatever happens next, the WASB will continue to stand with locally elected school boards to advocate for your empowerment to make decisions that best serve the students in your communities.

We do know from Election Day that our communities support their local public schools as evidenced by the high rate of referendum approvals. Regardless of candidate or political party preference, voters in our communities came together to support their local public schools. There are some major school funding issues in play that cannot be glossed over or ignored, but knowing that voters support their local public schools is worth celebrating and we need to build on that support.

A key tenet of public education is that every child, no matter where they live, receives a quality education. Our current school funding situation is escalating the haves and have nots and the very real possibility for the expansion of privatization of K-12 education at the state and federal levels threatens to exacerbate this trend. This is not only unfair to our students but violates our constitutional mandate to provide an equal educational oppor-

tunity for all children, and will have a detrimental effect on Wisconsin's overall economic growth.

So, where do we go from here? We need to keep telling our story and expanding our community engagement efforts. This is a marathon, not a sprint. But in the current environment, we have to do more. We have to resolve to find new ways to engage the public, develop relationships and influence with lawmakers, and make our voices heard.

You are in a unique position to unite your community — not only with regard to intangibles such as community pride and cohesiveness but also with regard to the very real tangible effects of economic growth. With your ability to develop partnerships between the local schools, private businesses and community organizations, you can be a positive force for change.

In January, we'll come together for the 96th annual State Education Convention in Milwaukee. Our theme is "It Starts with Us." And it does. I hope you can attend the convention and use this opportunity to network with your colleagues from around the state and learn from their experiences. We need to continue to work together, share ideas, and find solutions to the challenges facing our school districts. Together, we go forward. ■

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