



Focused on Continuous Improvement

April was an important month for school boards in Wisconsin with school board seats and referenda on the ballot in the spring primary election. Congratulations to the new and returning school board members and to the districts that were successful in passing a referendum!

Of the 71 referenda on the ballot, 55 were approved by voters — a 77 percent passage rate. Our school districts are sound fiscal stewards but sometimes more investment is needed to ensure a high-quality education for our students. The dollars from these referenda will ensure that school facilities are upgraded, programs remain in place and, in some cases, schools won't be forced to close in the face of stagnating state funding and restrictive revenue limits.

While it is encouraging to see so many of our communities willing to support greater investments in public education, the continuing reliance on referenda expands the disparities in school funding and makes it increasingly difficult to make long-term budget plans.

The Wisconsin Constitution requires that we provide for “the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable.” In 2000, the state Supreme Court determined that “uniformity in educational opportunities” was not constitutionally mandated, but that the Legislature must provide sufficient resources so that every student can have the opportu-

nity for a “sound, basic education... that will equip [them] for their roles as citizens and enable them to succeed economically and personally.” While the court recognized that disparities between school districts stem from differing taxing capacities, it did not address how those differing capacities and ability to pass referenda contribute to disparities in resources.

If we allow the disparity to grow among our public school districts, at what point will the public demand a better system and increased state investments? For a deeper discussion on this topic, view this month's Capitol Watch column on page 20.

With the April Election behind us, it's time for school boards to dig in and continue their work. Budgeting for the next school year is underway, graduation day is just around the corner, and annual school board meetings are coming up.

Leading a public school district comes with challenges. As school leaders, we must remain focused on continuous improvement not only by the district as a whole but as school boards as well. To help you in that endeavor, the WASB has launched a Peer Mentoring Program as a complimentary service to our legal, policy and board governance services. Long-term board members who have demonstrated a commitment to professional development have stepped forward to be mentors.

Whether you are a new board

member trying to understand your role or a board president grappling with a governance issue, these experienced board member mentors can provide you with advice, support and guidance. They've walked in your shoes and know what it's like to deal with hot-button issues and difficult situations. Feel free to reach out to them at any time. For more information and a list of mentors, visit wasb.org. Select “Governance” and then “Peer Mentoring Program.”

I also encourage our new board members to utilize the Introduction to School Board Service Program. It's a professional development guide specifically for new board members to assist you in ensuring that you are exposed, at an introductory level, to the full range of issues and topics that come before boards. To download a copy of the program, visit the WASB website. The Introduction to School Board Service Program is a component of the Member Recognition Program found under “Governance.”

In closing, please consider joining us at one of our Spring Academy Workshops. The evening workshops will take place this month in six different locations across the state. Learn about governance and school law issues that every school board member should know. For more information, see page 26 or visit wasb.org. ■

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