Leading Together

Leadership Conference focuses on the duties and challenges facing school leaders

As school leadership continues to evolve, the 2012 WASB Leadership Conference, which took place July 13-14 in La Crosse, aimed to tackle some of the issues most important to public school leaders — effective use of technology and community engagement.

WASB Governance and Leadership Development Director Deb Gurke led a series of sessions focused on how schools are using technology to offer personalized learning, opportunities for students to work in teams, and engage people from around the world.

The first of these sessions, "A Sense of Balance: Seeking 'Certainty' and 'Equilibrium' in the Golden Age," was led by Cashton School District Superintendent Brad Saron. Among other topics, Saron offered a school board and superintendent perspective on the many technologies being utilized in Wisconsin classrooms.

"What technology allows us to do is amplify our ability to personalize learning and to extend our influence beyond the boundaries of a typical school day or academic year," Saron said.

Jessica Johnson, principal of Dodgeland Elementary School, discussed how students in her school are benefitting from the use of SMARTBoards, iPads, blogging, digital story creation, and video production. Johnson also shared how teachers are using social media tools such as Twitter for professional development.

Another session focused on technology in the classroom featured Shannon Leuhmann, an elementary school teacher in the Oregon School District, who discussed how her students have benefitted from linking to other classrooms around the world and engaging parents at home. Shannon's talk was presented via YouTube; a presentation she gave at TEDx Madtown in 2011.

The technology and instruction sessions wrapped up with the screening of two TED Talks, the first titled "Education Innovation in the Slums" featuring author and innovator Charles Leadbetter. In the Ted Talk, Leadbetter shares how he went searching for radical, new forms of education and found them in the

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slums of South America. Leadbetter says all schools can learn from this disruptive, new kind of school, focused on pulling students, not pushing them. The second talk featured Jane McGonigal, who discussed a video game that helps people heal from trauma.

The second day of the conference provided attendees with a special focus on community engagement. Gurke set up the discussion by stating that community members, now more than ever, expect school leaders to communicate to them and also solicit feedback for use by the district. Gurke led an in-depth session that covered community engagement tools school leaders can use to plan events that will get school leaders useful information and also give community members an opportunity to provide meaningful feedback.

Attendees had the opportunity to model some of the skills shared by Gurke by participating in a mock community engagement event. One tool that was introduced in the session was ground rules, and members saw the value of this tool as they engaged in conversation. One member said, "When was the last time you saw someone stop themselves and apologize for interrupting you? That never happens. The ground rules really made us aware of our behavior."

The final session, led by Gurke, walked school leaders through an approach to leading meetings called the "Focused Conversations" approach. As Gurke said, board meetings can get bogged down when issues get contentious. Using the Focused Conversations approach, board members can keep meetings focused, make decisions, evaluate programming, interpret information, and make changes. Attendees applied skills learned in this session on a Ted Talk.

The Leadership Conference also included a session led by Margaret McMurray, a charter schools consultant with the Department of Public Instruction, who discussed charter school authorizing. McMurray defined what charter schools are and their potential advantages. Representatives from the La Crosse and Highland School Districts shared information about successful charter schools established in their districts.

WASB Associate Executive Director Barry Forbes discussed school boards' responsibilities related to open meetings law. This session served as an important introduction, and refresher, on open meetings law. Forbes also covered public participation in school board meetings and community engagement events.

The WASB thanks those member who were able to attend and will keep members up to date on the topics and issues covered at the 2012 WASB Leadership Conference. ■

INTRODUCING THE **eConnection**

The WASB is excited to announce the launch of the ***eConnection***, a weekly, email newsletter designed to keep WASB members up-to-date on WASB events and services, as well as provide state and federal education updates.

This new, electronic newsletter goes to all board members and superintendents. With the launch of the ***eConnection***, members have the option to discontinue receiving the print version of the *Connection*. If you no longer wish to receive the print *Connection*, simply contact the WASB at info@wasb.org or 877-705-4422.

The WASB will continue to produce the popular *Legislative Update*. It can be accessed through the ***eConnection*** by clicking on the Legislative Update link, located under the Advocacy & Government Relations section.

Look for the ***eConnection*** in your email inbox each Friday. ■

Investing in Wisconsin Public Schools

New tool helps school leaders understand the nuances of financing

The Investing in Wisconsin Public Schools map allows people in small groups to discuss and gain a better understanding of how the different stakeholders affect a public school district's finances.

This summer, the WASB in partnership with the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO), and the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association (WSPRA) introduced a new tool called "Investing in Wisconsin Public Schools" aimed at helping public education stakeholders gain a better understanding of how public school finance works in Wisconsin.

The process uses a blended learning and engagement methodology suited for stakeholders at all levels to cover basic revenue and expense elements of public education. It allows participants to understand how all stakeholders can affect the financial well-being of schools.

Investing in Wisconsin Public Schools centers around a colorful map that lays out a typical school district and the external and internal stakeholders affecting the district's finances. A trained facilitator, or table coach, leads a small group in its discussion and examination of the map. This allows for participants to not only engage with a dialogue with one another, but also to visualize how all of the pieces of public school finance system work.

Visit wasbo.com/investinginschool to learn more, or contact WASBO at 608-249-8588.

In addition, two table coach training opportunities are coming up — Aug. 7 in Stevens Point and Sept. 28 in Elkhart Lake. Register at wasbo.com. ■

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