



## Going Forward Together

*Asking the right questions and building partnerships for your students*

After accepting the gavel at the Joint State Education Convention in Milwaukee in January, I announced that my theme for the year would be “Forward Together.” For me, those two words succinctly but clearly convey the essence of what is needed today and provide a personal focus for my year as WASB President.

But that theme is not meant for me alone but for each and every board member throughout the state. Now, several months after the convention, it seems appropriate for each of us to reflect on our own board’s progress going “forward together” for public education.

The logical place to begin that reflection is in one’s local district. Here are some key questions you might want to ask:

- Does my board actively engage its stakeholders in creating and updating a strategic plan?
- Has the board identified the critical issues currently facing my district and established a plan for addressing them?
- Is student achievement the central focus in my board’s decision-making process?
- Are board members always prepared to actively discuss and make appropriate decisions?
- Do all board members encourage and respect the free and open exchange of diverse opinions but then ultimately support board decisions once made?
- Are the board’s decisions data driven rather than opinion driven?

- Are board members committed to continually increasing their knowledge and enhancing their leadership skills by participating in appropriate workshops and seminars?
- Does each board member positively represent my school district and community — ever applauding the district’s accomplishments while also acknowledging and continually addressing areas of needed improvement?
- Does the board annually evaluate its procedures and effectiveness and cooperatively establish goals for ongoing improvement?
- Finally, considering that new members might join my board in April, how will we mentor those individuals to facilitate their active involvement in the board’s work?

Your answers to such questions should provide a clear barometer of how well your board is prepared to “go forward.”

But we also need to think well beyond the boundaries of our local board room and individual district. For public education to remain the bedrock of our democratic way of life, board members must work together with community members, with other boards, and with education associations throughout our state and nation.

History has demonstrated time and time again the power possible when individuals work together in a common cause. There IS strength in numbers! Consider how effectively your board keeps community

members informed of key education issues.

Does your board actively “reach out” to the businesses and organizations within the community to establish new partnerships and to strengthen existing ones? What steps has your board taken to combat the ongoing assaults against public education, to promote its value, and to stress the importance of local control? Does your board regularly communicate with your legislators and invite them to board meetings, legislative breakfasts, and celebratory events to share both your district’s achievements and its needs, as well as to discuss proposed legislation? Did your board members attend WASB’s Day at the Capitol and join with members and administrators from throughout the state in taking a strong public education message to the Capitol? Will your board members continue those critical networking and advocacy efforts at the local, regional, state, and national levels?

Going forward together often is not easy or without cost. Your board’s journey might be fraught with obstacles and challenges, with unexpected forks in the road, and with detours that hinder your progress. But don’t devote undue time to worrying about what might happen. Instead, devote your time and energies to making things happen. After all, the best way to ensure our desired future for public education is to create it! ■

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