



Raising the Bar

You'll be hearing a lot about higher expectations in the weeks and months ahead. Our state is setting higher expectations for student achievement. Schools and teachers will soon be evaluated on how well students perform on state assessments. As we raise the bar, schools will once again be asked to do more with less.

The WASB Board of Directors recognizes school boards are facing many challenges in these tough economic times. That is why the WASB Board chose to hold membership dues for the 2012-13 school year to last year's rates, froze WASB staff compensation for the second time in the past three years, and adjusted its employee health insurance benefits.

As we tighten our belts, please know that we are maintaining all of the benefits of your WASB membership, keeping you informed of developments that affect your board and your district. The WASB is setting high expectations too.

In July, Wisconsin received final approval for its No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act waiver. In the coming months, I strongly encourage every school board throughout the state to learn about the changes that will be implemented as a result of the waiver and the impact on community engagement.

The WASB is here to help with timely programs and accurate information you can use to help your district understand and adjust to these changes.

As part of its waiver application, Wisconsin pledged to implement a new statewide accountability system that will include report cards — to be

issued for the first time this fall — grading each public school.

Reading and math scores on the school report cards will be calculated using new Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) proficiency cut scores based on more rigorous proficiency levels linked to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The new cut scores will apply significantly higher proficiency benchmarks than were applied in the past, resulting in changes to the percentages of students in each performance category. Test results likely will show a significant, one-time decline in the number of students considered to be “proficient” or “advanced” on the WKCE.

School leaders need to be prepared to explain to their communities that this decline does not reflect a decline in the abilities or performance of students or schools, but rather reflects higher standards and aspirations the state is setting for students. As Sevastopol Superintendent Steve Cromell told his school board earlier this summer, “Kids aren't going to change, but their scores will be much lower.”

The school report cards are the only place these new NAEP-based data will be found. There will be no adequate yearly progress (AYP) determinations for the 2011-12 school year, so attention will be focused on the report cards.

With new data suddenly at the hands of district leaders, community members, and media, it will be important for school leaders to understand this data and be equipped to ask the right questions about it. On page 26,

WASB Governance and Leadership Development (GoLD) Consultant Vicki McCormick provides some direction on how board members can prepare to process this new data and use it as you lead your school district.

Your district has received information from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) about these report cards and changes in cut scores. In the coming weeks, you should be having a board conversation about these changes and how to communicate with the public.

The WASB will continue to keep you up to date on these changes and provide you with the most current information available to help you utilize the new data and continue communicating to your parents and other constituents about the changes.

Because we are all budget-conscious, the WASB is offering four, free August Workshops featuring sessions where board members can learn about the accountability reforms that accompany the waiver — school report cards, new standards and tests, educator evaluations, and data-based decision-making to name a few. You'll get a preview of what you will need to know about data to ask productive questions and make solid decisions in this new context.

For board-specific assistance, the WASB GoLD consultants stand ready to help and the WASB will be holding workshops this fall on data assessment and other related topics. More information about the waiver and impending changes is available on both the WASB and DPI websites. ■

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