



## Stay Focused on Students

With all the changes coming at public education, the last thing many of us expected as we started the new school year was to have to revisit Act 10. However, that is exactly what has happened. Once again, we need school leaders to keep the focus on students and their needs as legal battles resume over the collective bargaining rights of teachers and others.

In mid-September, a circuit court in Dane County issued a decision overturning a number of changes made last year to the state's collective bargaining laws by Act 10 and Act 32. While this decision is likely to be mired in appeals for months to come, it's going to be incumbent on school leaders to stay focused on improving student achievement.

While we wait for the courts to make their final rulings, there are several important things for school leaders to know. Regardless of whether the ruling stands on appeal:

1. This ruling does not return school board and unions to the bargaining laws that existed prior to February 2011. Rather, the decision removed a limited portion of the collective bargaining changes made last year.

2. Interest arbitration is not available to school district bargaining units. The dispute resolution process ends with mediation. As a result, school boards retain significant control over the final decisions to be made in regard to the management of the school district after they meet in good faith with their bargaining units and attempt to reach a voluntary agreement.

3. For school boards and school district unions, the statutory definition of "collective bargaining" identifies "wages" as the only mandatory subject of bargaining.

4. School boards and school district bargaining units remain limited to executing one-year collective bargaining agreements.

While these key elements remain unchanged, other aspects of the judge's ruling may affect each school district differently depending on its unique bargaining history and the timing of its actions. For instance, school districts that entered into new collective bargaining agreements on

the brink of Act 10's effective date are likely to be in a different situation than those districts that became subject to the full scope of Act 10 as of July 1, 2011. We encourage school boards to work closely with their legal counsel to determine how the judges' ruling may affect your district.

I have no doubt that you, our state's school leaders, will navigate these changes as you did last year when major collective bargaining changes were handed down to school leaders in the midst of the school year. As always, the WASB will strive to assist school leaders in this process by providing you with timely and practical additional information about this important judicial decision.

I wish I could say this will be the last word on this topic, but we know change is the nature of leading our public schools. I was impressed by the dexterity and leadership that school board members and administrators exhibited last year when major collective bargaining changes were rolled out. I urge you to stay focused on the most important task at hand — raising student achievement for all children in our public school districts all across Wisconsin. ■

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