



Engage, Connect, Build

Congratulations to our newly elected school board members! Serving on your local school board comes with tremendous responsibility, but there is no more rewarding public service than leading a school district and educating our children.

You join us at a time of tremendous change in school districts across the state. While challenging in regards to the scarcity of resources, this may prove to be an exciting time of improving public education to meet the needs of our next generation. Scarcity often drives innovation and new ways of looking at things. The demand for overall improved student performance and narrowing achievement gaps will also challenge boards to take a fresh look at how schools operate.

As we move forward and look toward next school year, I want to encourage school boards across the state to take stock of their efforts to engage, connect with and build relationships with their communities. As you no doubt know, building partnerships with businesses, universities, colleges, and other organizations in your community is essential to offering a robust array of learning opportunities for your students. With funding cuts and other challenges, public schools simply can no longer do it alone.

I'm continually impressed with how districts utilize their limited resources to effectively educate our state's students and am inspired by your efforts to reach out to businesses and other organizations for the benefit of all involved.

To help boards in these endeavors, last summer, I asked University of Wisconsin System

President Kevin Reilly to challenge his campuses to reach out to their area public school districts even more. Our university system, along with our state's technical college system and private colleges, have been engaging their surrounding school districts in a variety of ways for years. But now, with education funding at all levels facing tight fiscal times and increasing accountability, we need to be more creative in finding ways to maximize resources and opportunities.

I'm pleased to say that a number of campuses responded favorably to our challenge. In addition to proudly documenting their activities – like those enumerated in the story by UW Oshkosh on pages 4-8, others stepped up to the challenge by taking on new efforts.

For instance, the University of Wisconsin Stout held a special, inaugural dinner for school board members in the Menomonie area last fall. At this event, school board members were joined at their tables by current UW Stout students who had graduated from the school board member's district. It was a great opportunity for school leaders to hear how well their districts prepare students for post-secondary education and for school leaders to learn about UW Stout's other K-12 outreach efforts.

I am confident we will continue to capitalize on these efforts. The opportunities for collaboration are limited only by our willpower when we engage area universities and colleges as well as area businesses and organizations in communities and regions throughout the state.

While it may not always be apparent as we debate the appropriate level of school funding and

initiatives, communities do recognize the value of their public schools.

Last month's elections featured almost 30 school referendums on ballots across the state. Although not all of them passed, voters in the School District of Beloit approved a historic \$70 million school referendum to transform and update the district's facilities. But the school district didn't pass this referendum alone – among other organizations, the Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce (GBCC) helped greatly by endorsing it.

After the referendum was approved by voters, Randy Upton, president of the GBCC offered this succinct quote to the *Wisconsin State Journal* about the importance of a strong school district, "It's going to make people proud and make people look at Beloit as a place to live and invest."

Most organizations understand if their school district succeeds, it benefits everyone in the community. When you do connect with a local organization - whether it be a regional university, technical college, business, or other organization - make an effort to let your community know about the partnership. There may be other people or organizations that will want to get involved or in the very least, you will be highlighting the numerous ways your district is adding value to the community.

In closing, please remember that the WASB is here to serve you. Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions and please visit our website wasb.org for a host of information on topics important to school board members. I look forward to working with you! ■