



## Let's Expand Their Horizons

As school leaders, we know public education is undergoing changes. Educator Effectiveness, Common Core State Standards, standardized testing, technology — the education climate is evolving.

Change can be challenging but it can also be exciting. The use of technology inside and outside our schools is providing exciting opportunities in public education. A recent study by CompTIA, a non-profit organization that is known as the voice of the world's information technology industry, found that 78 percent of K-12 educators said that technology has positively affected the classroom and productivity of students. It's changing the way our teachers teach and the way our students learn.

In the 1990s, Wisconsin schools were considered leaders in effective technology use in schools. Since then, Wisconsin has fallen behind as it has struggled to provide quality Internet access to all corners of the state. At the same time, our child poverty rate has increased — calling into question a growing technology divide between the haves and the have-nots — and schools have been facing multiple years of budget cutbacks.

Technology may hold the potential to be the great equalizer in

student achievement and is becoming increasingly vital, but schools face hurdles in ensuring that technology is implemented effectively and the technology gap doesn't threaten achievement levels. The troubling disparities in access to the Internet and the necessary digital tools may increasingly leave children behind.

There is an obligation for the state and the technology industry to play a role in limiting the technological divide in our schools. An article in *NBC News* this summer reported that “more than two-thirds of U.S. school districts are cutting back on regular maintenance and replacement of computer equipment” because of budget troubles. And a survey by the Federal Communications Commission, reports that “half of schools and libraries that apply for federal subsidies have ‘lower speed Internet connectivity than the average American home — despite having, on average, 200 times as many users.’”

If we truly want our students to be college- and career-ready, we must provide a learning environment which utilizes technology effectively and provides the human and physical connections that make learning possible. Every child deserves the resources that will prepare them to

be contributing, productive citizens.

The WASB is working with other public education groups on a proposal to significantly increase state technology funding assistance for schools. The state Legislature and governor must give this proposal serious consideration in the upcoming state budget debate. Teachers and school leaders are being creative in finding low-cost online options, but it's not just about putting a device in every student's hands. It's also about bandwidth, networking equipment, software, professional development, and leadership that is flexible and adaptable.

If used well, technology can inspire students to innovate and excel. It can open their worlds — expanding their horizons on a global scale and leading them into opportunities and careers they may never have dreamed about. Our future depends upon how well we prepare our children for tomorrow.

As a final note, thank you to all of our school board members for the work you do for our students — you are our everyday heroes. In appreciation of your efforts, the WASB is celebrating Oct. 5-11 as Wisconsin School Board Appreciation Week. Never forget that the work you do matters. ■

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