



Make Your Voice Heard

Welcome to our new school board members who will be taking the oath of office this month and finding their place at the board table alongside their fellow school board members. We congratulate you on your election and look forward to working with you!

To our experienced board members who will be leaving office, thank you for your service, your commitment and your dedication to public education. Whether you served for three years or 30, you strengthened democracy by taking an active role in local government. I encourage you to continue your advocacy efforts as private citizens in supporting public education and the efforts of your school board.

As our current school board members and administrators know, our new board members are joining at a crucial time for public education.

We need everyone — current, incoming and alumni school board members — to speak up on behalf of public education and the public's investment in our young people. A perfect storm of partisan politics, voucher school expansion, and public school funding cuts is creating a new reality of what Wisconsin school districts face.

Public schools would see a net decrease of \$130 per student in state funding in the proposed budget. The vast majority of our school-aged children in Wisconsin attend public schools. We need to make sure law-

makers in Madison are concerned about their futures and the futures of our communities, and invest in public education appropriately.

As the state budget debate continues and legislators tackle education-related issues during the 2015-16 legislative session, I also encourage you to ask your legislators to support initiatives that are backed by research and focused on what is best for student learning. Initiatives such as: investments and improvements in early childhood, children's mental health services, technology, and professional development for teachers and administrators.

Just like we use data to inform our decisions on local school boards, we need to urge our lawmakers to refocus on sound, practical, research-backed education initiatives that have proven results.

You — our state's school board members — can play a key role in ensuring that the voices of our public schools are heard in Madison. If you haven't already, contact your local lawmaker and establish a relationship. As one locally elected official to another, your input can have a direct impact on your lawmakers' outlook and view on public education. We also encourage districts to educate their communities about the impact of diverting funding away from their public schools. Find ways for community members to speak out. Now is the time to make your district's voice heard.

There is a lot of work ahead of us. During the third week of April, the WASB will be holding New School Board Member Gatherings throughout the state to help get new members orientated. On May 2 in Appleton, we'll be holding the WASB Spring Academy with tracks for new and experienced school board members. And on July 18, the Summer Leadership Institute will allow members to delve more deeply into topics. In addition, the WASB offers many publications, events, and other services aimed at helping school board members become better informed leaders.

Again, I welcome our new school board members and thank those outgoing members for their service. I encourage our new board members to attend a New Board Member Gathering and visit our website (wasb.org) to get acquainted with the information and expertise that is at your fingertips.

Another way to access the information and resources available from the WASB is to download our new mobile app. It includes links to education news, notifications from the WASB, event information, Legislative Updates and much more. To download, search "WASB" in the iTunes or Google Play stores.

School board service is an important responsibility with many complicated issues surrounding public education. As you begin your work, remember that we're here to serve you. ■

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