



## A Vision for Public Education

In recent years, the conversation about public education in Wisconsin has been mostly dominated by funding cuts, vouchers and shifting academic standards. I think all of us have been frustrated by the list of changing mandates handed down from the state and meandering debates over a host of educational policy items. These debates have deterred, rather than helped, local officials create a better atmosphere for public education in the state.

It's my belief that we've gotten bogged down in these circuitous, unproductive discussions because, as a state, we lack a strong vision for public education. Without a clear, focused goal, others have been able to distract us from our mission and take us down a path that hinders the success of our public schools.

Public education isn't perfect. We have challenges and obstacles. We need to acknowledge that we can do better in ensuring that all students — each and every one of them — leaves our doors with the skills and experiences that will prepare them for their next steps in life. And we need the courage and fortitude to acknowledge when there are issues and confront them head on.

But public education is democracy at its finest — locally elected officials overseeing a system that ensures the education of our next generation of citizens. We need to take back the conversation about

the future of our public schools. A vision for its success cannot be decreed by the state. It needs to come from local communities across Wisconsin in a bottom-up movement. The WASB is committed to fostering this discussion.

As school leaders, I ask each of you to think about your vision for public education. Ask your students, staff, parents and community members about what they expect. Listen and learn from their responses as you set your goals and strategic plans. It is through these conversations and inclusive dialogue that, ultimately, will lead the way to increased achievement and better outcomes for all of our students.

My vision for public education includes: adequate, appropriate and predictable funding for every school district in the state; ensuring that all teachers have the skills necessary to meet students where they are and take them to the next level; technology accessible at school and at home for every student; solid investments in proven, early childhood education programs; supportive communities who recognize that public education is a collaborative endeavor; engaged parents who are involved in their child's education; and the authority for local school boards and administrators to manage their districts in the best interest of their students and their communities.

But we want to hear about your vision.

In this issue of *Wisconsin School News*, we feature a commentary on a vision for school funding from Tony Klaubauf, superintendent of the Denmark School District, and Peter Ross, superintendent at the Seymour Community School District. We hope to feature more articles like this in the coming months on your vision of what public education should be.

We've looked closely at the feedback you gave us at this fall's Regional Meetings during the community engagement activity. You're clearly hungry for more information — both about what's happening at the Capitol and from other school districts on what has worked for them. We're working on finding additional ways to actively and efficiently connect with you through our timely and informative Legislative Update blog and weekly electronic newsletter, provide you with more resources including sample press releases, and help make your voice heard. We also encourage you to share your stories — at the upcoming State Education Convention, on our Stand Up for Public Education website and through the *Wisconsin School News* so your colleagues across the state can learn from your example.

We look forward to hearing from you! ■

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