



## The Foundation for Successful Schools

School leadership is not easy work. Our state is faced with its share of challenges inside and outside of the classroom. In April, more than 30 school districts went to referendum, either to exceed revenue limits or to issue debt for school building projects. We were pleased that most of these referendums passed, but it was also a reminder of how many public school districts are struggling under our state's school finance system.

With the increased role of school referendums in our public schools, we're running a series of related articles in the *Wisconsin School News*. These articles are not your typical referendum articles. Rather, WASB consultants are taking an in-depth look at critical district operations such as comprehensive financial and facility assessments in order to help school board members fully understand their financial situations and realize their student achievement goals. This kind of work is important for any school district to complete, not just those considering a referendum. As WASB Consultant and respected retired school administrator Roger Price points out, schools are a community asset and it's the responsibility of school leaders to conduct an objective assessment and analysis resulting in long-term, fiscally responsible plans.

In this issue, Price teams up with another WASB consultant — David

Carlson, who is also a well-respected expert in school finance. They take an in-depth look at school district financial assessments, a crucial process for school leaders to undertake to get an accurate picture of their district's short- and long-term finances. More importantly, this kind of work puts the board in the driver seat. Having a clearer picture of your district's finances can take some of the guess work out of decision-making. Understanding your district's financial state is a major step in moving the board, district leadership, and community to a shared understanding of how best to educate its students. A district can empower itself by completing and maintaining or updating a financial assessment.

We will include at least two more special articles on deeper issues related to school referendums in upcoming issues of the *Wisconsin School News*. Future articles include a look at facility assessments, and another will feature advice from referendum professionals.

Preparing for a referendum is a long, multi-step process. In addition to the nitty-gritty work of monitoring your district's finances and facility needs, one of the best things districts can do to prepare for a referendum is communicate with your community. Communication professionals repeatedly tell us that school leaders need to increase our communication efforts. On page 20,

Sarah Heck and Kevin Hickman of the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association explain the value of an investment in communications.

As I mentioned, leading a school district is not easy work but I want to remind new school board members of the many resources available through the WASB to help school leaders. The WASB serves public school districts in Wisconsin by advocating on your behalf in Madison, providing policy and legal services and information among a host of other services. If you need more information about how to conduct a financial or facility assessment — or want help completing one, don't hesitate to contact the WASB. Please visit us at [wasb.org](http://wasb.org), email us at [info@wasb.org](mailto:info@wasb.org) or call us at 877-705-4422.

I'd like to close by welcoming our new school board members. Last month, I travelled around the state and met with many of our newest members at the WASB's New Board Member Gatherings. These informal meetings acquainted newly elected school board members with the basics of school board governance and introduced them to some of their colleagues in their WASB region.

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. *Welcome!* ■

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