



## Governing for Success

The start of a new school year is here. Students are back in the classroom and eager to learn.

It's an exciting and important time of year for everyone in public education, including school boards.

It is well documented how teachers and administrators play a tremendous role in impacting student learning and academic success. They are in school every day working directly with students. The school board's role in student achievement, while present, has not been studied as extensively.

So I was excited to learn recently that new research from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has found a positive correlation between the Key Work of School Boards and academic outcomes.

Conducting their research independent of the WASB, the researchers, Dr. Michael R. Ford and Dr. Douglas Ihrke, surveyed Wisconsin school board members in 2013 via an 89-question board governance survey. Their results provide evidence of the value of adhering to the guiding principles of the Key Work of School Boards, which identifies the core strategies that effective boards implement to ensure all students achieve at high levels.

The Key Work of School Boards was developed by the National School Boards Association and revised earlier this year. It includes five action areas that are examined in detail — vision, accountability, policy, community leadership, and board/superintendent relationships. The Key Work describes the characteristics of high-achieving school boards and provides strategies and ideas for incorporating those characteristics into the governance of the school district.

The latest research by Ford and Ihrke found a statistically significant, positive correlation between experienced board members (having served five years or more) who follow the Key Work principles and the reading proficiency scores among their students, and no evidence that adhering to the Key Work principles has a negative effect.

This research helps to validate earlier studies such as the Iowa Association of School Board's Lighthouse Study, which involved a number of Wisconsin school districts and used case studies to demonstrate that the way a school board governs can impact student achievement.

The greatest predictor of student achievement is, of course, the demographics of the students and their

income status. However, school boards have no control over those factors. What they can control is their own behavior and how they govern. While it may be easy to talk about the common characteristics of effective school boards, the challenge is putting them into action and making them a habit of the board.

Thus, the Key Work of School Boards — either in its entirety or specific segments — will be the focus of a number of upcoming WASB events. In addition to presentations at all of the Regional Meetings throughout the state in September and October, there will be workshops this fall in Madison in conjunction with the WSAA/WASB Employment and School Law Seminar and at CESA 11. We hope to see you at one or more of these events. Look for more workshops and presentations to be scheduled in the future, including at the State Education Convention in January, and feel free to contact the WASB to have a workshop scheduled in your region.

As the new school year gets underway, we owe it to our students to be mindful of best practices in governance and put the Key Work principles into action. ■

While it may be easy to talk about the common characteristics of effective school boards, the challenge is putting them into action and making them a habit of the board.