



Equity in Education

"We affirm in our actions that each student can, will, and shall learn. We recognize that based on factors including, but not limited to, disability, race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, not all students receive equitable educational opportunities. Educational equity is the intentional allocation of resources, instruction, and opportunities to meet the specific identified needs of students and staff in the local school community."

At their June meeting, the WASB Board of Directors adopted the statement above to publicly reaffirm their commitment to educational equity.

As school leaders, we agree that no matter where a child lives, they are entitled to a strong public education. Students in Ashland should have similar opportunities as students in Beloit. Likewise, all our students — no matter their background, race, gender, culture or socioeconomic status — should have equal opportunity to succeed in our schools.

Unfortunately, research shows that students from different backgrounds have different experiences in our education systems. Analysis of public school funding by The Education Trust found that most states provide less funding to school districts that serve large populations of students of color and students from low-income families.

In the U.S. today, school districts serving the largest populations of Black, Latino, or American Indian students receive roughly \$1,800, or 13 percent, less per student in state and local funding than those serving the fewest students of color. This may seem like an insignificant amount, but it adds up. For a school district with 5,000 students, a gap of \$1,800 per student means a shortage of \$9 million per year. (*"Funding Gaps 2018," The Education Trust*)

There is an opportunity gap in how our education system delivers

education to different groups of students. The differences can lead to the inequitable distribution of opportunities and resources, which, in turn, can lead to very different academic outcomes for our students. Unfortunately, in Wisconsin, we know all too well about the achievement gap — the academic disparity between groups of students.

To be clear, equity in education is about serving all of our students. It's about ensuring that we are meeting the educational needs of students regardless of disability, race, gender, and socio-economic class. It's about making sure that all students are welcome in all courses, including for instance, our science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) offerings.

Focusing on educational equity is becoming increasingly important as our state and nation becomes more diverse and poverty levels rise. In 2000, 17 percent of children under age 18 in the U.S. lived in families below the poverty level. In 2015, that number had increased to 22 percent and reports indicate that it will continue to climb.

In this issue of *Wisconsin School News*, we want to help start the conversation around educational equity if it is not already taking place at your board table. The article on page 14 provides some best practices used in districts that strive for educational equity and some practical advice on what school boards can do.

Governing for educational equity isn't just the right thing to do, it's also in our state's best economic

interests. The more we can support all students in our schools, the more likely they will be to succeed and grow into productive adults. If we hope to move forward as a state, we need all our students to achieve their potential.

As always, improving the effectiveness of your board sets the stage for tackling issues like equity. Later this month, we will be holding four governance workshops led by WASB consultants that focus on effective governance and developing strong board/administrator relationships. The workshops will take place in Turtle Lake (Aug. 7), Whitewater (Aug. 8), Tomahawk (Aug. 14), and Fennimore (Aug. 15)

The WASB Regional Meetings, which begin in late September, provide an opportunity to connect with members and celebrate our wonderful school leaders in each part of the state. The pre-meeting workshops will be led by experienced WASB attorneys and will focus on running effective board meetings. We will also be holding a series of advocacy workshops at various locations across the state in November.

We've also begun looking ahead to the annual State Education Convention, taking place Jan. 23-25 in Milwaukee. The convention's theme is Leading for Excellence and Equity.

For more details on all of these upcoming events, visit WASB.org or see Association News on pages 25.

We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meetings and working with you to improve educational equity in our state. ■