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Official publication of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards

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EXCELLENCE Gaps

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Cover photo credit: Racine Unified School District

Stanford Study Finds Vouchers Do Not Improve Student Achievement

A study published in February from Stanford University found no evidence that voucher programs significantly improve test scores. Martin Carnoy, a professor in the Stanford Graduate School of Education, authored the study, which was published by the Economic Policy Institute. Carnoy's report found that while vouchers may have a slight impact on graduation rates, those benefits are outweighed by the risks that voucher programs pose.

"The evidence is very weak that vouchers produce significant gains in learning," Carnoy said. "They also carry hidden costs, and they're distracting us from other solutions that could yield much higher returns."

Carnoy analyzed research conducted over the past 25 years, including studies of programs in Milwaukee, New York City, Washington, D.C., Indiana and Louisiana. In Milwaukee, where the nation's second-largest voucher program has been operating for more than 20 years, only a quarter of students attend their neighborhood school.

"If choice were the answer, Milwaukee would be one of the highest-scoring cities in the country," Carnoy said.

The study also addressed the hidden costs of voucher programs. Proponents of school choice argue that vouchers cost less than public education. However, Carnoy's study revealed that student transportation and other costs associated with vouchers could raise public education costs by 25 percent or more. □

Three Lakes School District Receives National Honor

Each year, the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) Magna Awards recognize school board best practices and innovative programs that advance student learning. This year, the Three Lakes School District received honorable mention for its work in promoting cultural change.

NSBA selected the Three Lakes School District in Oneida County for its efforts to reduce discipline issues and increase student achievement. The district worked with UW-Madison and found that student

engagement in the district was low. To engage all students, the district developed a career planning program focused on career exploration and educational planning.

"This model required students to complete research on the areas of their interest and report back to their class on the educational requirements, costs, and job opportunities in their selected fields by the end of eighth grade."

Congratulations to the Three Lakes School District! □

STAT OF THE MONTH

38%

Percent of Wisconsin eighth-grade students scoring at proficient or advanced on the science portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), compared to the national average of 31 percent.

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Two Schools, One District Nominated for Green Ribbon Awards

Two Wisconsin public schools and one school district will be considered for awards from the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools program.

The awards program recognizes schools and districts that act to reduce their environmental impact and costs, improve health and wellness, and provide effective environmental and sustainability education. Wisconsin's 2017 nominees are Houlton Elementary School in the Hudson School District and Kromrey Middle School in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. In addition, Washburn School District was

nominated for a District Sustainability Award.

Wisconsin has had 15 public schools, one private school, and four public school districts receive national awards since the program's inception in 2012. Wisconsin's Green Ribbon Award recipients are among 295 schools, 47 school districts and 25 post-secondary institutions that have been recognized nationwide.

"Meeting the requirements to be considered a Green Ribbon school means taking a hard look at day-to-day practices to make improvements," said State Superintendent Tony Evers. □



Welcome New School Board Members

This month, we welcome our newly elected school board members who will be sworn in and begin their service. Congratulations for standing up and helping to lead your local public schools. 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 and your commitment and dedication to public education. 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. Please consider becoming a WASB alumni member to continue receiving information from the WASB.

As our current school board members and administrators know, our new board members are joining at a crucial time for public education. To help new school board members transition into their roles, the WASB offers a series of New School Board Member Gatherings. These informal, evening gatherings

take place in each WASB region between April 17 and 20. If you will have a new school board member in your district, please inform them of the gathering in your respective WASB region (see page 26). Or, better yet, join us at the gathering and bring along any new school board members in your district. The gatherings are free and open to new and experienced board members and superintendents.

Another WASB event geared toward both new and experienced board members will be taking place in May (see page 27). The Spring Academy Workshops will be expanded this year with 12 locations across the state. We hope the selection of locations will make it easier for members in every corner of the state to attend. The events will begin with a dinner and include an in-depth workshop on the roles and responsibilities of school board members. We'll discuss the foundations of effective governance as well as the open meetings and public records laws, and much more. The Spring Academy Workshops not only provide practical knowledge to help you govern your school district

but they also provide opportunities to meet other school leaders in your area. The workshops will be followed up by the Summer Leadership Institute in Green Bay on July 14-15. The agenda will be released soon.

Effective school board governance is crucial to the success of our public school districts. Every district needs dedicated and knowledgeable school board members providing the link between their schools and their communities. It is not an easy job. The challenges our public school districts face are complex and require thoughtful, long-term planning. I encourage all of our members to use the resources and opportunities available through the WASB. These include WASB events as well as a host of publications, newsletters and support in all areas of school board leadership including school law, policy, superintendent search, governance, community engagement and advocacy.

As we move forward, please remember that the WASB is here to serve you — our public school leaders. You can find support and resources at the WASB. We're here for you. ■

Effective school board governance is crucial to the success of our public school districts. Every district needs dedicated and knowledgeable school board members providing the link between their schools and their communities.



EXCELLENCE Gaps

Any Wisconsin school administrator or school board member is familiar with the concept of achievement gaps — the large achievement disparities between students of various income or racial/ethnic subgroups. According to Stanford’s Center for Education Policy Analysis, Wisconsin has some of the largest black-white achievement gaps in the nation.

Mitigating these gaps is certainly an important endeavor from both equity and economic perspectives. However, an unfortunate side effect

of such a strong focus on differences in minimum-proficiency achievement is that it can cause other levels of performance to go overlooked. After

all, just because there are some African American students who need support to reach grade-level proficiency doesn’t mean there aren’t also high-achieving African Americans who need similar support from their schools.

Nearly every assessment includes a high-performing category, often labeled as “advanced” or “significantly exceeds expectations” to



The Inequality Challenge of the 21st Century

Scott J. Peters, Ph.D. and Jonathan A. Plucker, Ph.D.

signify students who have mastered content above their respective grade level. Whereas the focus of the 20th century was on minimal proficiency gaps, the skill gaps that will be the equity concern of the 21st century will be at these advanced levels of achievement; what we refer to as excellence gaps.

At the recent Wisconsin State Education Convention, I (Scott

Peters) presented some National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data on rates of advanced achievement in 12th grade science (2015), economics (2012) and writing (2011). In the 2015 science assessment only 1 percent of African American students scored advanced compared to 6 percent of Asian students. This leaves a gap of 5 percentage points. It's worth

Whereas the focus

of the 20th century was on minimal proficiency gaps, the skill gaps that will be the equity concern of the 21st century will be at these advanced levels of achievement; what we refer to as **excellence gaps.**

noting that the overall rate of advanced achievement in science is only 2 percent, something we continue to find shocking, but what is just as concerning as the low rate of advanced achievement overall is the disparity with which various groups reach this high rate of achievement. Typically, we recommend comparing income groups (those who are vs. are not eligible for free or reduced-price meals) and racial/ethnic groups (white, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American) as a measure of excellence gaps.

■ Why Excellence Gaps?

The reason we argue that excellence gaps will be the inequality focus of the 21st century is because minimal proficiency skills no longer guarantee success in the global workforce. According to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, the percentage of jobs requiring routine manual or cognitive skills has been relatively flat for decades,

whereas the percentage of jobs requiring non-routine manual or cognitive tasks has exploded. In 1983 only 30 percent of jobs required non-routine cognitive skills; in 2014 it was closer to 60 percent (Artificial Intelligence, 2016). Similarly, around 2009, foreign applicants surpassed American applicants in receiving United States patents (US Patent and Trademark Office, 2017). Put simply, we as a nation are starting to fall behind in the race for innovation and creative productivity and increasing the rate of minimal proficiency achievement is unlikely

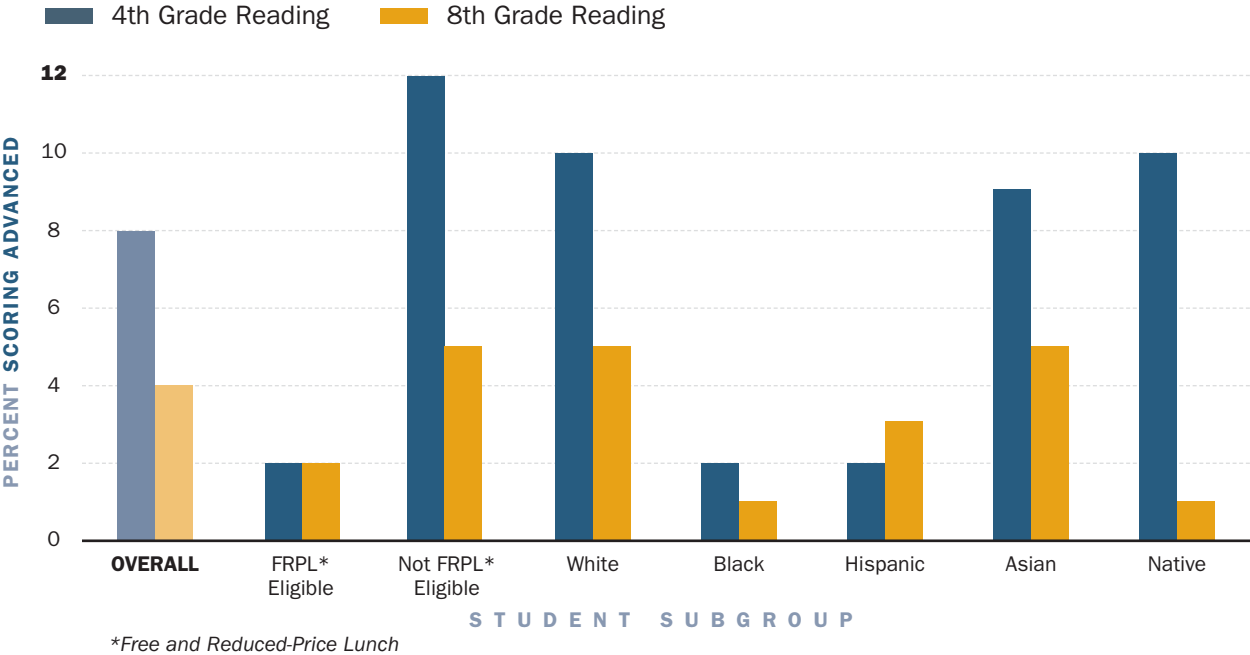
to change this. Greater attention to skills beyond grade level is needed.

■ **Excellence Gaps in Wisconsin**

In Wisconsin, we evaluated excellence gaps using the 2015 NAEP data on reading, math, and science. Figure 1 presents data on reading/English language arts, Figure 2 on math, and Figure 3 on science. In all of these figures, the size of excellence gaps is best viewed by comparing same-color bars from left to right.

It is easy to review the data presented in Figures 1 through 3 and become disheartened. We find the science data in Figure 3 especially upsetting, given that the percentage of Wisconsin African American students who score advanced in science rounds to zero. The same is true with Native American students. Does this mean there are no talented Native or African American students in Wisconsin? No! But it does mean they are not receiving sufficient opportunities to develop the advanced potential they might have. The income group comparisons are

Figure 1. Rates of advanced achievement | 2015 NAEP Wisconsin READING



Computing Excellence Gaps

Anyone with Internet access can compute excellence gaps for any Wisconsin school or district. Start from the Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard (WISEdash) at wisedash.dpi.wi.gov.

1. **Choose data** from the Badger Exam, Forward Exam, or old WKCE from the dropdown menu.
2. **Select a school district** of interest as well as subject area. The page will automatically update to show the school or district profile as far as achievement in this content area.
3. **Select “economic status” or “race/ethnicity”** under the “group by” option to investigate minimal proficiency or excellence gaps. This will then present the rates at which the student groups have achieved at both grade level proficiency and advanced achievement.

especially informative in this regard. In nearly every case, students who are from higher income families score at advanced levels about three times as often as do students from low-income families. In the United States, income simply allows you greater educational opportunities

both in and out of school. If services to develop advanced abilities are not provided as part of the public school system, then families who can afford to will seek them out elsewhere. This can exacerbate excellence gaps.

The analysis is not complicated, nor is it especially revolutionary.

What is different about excellence gaps is that they force districts to consider what they are doing to close opportunity gaps at the highest levels of achievement and not just at minimal levels. School and district leaders need to ask themselves some important questions:

Figure 2. Rates of advanced achievement | 2015 NAEP Wisconsin MATH

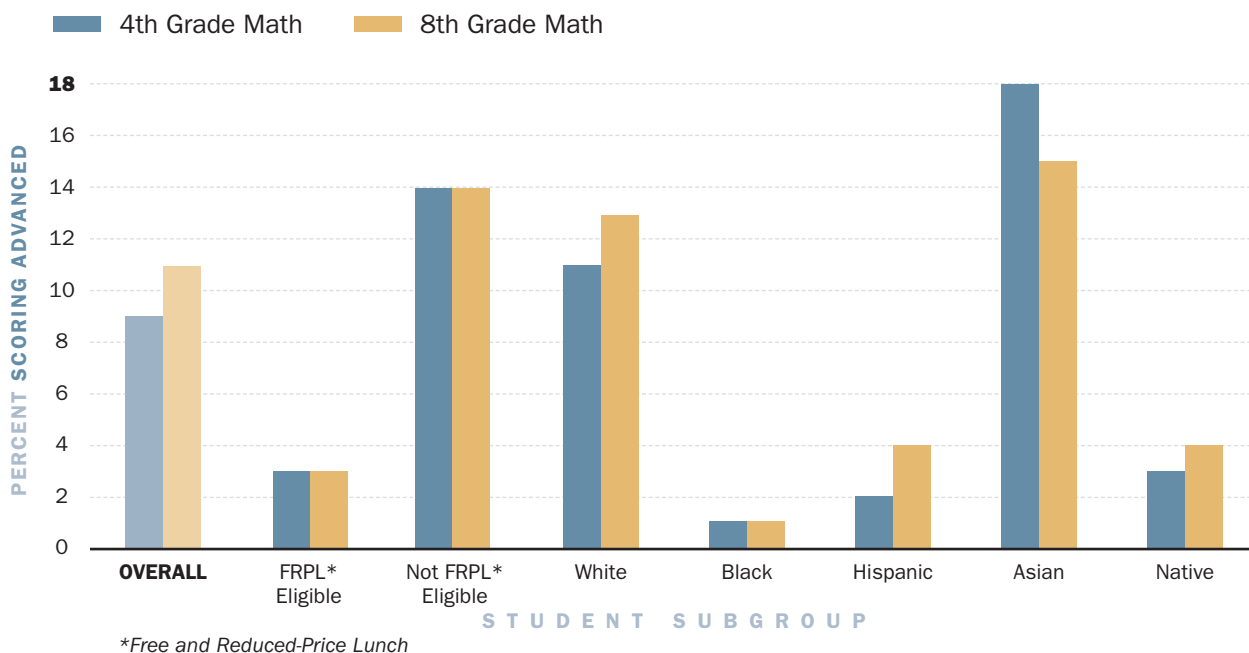
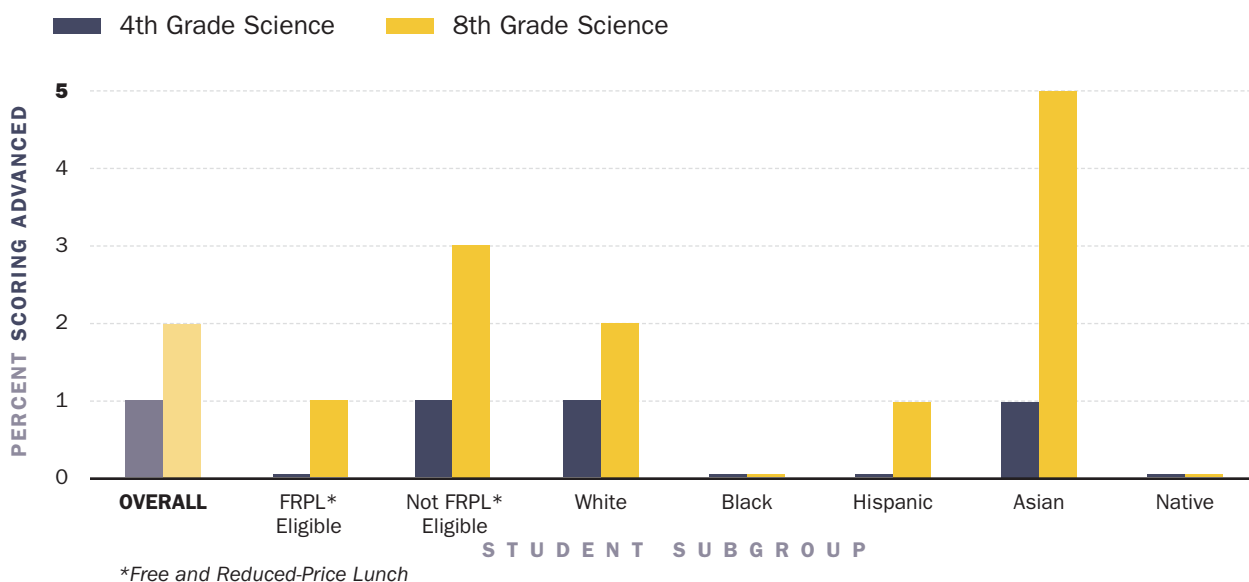
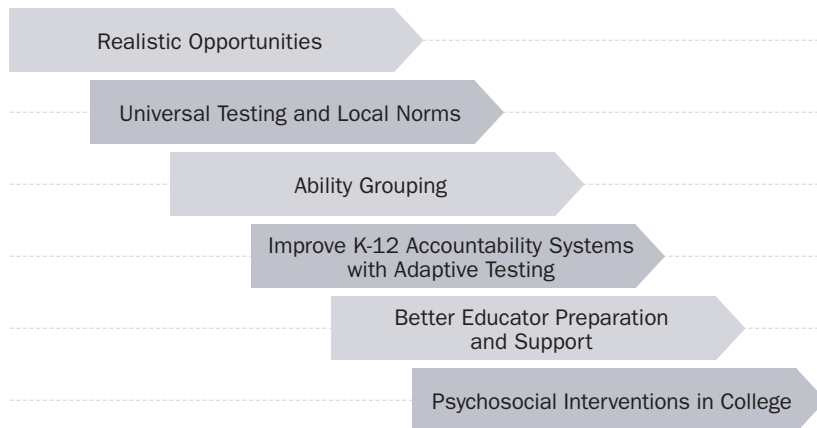


Figure 3. Rates of advanced achievement | 2015 NAEP Wisconsin SCIENCE



The Model for Shrinking Excellence Gaps



- What are we doing to close excellence gaps?
- How will the adoption of a particular new program or curriculum influence those students who are already proficient?
- What could be done to help more students from low-income, African American, Latino/a, or Native American families score at advanced levels?
- How could we include the mitigation of excellence gaps in strategic plans or SMART Goals?

- How much are excellence gaps hurting the district's report card score for "closing gaps"?

In our book, "Excellence Gaps in Education: Expanding Opportunities for Talented Students," we presented a model as a path toward closing excellence gaps.

Some of these interventions, such as changing teacher education programs to include attention to how all students will grow, are beyond what a single district can do. But an individual school district can change how it identifies talent from national

test norms to local norms. Similarly, it can also make sure that all students have access to advanced classes and programs and that there are services earlier on in their careers to help prepare them to benefit from these programs. The Advanced Placement® SpringBoard® program is a good example. The interventions themselves are not especially revolutionary, but they would require proactive attention and the allocation of resources.

In nearly every state in the nation, excellence gaps are large and growing (for state specifics, see Plucker, Hardesty, and Burroughs, 2012). Every year that the nation and the state of Wisconsin fail to stem this growing form of inequality, both fall farther behind in the race for economic competitiveness, creativity, and the development of individual talent. ■

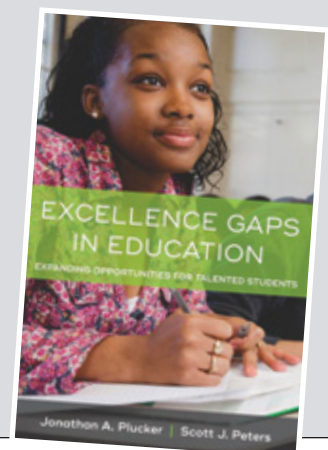
Scott J. Peters is an associate professor of educational foundations at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Jonathan A. Plucker is the Julian C. Stanley Professor of Talent Development at Johns Hopkins University, with a joint appointment at the university's Center for Talented Youth and School of Education.

For More Information

In November 2016, Scott Peters and Jonathan Plucker published their book "Excellence Gaps in Education: Expanding Opportunities for Talented Students."

Check out this book for more in-depth coverage of excellence gaps in education. The book is available from Harvard Education Press at hepg.org.



NSBA Center for Public Education Study Finds Diversity Benefits Students

More than six decades after *Brown v. Board of Education*, far too many schoolchildren still attend segregated schools. A new report from the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) Center for Public Education (CPE), "School Segregation Then & Now," finds that integrated schools hold greater potential for helping all students succeed both academically and socially.

According to CPE's study, the composition of our school communities matter for improving outcomes for students, their communities, and the long-term stability and prosperity of our nation. The positive effects of diversity shouldn't be overlooked, rather, education policymakers can and should advance their efforts to purposefully increase diversity.

In its examination of school segregation across the nation, CPE found:

- Shifting demographics have changed how often students of different races attend the same schools.
- Despite progress, many students are still racially isolated. About 15 percent of black and Latino students attend schools that are less than one percent white.
- Low-income black and Latino students are far more likely to attend schools of concentrated poverty than low-income white students.

- Due to demographic patterns and legal precedents, efforts to integrate schools are often limited within district boundaries.

Although efforts to diversify schools confront significant obstacles, tools school leaders have at their disposal include:

- Creative school choice;
- Carefully drawn school attendance boundaries; and
- Inter-district partnerships on students' school assignments.

Serious efforts to address this issue must include community input, the study emphasizes. Any policy that addresses students' school assignments is controversial, as the school busing plans of the 1970s and 1980s made clear. Providing families with some level of choice may also aid in the success of new school assignment plans.

"Our message is that local, state, and federal policy-makers, as well as local community members, cannot accept that segregated schools are inevitable or the norm," says NSBA Executive Director and CEO Gentzel. □

You can view the complete study at the Center for Public Education's website, centerforpubliceducation.org.



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Keith Brandstetter

Waterford Union High School
Superintendent

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School LEADERSHIP Success



A discussion on
the separate but
important roles and
responsibilities of
the school board
and superintendent

SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP is always in the public lens with respect to its operation and the performance of the district's students. There is good reason for this constant examination since school districts are often the largest, or one of the largest organizations, in a community. A focused vision, clear expectations, and a cooperative working relationship between the school board and superintendent are the hallmarks of a successful district.

Each school district addresses financial accountability, defines student success, and establishes a cooperative atmosphere at the board level in different ways based on the local school culture. Simply saying that teamwork is all that is necessary to

create quality leadership in a school district is not enough. In this article, we will examine these issues from the perspective of the WASB Peer Mentors, who are long-serving school board members, and the superintendent perspective.

► The School Board Perspective:

- Gary Vose, *Kettle Moraine School Board*
- Howard Kruschke, *Saint Croix Central School Board*
- Larry Dux, *Pewaukee School Board*

► Superintendent Perspective:

- Dr. Al Brown, *WASB Organizational Consultant*

What is the role of a school board member or a superintendent in fostering student success?

► **School board perspective:** You must define student success in order to fully support it. It is critical that the school board and superintendent fully agree upon what constitutes student success and how it will be

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER PERSPECTIVE



Gary VOSE
Kettle Moraine
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WASB Organizational
Consultant

measured. To determine this, a process needs to be developed that includes the board, administration, teachers, parents and the community — this is a joint responsibility of the board and superintendent.

The roles of the board and superintendent are very similar in some ways and yet differ significantly when implementing a district's definition of student success. For example, both the board and superintendent have similar leadership and communication roles. However, the board is responsible for monitoring results while the superintendent must implement the strategies necessary to result in successful student outcomes. The board also needs to ensure the necessary resources (financial, staffing,

facilities, etc.) are made available while the superintendent is responsible for the proper and most efficient use of these resources. The board is also responsible for setting policy that defines staff expectations while the superintendent provides opportunities for staff development in support of student success.

Lastly, in order for the school board and superintendent to maximize student success, it is critical for both to be “on the same page.” In other words, the effect of a consistent and dedicated approach to student success creates a synergy. — *Gary Vose*

► **Superintendent perspective:**

The school board and the superintendent work as a team to develop an organizational culture that focuses on student success. This success is

created by having a shared vision for the future, shared goals to reach this vision, and shared values or beliefs to build strong relationships. The culture of continuous improvement is essential to having a positive impact on student success. The school board and superintendent relationship or teamwork is also strengthened by a laser-like focus on learning.

There are any number of innovations, ideas and politics that can distract or side-track a board and/or administration from its identified improvement aspirations. The discussion and documentation of the district vision and goals will aid in navigating the plethora of ideas and focus on improving education within their community. The documentation of this work will also aid future

WASB PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

The WASB Peer Mentoring Program is a complimentary service for school board members — new and experienced. Whether you are new to the board, new to being a board officer or just would like an additional resource, WASB Peer Mentors are available for advice, support and guidance.

Mentors are available to listen to a board member's concerns and help them identify the problem.

Mentors can support a board member in understanding his/her primary role and responsibility, including:

- **Setting** a vision for the district,
- **Ensuring** accountability for the public,

- **Setting** district policies,
- **Providing** community leadership, and
- **Developing** effective board and superintendent relationships.

If you are interested in working with a Peer Mentor, visit wasb.org or contact Sheri Krause, WASB Communications Director, at skrause@wasb.org or 608-512-1705.

WASB Peer Mentors: *Diana Bohman, Tomorrow River; Larry Dux, Pewaukee; Gabe Kolesari, Hamilton; Howard Kruschke, Saint Croix Central; Patrick Sherman, Lake Geneva; Tom Steiner, Trevor Wilmot; Gary Vose, Kettle Moraine*



boards in managing their work by creating a strong foundation for the future. The vision and goals must also be communicated with the stakeholders within a community. This linkage with the community is essential to sharing the district's story or the creation of a strong district message.

Values are the third component of developing a strong continuous improvement culture. You do not create or establish core values; you discover or identify them. The process of discovering organizational values is based on the individual values of the board, staff and community. In other words, you begin with individual values and move up to organizational values. Core values or beliefs are why you do what you do and what you stand for. These are strongly held convictions, assumptions, and priorities that guide attitudes and behaviors. — *Al Brown*

How would you describe your role with fiscal responsibility?

► **School board perspective:** Fiscal responsibility of a school board is a responsibility that covers several aspects. You need to ensure money is available to achieve the district's vision and mission. Working with the superintendent, a strategic plan should be developed as to how the budget is spent to achieve the goals of the district.

The school board should understand the district's strategic goals and not be distracted by unbudgeted spending on short-term resources which will deplete funds to achieve the strategic goals. Spending for additional personnel or unbudgeted items during a year may not leave

enough resources to hire needed teachers or fund needed programs. When proposals for spending outside the budget come before the board, the board must ask itself a few questions.

1. Does the expenditure fit with the strategic plan?
2. Is the expenditure necessary?
3. Are the funds available in the budget?
4. Is there another way to achieve the same results?

Board members should have a basic understanding of the budgetary process, taxation, and the school aid funding in order to understand revenues, expenses, and how budgets are developed.

In summary, fiscal responsibility of a board is extremely important. School boards serve as stewards of the taxpayer dollars. They need to ensure funds are spent appropriately and achieve the district's vision and mission. Lastly, strategic planning is important to ensure resources are available for district achievement and facility maintenance goals necessary for educational needs. — *Howard Kruschke*

► Superintendent perspective:

The district administrator's key role in fiscal responsibility is to provide current and accurate financial data. This data should not only monitor current expenditures, but also align school district finance to future district goals. School finance is not an activity that takes place only at the monthly board meeting, but is a constant in the district's ongoing planning process.

The budget assumptions can be identified and agreed upon with improved accuracy when staff and board members are using consistent and understandable financial information. Financial decisions and discussions can then be aligned to district goals. Long-range planning can also provide lead time in the decision-making process. This lead time increases the potential for administrators and school boards to make proactive decisions.

There are a number of models for assessing a district's current financial status but these models can also forecast future financial conditions. This a key tool to be used in the planning and decision-making process. If past trend data is combined with forecasting, school

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One of the foundational pieces to building strong, working relationships within and between school board members and the superintendent is to be very clear on the role of the school board and the role of the superintendent.

boards can make financial decisions that better align with district goals. These documents will also organize a great deal of financial information for future reference. — *Al Brown*

How do you build a working relationship (i.e., partnership, team atmosphere) within and between school board members and between the school board and superintendent?

► **School board perspective:** One of the foundational pieces to building strong, working relationships within and between school board members and the superintendent is to be very clear on the role of the school board and the role of the superintendent.

The Pewaukee School District has reviewed the National School Boards Association's *Key Work of School Boards Guidebook* to help clarify those roles and also regularly reviews its board policies to ensure they are consistent with the separation of duties and responsibilities suggested in the guidebook.

In our district, the process of developing a relationship between a potential board member and the superintendent begins when a person decides to run for the school board. Per board policy, all candidates for the board of education are invited to attend a meeting with the superintendent where they are provided with materials on district operations, the district budget, and are invited to attend board of education meetings.

The board member orientation continues after the person is sworn in, with both the superintendent and the board president meeting with the new board member to cover the board policies related to board

member expectations and other aspects of how the board functions.

The ongoing maintenance of strong working relationships involves using the WASB/School Perceptions Annual Board Development Tool. This self-evaluation survey tool is used to determine areas where further discussion and dialogue may be needed to ensure alignment between board members and the superintendent. — *Larry Dux*

► Superintendent perspective:

In past workshops, participants have heard that communication, relationships and trust are the key components of effective school governance. Trust has been a foundational construct that has accumulated a number of vague meanings and interpretations. This term could have a number of meanings and was interpreted to mean different things to different people. David Horsager's presentation at the 2017 State Education Convention in Milwaukee provided a clear understanding of the components of trust.

Horsager's eight pillars develop a connection between success and trust. These pillars are: clarity, compassion, character, competency, commitment, connection, contribution, and consistency.

These pillars are critical for creating trust within an organization. This improved trust can then be translated into better results, more effective operations, and improved student learning. Horsager's book, "The Trust Edge," would make an excellent book study for board/superintendent teams. The dialogue that will be generated by this book study can aid in the building of strong board/superintendent relationships and a broader under-

standing of individual values and organizational beliefs. — *Al Brown*

Final Thoughts

Open and honest communication is the foundation to building a strong working relationship. A strong communication foundation has an underpinning of role responsibility, a constant focus to align actions with the school district vision/goals, and monitors student learning results. The final questions for your leadership team (school board and superintendent) are:

1. Do you have a documented long-range or strategic plan?
2. Do you have a current school district vision?
3. Are your actions in alignment with your school district vision/goals?
4. Does the school board and leadership staff understand and function within their organizational leadership roles?
5. Do you annually take time to examine the changing perspectives of school board members and the superintendent on district issues and operational items?

If you answer "no" or "do not know" to any of these questions, the WASB Organizational and Governance Consultants as well as WASB Peer Mentors could provide help to your school district. WASB Organizational and Governance consultants can provide customized services to get your district on track to improve team leadership skills and focus on student learning — just give us a call at 608-257-2622 or email info@wasb.org. ■



Sheboygan Falls High School sophomore Jacob Strojny works at the school's new plastic injection molding machine.

A LOCAL Partnership

**Sheboygan Falls School District teams up
with local businesses to expand
technology education**

Anne Davis

When the Sheboygan Falls School District held its official open house last fall for the high school's new state-of-the-art Innovation Design Center, one of the stars of the show was making its debut in a high school setting.

A 33-ton injection molding machine made by Milacron in Cincinnati for commercial use was installed at the high school through an arrangement with a local business partner, Bemis Manufacturing. Giving students access to the machine is expanding the school's ability to offer technology education in new and exciting ways.

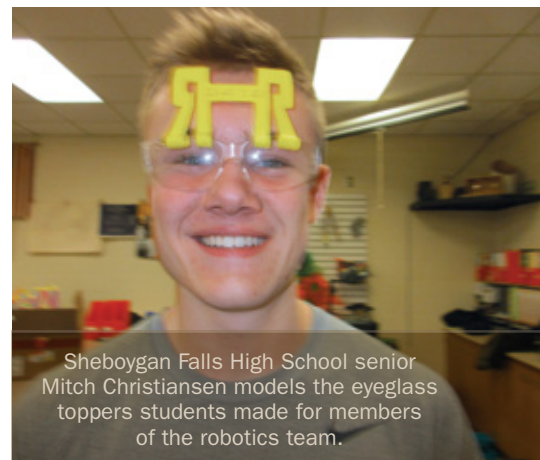
"It allows us to go full circle from design to manufacturing," explains technology education teacher Ed Hughes. "The more hands-on instruction you can do increases the learning capabilities tremendously."

During the open house, several students explained the machine's operation and passed out plastic key chains and golf ball divet repair tools they had designed and manufactured.

"It's more realistic than some other things. It kind of trains you for the real world," said one of the students, Preston Kvindlog, a senior who plans to become a mechanical engineer.

This is the first time a machine like this has been used in a high school setting, according to Milacron. But Bemis decided to work with the company to get the machine into the school as Sheboygan Falls was creating the Innovation Design Center. The machine allows the school to teach students how to manufacture plastic parts as well as be used to expose them to other skills such as hydraulics and materials management.

This year's robotics team used the machine to manufacture bright yellow eyeglass toppers to wear to their competition. And when a high school chemistry class began their unit on polymers, they visited the technology education lab to see first-hand how the plastics manufacturing process works.



Sheboygan Falls High School senior Mitch Christiansen models the eyeglass toppers students made for members of the robotics team.



The acquisition of the machine is the latest in a series of collaborations between Bemis and the school district that began to expand three years ago after Scott Kuehn took over as technical talent acquisition coordinator at Bemis.

■ Teaming Up

In addition to Bemis, Sheboygan County is home to several major manufacturing companies including the Kohler Company, Sargento Foods, Inc. and Curt G. Joa, Inc. Bemis, like the other companies, has experienced a severe shortage of highly skilled workers. Kuehn said there are as many as 3,000 open manufacturing jobs in the county.

In his new position, Kuehn

quickly identified local school districts as good partners to educate future employees — and their parents — about the types of manufacturing careers available. Although some — like engineering jobs — require four-year college degrees, there are many highly skilled jobs that pay well and require just a two-year degree.

“A four-year college is not for everyone,” said Kuehn. “This leverages the skill sets these students possess, so let’s play to their strengths.”

The first step in educating students — and their parents — was re-educating teachers and administrators.

Superintendent Jean Born said that as they began working with

Bemis, school officials were redefining their ideas about technology education. Instead of trying to teach students specific technical skills, they decided they needed to concentrate more on teaching them “soft skills” like teamwork, communication and problem-solving.

“It’s not about stuff. It’s about changing the way people think,” said Mary Blahnik, the district’s director of instruction.

■ Teacher Externships

One of the key steps to changing perceptions about manufacturing was a week-long externship that Kuehn set up for district teachers. The teachers met with employees at Bemis and listened to them explain



their jobs and the skills required to do them. The educators took part in hands-on projects and toured some of Bemis' suppliers.

After their experience, teachers were asked to develop a lesson in which Bemis employees could come into their classrooms and interact with students.

After three full rounds of the externship experience, the results have been palpable. Teachers have

adjusted their curriculums to reflect their experiences and incorporate more real-world problems into their instruction.

"That externship forces them to think outside the box, and try to connect to real life examples," Born said.

Bemis has also done shorter externships with school guidance counselors and science teachers so they can learn more about the

modern face of manufacturing.

Kuehn also worked to expand traditional school-business partnerships like job shadowing, internships and youth apprenticeships. The long-term expectation is that by creating these connections with students while they are still in school, they may return to the area after they finish college or technical school and take a job at Bemis or one of the other local manufacturers.



Policy Resource Guide

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■ Connecting with Mentors

Other local manufacturers are also working with the Sheboygan Falls School District on technology education partnerships. Dan Schlagenhaft, an engineering manager with the Kohler Company's Combustion Engineering Group, has been involved for eight years with the county-wide robotics team that is headquartered at Sheboygan Falls High School.

He got involved when his children joined the team. He is one of the mentors and local business professionals who volunteer their time to work with the students as they design their robotics challenge. These connections can pay off later and bring students back to local companies as interns or employees.

"If you're here as a mentor, you have a greater opportunity of connecting with a student," Schlagenhaft said. "In this competitive market, it's almost essential that you connect to the top talent when

they're in high school. You can't wait until college."

In addition to arranging for the injection molding machine, Bemis helped in other ways with the renovation of the technology education center. The high school had purchased a CNC lathe machine but lacked the money — approximately \$3,000 — to set it up. Bemis sent in employees to set it up for free.

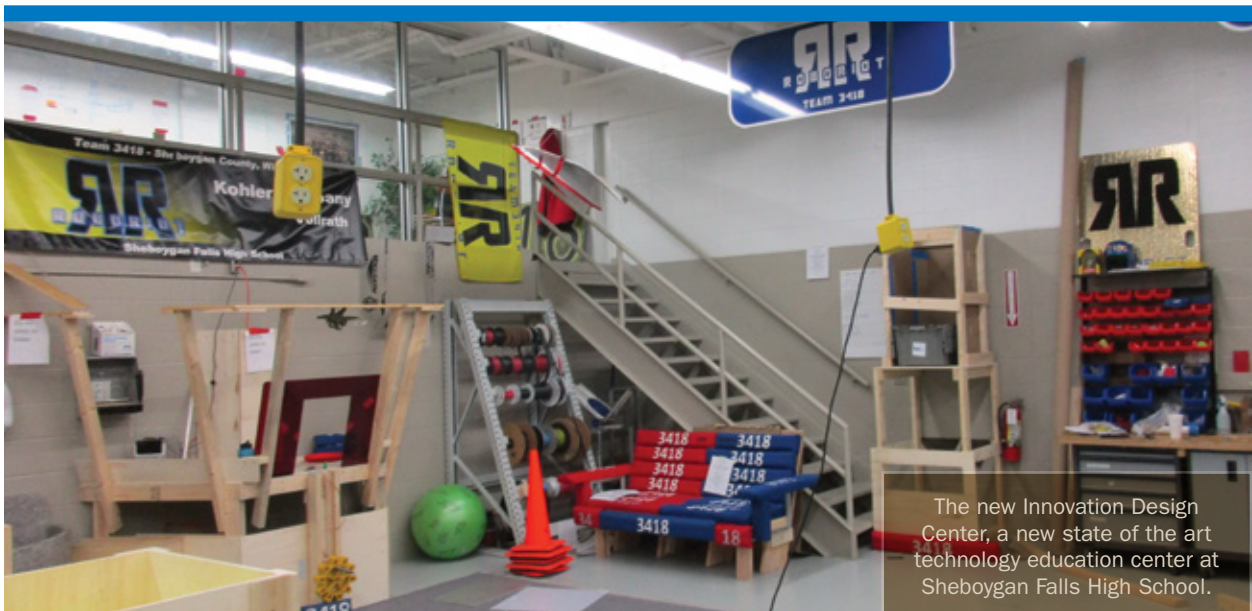
■ Help for a Small District

For a small district like Sheboygan Falls, finding the money to purchase expensive equipment like that used in the Innovation Design Center can be difficult. Kevin Dulmes, facilities manager for Sheboygan Falls, says that without the district's business partnerships with Bemis, Kohler and others, the center and the opportunities it represents would never have been realized.

"That is a sizable investment small school districts couldn't afford," he said. "This would not have happened without the help



"If you're here as a mentor, you have a greater opportunity of connecting with a student. In this competitive market, it's almost essential that you connect to the top talent when they're in high school. You can't wait until college." — Dan Schlagenhaft



The new Innovation Design Center, a new state of the art technology education center at Sheboygan Falls High School.



Without the district's business partnerships with Bemis, Kohler and others, the center and the opportunities it represents would never have been realized.

of the local businesses. The financial impact on the district was very low.”

In recognition of the work that Bemis and Kuehn have done with the Sheboygan Falls School District, Bemis was awarded first place in the first-ever Educational Outreach Contest sponsored by the Manufacturers Association for Plastics Processors or MAPP. Bemis beat out 500 entries from companies across the country to win the award.

Despite their success so far, Sheboygan Falls and Bemis both recognize there is still a lot of work to be done. One of the biggest challenges is to reach out to parents of students and convince them that manufac-

turing is a viable career choice.

“They still think of a factory as a dark, dirty place,” Kuehn said.

Instead of the old, repetitive assembly line jobs, manufacturing employees today need to have high-level problem-solving skills, he emphasized.

One argument he makes with parents is an economic one. Some students go to a four-year school, rack up student loan debt, and then graduate only to end up working in a low-paying menial job because they can't find a position in their field. By contrast, students who focus on a manufacturing position in high school can earn credits toward

college while still in high school, graduate from school debt-free, and go right into a high-paying position.

The school district and Bemis are looking forward to finding new ways to work together.

“Our challenge was trying to determine a common purpose,” Sheboygan Falls High School principal Luke Goral said.

“There wasn't a connection before,” agreed Born. “Now there's a tight connection. The business and the school understand what each other wants and needs.” ■

Anne Davis is a freelance writer and former education reporter.

Future Trends



Ten big-picture realities
facing school boards

Gary Marx

School board members and other education leaders have a profound impact on society. Both what they do and don't do are important. They are big-picture people who understand that education touches every aspect of human endeavor. The rate of change happening in our society can make it difficult to focus on the future of education. In doing so, they discover the virtual certainty of uncertainty.

Some of us ignore or refute the approaching avalanche of realities driven by massive political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and demographic forces shaping our future.

A few dig trenches they hope will be deep enough to protect them from the disruption, stimulation, and even the exciting rush of a world in constant motion. Inevitably, this tactic holds back their communities and their schools. While they defend the status quo, the world moves on and leaves them behind.

We stand on the shoulders of yesterday as we get our schools and

students ready for tomorrow in a fast-changing world. Nostalgia is wonderful, but the past is not coming back anytime soon.

In decades of working with leaders and organizations on six continents, I've discovered that the great ones have at least two things in common: They are always trying to get better, and they always have at least one eye focused on the big-picture future.

My most recent book, *Twenty-One Trends for the 21st Century*, describes a series of forces that have implications for all of us. Those trends range from aging, diversity, and the flow of generations to personalization, the economy, jobs and careers, energy, the environment, polarization, poverty, ethics, and work-life balance. This external scan should be a part of planning and making decisions. We protect ourselves from reality at our own peril.

These big-picture realities are drawn from decades of research and work with school boards and their associations. You may accept, ques-

tion, ponder, or even dismiss the importance of each of these realities. However, whatever we decide, most of these forces will continue to become even greater drivers than they are today.

Consider the following implications of these trends for our schools and the future of our students and communities.

■ The Future is in School Today

If you want a glimpse of the future, stop by your elementary school. Those 5-year-olds who thrilled their parents and grandparents on their first day of kindergarten in the fall of 2016 will turn 65 in about 2076. Then there are the 18-year-old high school seniors, the Class of 2017. They'll turn 65 in about 2064. What we do or don't do in our schools and colleges today will have profound implications for tomorrow.

■ We are of the World

Everything that happens in the

world has implications for education. It's also true that what happens in our schools has profound implications for the world. Our vision, mission, and policies prohibit, permit, or encourage education that prepares students to become productive, civil, engaged, and responsible citizens of their communities, their countries, and our planet.

■ We are Either in Touch of Out of Touch

If we understand trends and issues, people will likely say we're "in touch." If we don't understand trends and issues, they will likely declare that we are "out of touch." It's as simple as that. We sometimes lose our bearings because we only pay attention to those who agree with us. A narrow view can produce a divide that turns into a canyon and bring progress to a halt.

■ The Face of Our Nation Continues to Change

By 2043, less than half the population of the U.S. will be non-Hispanic white. Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, traditional minority students became more than 50 percent of public school enrollments. As school leaders, we understand that if we manage our diversity well, it will enrich us. If we don't, it will divide us.

Our future depends on the best possible education for all students, not just for a few.

■ Perspective and Context are Basic to Understanding

Getting a sense of perspective to see things in context is imperative for school leaders. With a big-picture view and keen insights, we're better able to understand where we are, what is happening, and how we can develop or refine policies that strengthen future-focused strategies. Of course, true perspective depends on open minds. Trying to stuff everything into a narrow point of view doesn't work. That's why we need to make sure we are always absorbing information and ideas that help us form perspective.

■ Every Institution is Going Through a Reset

Like it or not, we are moving from an industrial age into a global knowledge/information age, an age of knowledge creation and breakthrough thinking. Changes, frequently driven by technology, are often quantum and exponential. With all of that said, we too often dig in our heels, insisting that the way forward is to go backward. Henry Ford democratized the automobile as we moved more deeply into the Industrial Age. But people

had to drive those early cars on bumpy buggy trails. Today, we often are faced with preparing students for a global knowledge/Information Age limited by Industrial Age, factory-style schools and mentalities. Every institution is going through a reset. Expectations will continue to change.

■ Personalization is a Key to Relationships and Learning

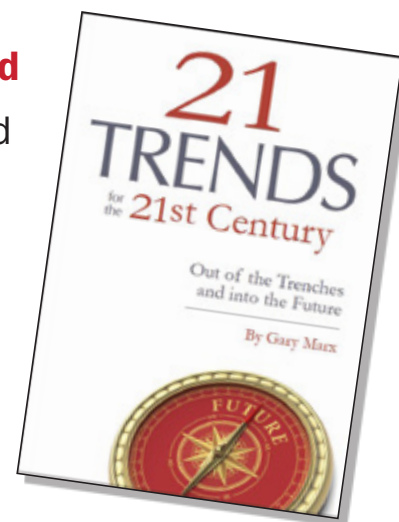
Each of us is a collection of abilities, talents, interests, motivations, hopes, and dreams. Our diversities range from racial and ethnic to socioeconomic, language, gender and gender identity, even neural diversity. Unfortunately, demands driven by high-stakes testing have led to a scoreboard mentality. That's the idea that progress is measured solely by a number, an average, a box score, rather than on fully educated people. (Note to our political colleagues: We need sound education policies but we can only do our very best in getting students ready for the future if we also have sound social and economic policies. We all have to do our part.)

■ The Purposes of Education Shape Our Future

Let me suggest five purposes for education, only for your consideration. Among those purposes are:

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— Gary Marx, author of *"21 Trends for the 21st Century"*





Many educators very proudly declare that
their school system is data driven. That's
commendable, but it's not enough.
We also need to be sensor driven.

citizenship (creating good citizens of a family, a school or college, a community, a country, and of the world); *employability* (What will it take to be employable for a lifetime, beyond a few skills for a job that might go away tomorrow?); *helping students live interesting lives* (The more we know and the more experiences we have, the more interesting education and life become.); *releasing ingenuity* that is already there; and *stimulating thinking, reasoning, problem solving, imagination, creativity, and inventiveness*. These purposes encompass all that we teach... and even more.

■ Sustainability Depends on Adaptability and Resilience

Several words help describe what's happening in the 21st century. One of those words is convergence. For example, it's where trends converge that we discover new products and services, opportunities, and solutions to problems. Consider the implication of aging for technology ... or energy and the environment for our personal well-being.

Another of those 21st century words is sustainability. Sometimes, sustainability is mistaken for stasis. In fact, in a fast-changing world, sustainability depends on adaptability and resilience. For those who insist on using their energy to defend an unsustainable status quo, here's a suggestion: Use that same energy to work with talented educators and the community to encourage a constant process for creating a future.

■ Change is Inevitable, Progress is Optional

Surrounded by talented educators and administrators, a primary responsibility of school boards is to encourage initiative. Not every idea will work but an education system should be the most connected institution in any community, constantly creating and harvesting ideas. Rather than declaring that the sky is falling when something doesn't work, consider that we are living in an era of paradox, complexity, and constant change. They are all part of a day's work in our fast-changing world.

Many educators very proudly declare that their school system is data driven. That's commendable, but it's not enough. We also need to be sensor driven. We thrive on data but we also need to be nimble enough to solve problems and address opportunities moment-by-moment.

We generally make clear that our curriculum is aligned with our goals. On top of that, we should be sure that our goals are aligned with individual needs of our students and challenges of the 21st century. For board members, that means flexible policies.

■ What Can We Do Next?

Consider holding community conversations involving anywhere from 50 to 300 people from all parts of your constituency, including educators and some students, to think through implications of the trends for our education system. They'll consider the possible impact of these trends for what students need to know and be able to do, and be

prepared to improve the quality of life in their community, the nation, and the world.

Ask them to describe an education system capable of getting students ready for life in a global knowledge/information age. Right up front, make sure everyone understands that they're focusing on the future, not holding a gripe session or a campaign event for someone's pet idea.

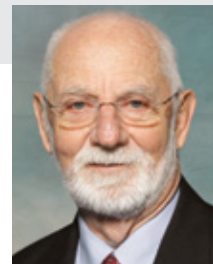
Superintendents and principals could convene futures councils, smaller groups of 12 to 15 community representatives with rotating memberships to involve as many people as possible. Ask participants to be trend-spotters. Harvest the wisdom. Get a sense of trends our neighbors think might have significant implications for our schools, quality of life, and economic progress.

Insist that every member of the team becomes a future-focused leader and make sure they have the tools to make it happen. Keep in mind that the future is where our schools will need to thrive and where our students will live their lives.

In the process, our education system will become known as the crossroads and central convening point for our community. We'll be breathing new life into the idea that "We're all in this together." ■

Gary Marx is president of the Center for Public Outreach in Vienna, Virginia. A noted author and speaker, he has provided futures, communication, and leadership counsel on six continents.

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The Ball is in Our Court

Action at the federal and state levels provides opportunities for school leaders to shape education policy

Hello Wisconsin! I am proud to be your WASB 2017 President. I have been on the WASB Board of Directors for more than four years and can tell you that the WASB is a focused organization preparing to lead Wisconsin education into the next decade and beyond.

Turning from playing defense into playing offense is not always easy, but the WASB is well situated to use its position as a positive state educational organization to play some offense. In particular, John Ashley, our WASB Executive Director, and the Government Relations team are leading the positive charge. The opportunities (and challenges) are immense with a new federal administration and new U.S. Department of Education Secretary. This coupled with the start of the two-year state budget cycle creates opportunities for a positive “give and take” dialogue at the state and federal levels. I am heartened that Governor Scott Walker has put forward a proposed budget loaded with additional educational funds, the likes of which we have not seen in recent years.

In January, I visited Washington, D.C. as a member of the WASB Executive Committee. We had positive talks with Wisconsin’s members of the House, Senate and their staffs. My feeling as a long-time Washington observer is that it is going to be difficult for Congress to move forward in a bipartisan way except perhaps in the education arena. Federal action seems possible for the reauthorization and modernization

of the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and the Child Nutrition Act, which governs school meal programs. Both bills passed the House last Congress but got bogged down in the Senate. Both laws are in need of an update and prospects appear good that Congress will enhance local control by moving more decision-making authority back to school boards with less federal strings attached.

Of course there is also the U.S. Department of Education’s implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which passed Congress in December 2015. For a while it appeared the department would try to rewrite this law through the regulatory process. But with the change in administrations, it now appears that ESSA may be implemented with less regulation, which means the intent of the law to allow states and local districts to play a more major role will be carried out.

That was a theme of our visits in Washington. While money is, and will be, tight, Congress seems willing to hand more control back to the states and, in the education arena, back to local school boards. I sensed a willingness to trust local school boards to a much greater degree than I had in the past.

It is also interesting to note that nearly all of our visits in Washington ended with talking about choice. With the president pledging to promote school choice, we made sure to point out that the Wisconsin

public school system provides considerable choice to parents and students. We talked at length about the myriad of programs that are available as choices to the students within the framework of the public school system, including open enrollment, charters, online classes, Youth Options, and more.

We also talked about what we can do for our representatives. We offered to provide data and facts regarding the education programs in our state. One of the representatives, who plays a key role on the House Education Committee, took us up on the offer and tasked us with reviewing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) program requirements. We’re always learning new and improved ways to provide educational services. Perhaps, there are ways to update the requirements while ensuring quality services and reducing costs? Congress is listening for suggestions. The ball is in our court.

Yes, believe it or not, I think that amid the government turmoil, education may well be the only place where Republicans and Democrats can get something done together. This year may bode well for education. One can certainly hope. It will not be easy, but if we all keep “Telling Our Story,” we might very well find some gold at the end of our education rainbow. Stay tuned. ■

Terry McCloskey is the WASB president, WASB Region 2 Director, and treasurer of the Three Lakes School Board.

Education may well be the only place where Republicans and Democrats can get something done together.



Advocacy Needed

Variety of factors threaten to shrink governor's per-pupil aid proposal

In his 2017-19 state budget, Governor Scott Walker has proposed a roughly \$650 million increase in funding for schools, which the WASB applauds. The bulk of the additional funding, about \$509 million, is earmarked to increase per-pupil aid payments to each district by \$200 per pupil in the first year and \$204 per pupil in the second year.

Despite our applause, the question of whether that welcomed proposed increase will withstand legislative scrutiny and become law remains to be seen. **This much is clear: school leaders will have to fight to keep the level of increase the governor has proposed.**

It will be important for school board members, administrators and parents to make a strong showing in support of the governor's proposed funding increase at the series of public hearings the Joint Finance Committee will be holding around the state (see schedule on next page).

There are a variety of reasons why legislators may choose not to go along with the governor's plan for schools.

Perhaps the biggest reason is concern over the sustainability of the spending increases for schools and other programs over the longer term.

Overall, the proposed budget increases state general fund spending by 8.3 percent over the two years. While K-12 school aid gets the largest single increase, medical assistance for the poor and disabled (Medicaid), state property tax credits, and the UW System are also slated to receive sizable increases. In addition, income tax cuts of more than \$204 million are proposed.

Some lawmakers fear that spending increases of this size could put the state into a deficit if the economy slows down. They argue that they don't want to have to come back later and make cuts should state revenues not come in as strongly as anticipated. Better to leave a bigger cushion and regret spending less than to spend more and have to risk angering the interests whose programs might have to be cut.

Sustainability fears are fueled in part because the governor's proposed budget spends more than the state is expected to take in over the next two years. The plan would draw down more than \$366 million from the state's current balance and would end the next budget cycle with a slim positive net balance of just \$11.6 million.

Some lawmakers who are con-

cerned about the sustainability of additional spending, particularly Assembly Republicans, are suggesting lawmakers should build the new budget from the current year budget — called the “base budget” in Capitol lingo — rather than from the governor's proposed budget. For school leaders, this would mean that the Legislature would start with no school aid increases on the table rather than the \$200 and \$204 per pupil aid increases proposed by the governor. School leaders would need to convince the Legislature to provide an increase.

Working off the base would be appealing to lawmakers who would like a bigger cut in income taxes rather than more spending. It would also be appealing to lawmakers who want more funding for roads and transportation — we've frequently heard \$300 million as their target. Where this money will come from — given that the governor now says he won't approve any new transportation taxes — is an open question. If it comes from the state's general fund, which is used to pay for school aids, this will clearly put the \$200 and \$204 increases in per-pupil aid at risk.

The push by Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) and

It will be important for school board members, administrators and parents to make a strong showing in support of the governor's proposed funding increase at the series of public hearings the Joint Finance Committee will be holding around the state

Assembly Republicans to work off the base budget signals an apparent rift between the Republican governor and the Republican Speaker.

As a guest speaker at the WASB Day at the Capitol event in March, Vos would not commit to the governor's proposed increases and stressed that smaller and steadier increases are more resistant to fluctuations in the national and state economies.

During the legislative panel discussion, Vos told attendees, "My job is to make sure the Legislature is a co-equal branch of government and that the budget reflects the priorities of my caucus. My job is not to just salute what the governor proposes. If we want to make changes, those changes will be made."

Vos may have some leverage as the budget bill will be taken up first by the state Assembly before it goes to the state Senate.

But Senator Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), another member of the legislative panel, took a different view. "The Senate is interested in working off the governor's budget," Olsen said. "We will vote on everything. Going off the governor's budget doesn't tie our hands one bit."

Sen. Olsen told attendees he supports the governor's proposed increases to schools and working off the governor's budget proposal rather than base budgeting because

that would give those increases the best chance of being approved.

Department of Administration Secretary Scott Neitzel, who heads the agency that puts together the governor's budget, warned that efforts in the Legislature to operate off base spending levels rather than the governor's proposal could jeopardize the proposed \$650 million in additional investments in K-12 public education.

"Think of it as going from a \$650 million increase to zero," said Neitzel.

Another reason the governor's proposed per-pupil aid increase faces tough sledding is that part of the increase is contingent upon a plan to convert state employees' health care coverage to a self-insurance model.

Lawmakers have expressed widespread reluctance to support the switch, prompting Gov. Walker to caution that it would be "unwise" for them not to support the change.

To preserve the governor's proposed \$200 and \$204 increase (or even an amount close to that) we need to urge lawmakers to support this investment in state resources for schools. As noted, school board members, parents and administrators will need to show up in force at the Joint Finance Committee hearings around the state.

In total, six public hearings on the 2017-19 state budget will be held around the state as follows:

- **Monday, April 3**
UW-Platteville, Platteville
- **Wednesday, April 5**
State Fair Park, Milwaukee
- **Friday, April 7**
Berlin High School, Berlin
- **Tuesday, April 18**
Spooner High School, Spooner
- **Wednesday, April 19**
Ellsworth High School, Ellsworth
- **Friday, April 21**
Marinette High School, Marinette

Note: Start times had not been announced as of this writing. Watch for more information in the WASB Legislative Update blog at wasblegupdate.wordpress.com.

Again, we can't emphasize enough how important it is that public school leaders attend and speak out in favor of the governor's proposed per-pupil aid increases. It is critically important that as many school advocates as possible testify at these hearings to preserve the investments included in the governor's proposal. ■

Dan Rossmiller is the WASB Government Relations Director.

Chris Kulow is the WASB Government Relations Specialist.



New School Board Member Gatherings

The WASB New School Board Member Gatherings are an informal orientation for newly elected school board members. The meetings provide an opportunity for new school board members to:

- Discuss essential information for their first board meeting.
- Network with new and experienced school board members in their WASB region.
- Learn about WASB services that can help them in their new role.
- Meet their WASB regional director.

Please remind and/or inform new board members of this opportunity. Dates and locations are listed to the right. Meetings take place 7-9 p.m. For detailed locations and directions, visit wasb.org. *Registration is complimentary.*

The Gatherings are open to all WASB members. We encourage district administrators and/or experienced board members to accompany their new board members to the Gathering and offer input and guidance.



Region 1	Thurs., April 20	Spooner High School Library
Region 2	Tues., April 18	Three Lakes Jr. and Sr. High School IMC
Region 3	Tues., April 18	Green Bay District Admin. Building Board Rm
Region 4	Tues., April 18	Durand High School Board Room
Region 5	Thurs., April 20	Marathon High School Library
Region 6	Mon., April 17	CESA 4, West Salem
Region 7	Thurs., April 20	CESA 6, Oshkosh
Region 8	Wed., April 19	Brillion Elementary School
Region 9	Wed., April 19	CESA 3, Fennimore
Region 10	Tues., April 18	Gerstenkorn Administration Building, Portage
Region 11	Wed., April 19	Muskego-Norway District Board Room
Region 12	Mon., April 17	Badger Ridge Middle School Library, Verona
Region 13	Wed., April 19	Elkhorn School District Board Room
Region 15	Thurs., April 20	Pewaukee High School, Room 240



The WASB Day at the Capitol on March 15 included presentations on the state budget and a legislative panel, which debated per-pupil funding, the energy efficiency revenue limit exemption and the school start date. Members of the Legislative Panel were (from left): Rep. Robin Vos (R-Burlington), Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), Rep. Eric Genrich (D-Green Bay), and Sen. Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse). *For more about the WASB Day at the Capitol see the Capitol Watch on page 24.*

Spring Academy Workshops

A foundation in school board governance for new and experienced school board members

With a focus on effective governance and a board's legal roles and responsibilities, the 2017 Spring Academy Workshops will provide training by WASB attorneys for new and experienced board members.

The workshops will be held in the evening (6-8:30 pm) at 12 locations across the state. The workshop will provide a foundation for new school board members to begin learning their role and serve as a helpful refresher for experienced members.

The agenda includes a dinner and an in-depth workshop on the "Roles and Responsibilities of School Boards." The agenda is the same in each location.

For a detailed description and to register, visit wasb.org. ■

Spring Academy Workshops

- May 9 – CESA 1, Pewaukee
- May 10 – CESA 3, Fennimore
- May 11 – CESA 2, Whitewater
CESA 10, Chippewa Falls
- May 16 – CESA 4, West Salem
CESA 6, Oshkosh
CESA 9, Tomahawk
- May 17 – CESA 5, Portage
CESA 7, Green Bay
CESA 11, Turtle Lake
- May 23 – CESA 8, Gillett
CESA 12, Ashland



School board members and administrators came to Madison for the WASB Day at the Capitol to advocate on behalf of public education. In the above photo, Milwaukee Public School Board members Wendell Harris, Sr. (left) and Terry Falk (right) meet with Sen. LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee) and her staff. Thanks to those school leaders who were able to attend the Day at the Capitol and meet with their legislators. *For more about the WASB Day at the Capitol, see the Capitol Watch on page 24.*



Board Agendas, Voting and Minutes

A school board's authority is vested in the entire board, and members of the board may not act separately or independently on behalf of the school district without express authority of the board to do so.¹ The only time a school board may conduct its business and take action on behalf of the district is at a public meeting properly noticed and held in accordance with Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law. School boards are required to hold meetings at least once each month and at other times as permitted by statute.² In order to meet and legally take action, a school board must appropriately post a notice of its meetings, vote only on matters properly before the board, and create a record of such action. This *Legal Comment* addresses the statutory and other authority which governs the processes required of school boards to properly notice, take, and record board action.

Agendas

Under the Open Meetings Law, all school board meetings must be preceded by written notice to the public, any news media who have filed a written request for such notice, and the official district newspaper.³ This usually takes the form of publishing

the board agenda for the meeting. The Wisconsin Department of Justice has taken the position that notice to the public is satisfied by posting in three separate locations in the district. In December 2015, the legislature amended Wis. Stat. § 985.02(2) (a) to allow for the posting of certain public notices in just one public location provided they are also posted on the district's website. It is not clear whether this amendment applies to the posting of meeting notices; however, the Wisconsin Attorney General continues to recommend that districts post their meeting notices in three locations, even if they are posted on the district's website.⁴

Proper notice of a meeting must be given at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of the meeting unless for good cause such notice is impossible or impractical.⁵ When good cause can be shown, shorter notice may be given, but in no case may the notice be provided less than two hours in advance of the meeting.

The Open Meetings Law requires that notices be published for any "governmental body" and any "formal subunit of that body." This encompasses both board and board committee meetings when they meet for the purposes of "exercising the responsibilities, authority, power or

duties delegated to or vested in the body."⁶ Notices must be published for both open and closed session meetings. Every notice must set forth the time, date, and place of the meeting, as well as the subject matter of the meeting's open or closed sessions, in a form that will give sufficient information about the business to be conducted at the meeting so that the public can make an informed decision about whether to attend.⁷ Factors relevant to this consideration include the burden of providing such notice, whether the subject is of particular public interest, and whether the meeting involves non-routine action that the public is unlikely to anticipate.⁸

The responsibility for preparing the meeting agenda (which is then often used as the formal meeting notice) is typically defined by board policy. Some boards divide the agenda into different categories, including action, discussion, and information items. Boards commonly use consent agendas for items that are routine or have already been discussed and are likely to be acceptable to all members and voted on as one item. Most board procedures allow any board member to remove an item from the consent agenda for separate consideration.

In order to meet and legally take action, a school board must appropriately post a notice of its meetings, vote only on matters properly before the board, and create a record of such action.

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The development of board agendas is also a matter of board policy and varies across the state. Generally, placing an item on the agenda is within the authority of the superintendent and board president. However, board policies typically contain procedures by which other board members may compel an item to be placed on an agenda, including designating how many members are needed to make such a request and the form and timing of such requests. It is also not uncommon for board agendas to include an agenda item for board members to propose future agenda topics. In some situations, state law imposes conditions which must occur prior to placement of an item on an agenda — for example, the process for formulating a budget for a common school district must include a class 1 notice prior to any public hearing.⁹

Once an item is placed on an agenda, consideration of that item by the board is subject to board policy. It is not unusual for boards to formally approve the agenda by means of majority vote and, if such a practice is followed, removal of items for consideration at a meeting can take place at this time. In addition, parliamentary procedure allows for tabling or referral of agenda items to other times. However, items cannot be added to the agenda at the time of the meeting under the Open Meetings Law.

Voting

In order to conduct business, including voting, a quorum of the board must be present at the meeting (*i.e.*, one-half of the board membership, plus one). Generally, board actions must be approved by a majority of those voting, unless a statute or board policy provides otherwise. For example, a vote to employ or dismiss a teacher requires a majority of the full board membership.¹⁰ A board must vote in open session unless the vote is clearly an integral part of deliberation authorized to be conducted in closed session. A board can vote in closed session if voting in open session would compromise the need for a

closed session.¹¹ For example, if a board convenes in closed session to determine its bottom-line price for the sale of district property, the board can and should vote in closed session to set that price and authorize the administration to negotiate for the sale subject to that limit. Unless otherwise specifically provided by statute, no secret ballot may be utilized to determine any election or other board decision except the election of the board officers.¹² Any board member may require that a vote be taken in such a manner that the vote is ascertained and recorded, commonly referred to as a roll call vote.¹³ In instances where a statute does not require a roll call vote or a member does not request one, action may be by voice or hand vote.

The proliferation of video and audioconferencing technology provides boards with the ability to meet with some members not physically present at the location of the meeting. While there has not been definitive guidance on this issue, a common-sense reading of the statutes appears to permit a board to conduct a meeting during which board members appear electronically. In order to do so, a quorum of the board must still be physically present at the location noticed for the meeting.¹⁴ There is considerable doubt as to whether board members participating electronically can vote on a matter before the board at such meeting. The law makes no provision for voting by proxy or for having an absent board member's vote recorded as a result of a written or oral communication to the board requesting the member's vote be recorded in a certain way.

The order of voting is determined by board policy or practice. Board presidents are authorized to vote on every motion presented for action. No statute specifically requires a board member to vote on every motion before the board; however, the statutes do express a legislative policy favoring the accountability of board members for their actions. Routine abstention from voting by a board member may

be a breach of that responsibility.

Abstention is appropriate in circumstances in which a board member has a conflict of interest, such as a direct financial interest in the outcome of the vote. An abstention is not counted towards the vote and, in such cases, a vote can be deemed passed when a plurality of votes are cast in the affirmative.¹⁵ For example, if a seven-member board has a quorum of six members present with one member abstaining, a 3-2 vote in favor of a motion will prevail even though it is not a majority of those present.

Minutes

Generally, the school clerk is responsible for recording the minutes of all board meetings, including both open and closed sessions, and for entering the minutes of the meetings into the board record.¹⁶ In the clerk's absence, the board may select another school board member to act as clerk of the meeting.¹⁷ Minutes are the presumptive evidence of official board action and should reflect the "substance of every official action" taken by the board in both open and closed session.¹⁸ "Substance" is defined as "an intelligible abstract of synopsis of the essential elements of official action taken by a local governing body, including the subject matter of a motion, the persons making and seconding the motion and the roll call vote on the motion."¹⁹ Minutes are not required to reflect what was said by individual board members or reflect the clerk's or anyone else's opinion on anything said or done at the meeting.

Motions and roll call votes of each meeting must be recorded, preserved, and open to public inspection in compliance with the Public Records Law.²⁰ This applies to open and closed sessions. Minutes of closed session should only reflect the statutory basis for entering into closed session, who made and seconded the motion to go into closed session, the time the board went into closed session, the fact that discussion occurred with respect to the statutory basis for being in closed session, any motions and roll call

votes, the motion and second to return to open session or adjourn, and the time of return to open session or adjournment.

The “proceedings” of a board meeting must be published within 45 days after the meeting as a Class 1 notice in a newspaper published in the district or publicized by a district-wide distribution prepared and directed by the board and paid out of school funds.²¹ For purposes of the publication, the proceedings must include the substance of every official action taken by the board and a statement of receipts and expenditures. Meeting minutes usually constitute such proceedings and are typically approved at the next board meeting.

The Attorney General has taken the position that these publication requirements apply to proceedings conducted in open and closed session meetings. Closed session minutes may also be approved in open session; however, the Attorney General has advised that boards should publish the proceedings of a closed session in a manner that preserves the confidentiality of closed session if the public interest still weighs in favor of keeping the proceedings confidential.²² Accordingly, as long as the need for confidentiality exists, it is advisable for the board to approve such closed session minutes in closed session and to withhold publication of such closed session proceedings.

Board minutes must be retained for a minimum of seven years, except as otherwise provided by the Public Records Board.²³ Tape recordings used for the purpose of preparing minutes may be destroyed no sooner than 90 days after the minutes have been approved and published.²⁴ The best practice, however, is to retain board meeting minutes permanently. With respect to student expulsions, the board is required to keep written minutes of the entire expulsion hearing, which become part of the student’s confidential student record.²⁵

Meeting minutes for both open and closed session are considered public records and must be maintained and disclosed in accordance with provisions of the Wisconsin Public Records Law. Before the minutes are approved, however, the minutes may be considered “drafts” and, as a result, they are not a “record” subject to disclosure. Once approved, the minutes are then likely “records” which must be provided to members of the public subject to analysis under the “balancing test.” Generally, open session minutes are subject to disclosure without limitation. Minutes from closed sessions are not exempt simply because the meeting occurred in a valid closed session. However, the records custodian may refuse to permit inspection of closed session minutes if the need for confidentiality continues and if sufficient reason is given consistent with the law. In many cases, the need to keep closed session minutes confidential may not extend beyond the closed meeting itself. In other cases, confidentiality may be required indefinitely, for example, in the case of minutes which refer to pupil records. Certain segments of closed session minutes may be properly open to public inspection, while other segments retain their confidential nature. As such, the custodian may have to review the minutes and block out certain portions prior to their disclosure.

Conclusion

Because school boards are governing bodies of public entities, public policy requires that board action take place in a manner which advises the public in advance of contemplated action, be conducted in accordance with appropriate process, notifies the public of the actions taken, preserves the records documenting such action, and allows for subsequent public inspection of those records. This requires boards to follow specific procedures some of which arise statutorily. However, a significant amount

of board practice involving agenda-making and board action is left for boards to determine through policy. Accordingly, boards should review their practices regarding agendas, voting, and minutes to make sure they not only comply with the statutes, but also are consistent with board policy. ■

End Notes

1. 2 *Education Law* § 3.04[2](Matthew Bender, 2015).
2. Wis. Stat. §§ 120.11, 120.43.
3. Wis. Stat. §19.84(1)(b).
4. March 14, 2016 letter from Assistant Attorney General Paul M. Ferguson to Daniel J. Mallin.
5. Wis. Stat. § 19.84(3).
6. Wis. Stat. § 19.82(2).
7. Wis. Stat. §19.84(2).
8. *Buswell v. Tomah Area Sch. Dist.* 2007 WI 71, ¶ 28, 301 Wis. 2d 178, 732 N.W.2d 804.
9. Wis. Stat. § 65.90(3)(a)3.
10. Wis. Stat. §§ 118.22(2).
11. *State ex. rel. Cities S.O. Co. v. Bd. of Appeals*, 21 Wis.2d 516, 538-39, 124 N.W.2d 809 (1963).
12. Wis. Stat. § 19.88(1).
13. Wis. Stat. § 19.88(2).
14. Wis. Stat. § 120.11 (1).
15. *State ex. rel. Burdick v. Tyrell*, 158 Wis. 425, 434, 149 N.W. 280 (1914).
16. Wis. Stat. §§ 120.11(1), 120.17(3), and 120.44(2).
17. Wis. Stat. § 120.11.
18. Wis. Stat. § 120.11(4).
19. Wis. Stat. § 985.01(6).
20. Wis. Stat. §19.88(3).
21. Wis. Stat. §§ 120.11(4) and 120.43(4).
22. Office of the Attorney General, Informal Correspondence to Jon Litscher (March 30, 1981).
23. Wis. Stat. § 19.21(6).
24. Wis. Stat. § 19.21(7).
25. Wis. Stat. §120.13(1)(c)3.

For additional information on related topics, see WASB *School News*, “Minutes of School Board Meetings” (May 2009); “Board Member Voting” (April 2007); and “Disclosure of Closed Meeting Minutes” (July 1981).

This Legal Comment was written by Michael J. Julka and Steven C. Zach of Boardman & Clark LLP, WASB Legal Counsel.

Staying On Top of School Energy Costs

SERVICE ASSOCIATE Q & A

Q. *What do school board members need to know about energy purchasing?*

A. The number one thing that school board members should know is that it is possible to save money with a properly structured gas purchasing program. The natural gas supply chain is composed of three basic layers that are easily quantifiable and verifiable. The price of natural gas is available daily through numerous news sources. The cost of long-haul gas transportation (“basis”) is available from daily industry publications. Gas distribution is regulated by the Public Service Commission and rates are available on their website or from the local gas utility. This all means that it is relatively easy for someone with access to the data to evaluate your gas purchasing program in an objective and quantifiable way.

Q. *How can schools save money when purchasing energy?*

A. Schools need to understand that it is often the long-haul transportation/ basis component of the gas supply chain that can cause gas prices to spike. Many of the gas pipelines that transport natural gas were built decades ago and the amount of gas that they can ship has not changed much. Consequently, what we saw during the 2014 Polar Vortex was not so much a price increase in the cost of gas as it was a price increase caused by people bidding up the last increment

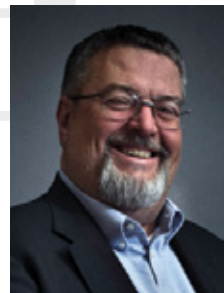
of gas transportation capacity. Institutions need to pay greater attention to this component of the supply chain. The best way to do that in our opinion is through competition.

Q. *Why are natural gas prices so low at the moment?*

A. While gas prices are low on a historical basis, gas prices currently are up significantly. During the shale gas boom we saw a tremendous expansion of natural gas production. Pennsylvania went from producing negligible quantities of gas to 16 billion cubic feet (“BCF”) of gas per day (about 22 percent of all U.S. production). Thus, at the end of last year, we had record production heading into a warm winter. Natural gas prices fell to \$1.711/Dth for the March NYMEX contract. Since then, many producers simply stopped drilling because the price got too low to make a profit. Consequently, U.S. production of natural gas has dropped about 2 BCF per day while demand from the power generation sector has dramatically increased as coal plants are retired and replaced by natural gas units. Thus the November NYMEX contract recently closed at \$2.764/Dth and January 2017, is trading in the neighborhood of \$3.00/Dth.

Q. *Is there anything else you’d like to address?*

A. Once again it is all about the metrics. Am I saving money for my



Blake Baxter is the senior energy originator at MEP Solutions



district? The metrics will tell you if you have a good gas purchasing program. If you have a gas purchasing program and no one can show you the savings metrics or if the program cannot be fully audited, then it may be past time to start asking questions. If you ask to see the Request for Proposals that was used to select your current gas supplier and no one can find one, then it may also be past time to start asking questions. And it is important to note that retail gas marketer contracts are generally one sided in favoring the marketer. It is critical that you involve people with experience in gas contracts in any negotiation. As with anything, keep asking questions until you find someone who can answer them. ■

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It is important to note that retail gas marketer contracts are generally one sided in favoring the marketer. It is critical that you involve people with experience in gas contracts in any negotiation.



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