

To the Citizens of our Communities:

Recent headlines from Madison indicate our legislature is focused on the topic of school accountability. As District Administrators of educational institutions in western Wisconsin, we understand the importance of accountability for our public schools. We accept the responsibility to closely examine our policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that we are being as efficient and as productive as possible. We find the recently developed School Report Cards to be an effective way to measure our progress and report our results. We are thankful for the effort and resources expended to create the current system. We remain unconvinced of the need for a replacement after only three years. We remain committed to finding ways to help every student achieve and be successful so that hope exists within every child for a better future and cycles of poverty and violence are eliminated.

In addition to school accountability, there are lots of ideas coming out of Madison these days. Ideas that are not research-based, which are not supported by professional educators, and which have not been proven to “move the needle” on student achievement. But, there are practices and evidence-based policies which have been shown to change and improve schools across our nation. We encourage you to engage others in our community around discussions on:

- 1) **Early Childhood Education.** In Wisconsin, the funding base for childcare programs (Wisconsin Shares/YoungStar program) is inadequate and unstable. These programs can have a significant impact on children and increase their likelihood of high school graduation, holding a job, and decreasing the need to receive public assistance or be incarcerated.
- 2) **Children’s Mental Health.** In Wisconsin, we have systematic shortcomings in how mental health services are provided. Many children do not receive the services they need which has serious consequences for the child, their families, and our schools and community. Mental health issues can be a significant barrier to a child being successful in school.
- 3) **Supporting Excellence in Teaching and Leading.** Research shows that teacher quality and principal leadership are the two most important factors leading to student success. Continued funding for Educator Effectiveness implementation, ongoing training and support for educators, and the promotion of policies designed to encourage the “best and brightest” to enter the teaching profession will improve school/district outcomes.
- 4) **Innovation.** Incentives should be provided to encourage districts to pilot new practices that evidence suggests will improve student learning. While our society has dramatically changed in the last 100 years, our schools have been slower to respond due to a sense of “tradition” and a lack of funding for innovation.
- 5) **School Finance.** The state share of school funding has decreased over the last ten years and large funding cuts were made in 2011. How do we ensure equitable funding for education across the state of Wisconsin when there are unique challenges in each district? Some districts have a larger share of English Language Learners, others are dealing with significant rates of poverty, and additional districts struggle with declining enrollment, substantial transportation costs, or a lack of technology. We need a school finance system that is fair and equitable for all children and is sustainable so that access to high quality instructional programming is maintained regardless of one’s zip code.

As a community, we want our children to succeed and be best prepared as future leaders to move our state and nation toward increased prosperity. All of us-whether we are parents, educators, business members, legislators or senior citizens- have a vested interest in our children. Let’s start talking about the real issues which will benefit our

children, add value for our taxpayers, and improve the quality of life in our state. Your involvement and support is crucial. Public education is public work – we need your help! Please feel free to contact us if you would like to host a conversation. Thank you!

Area School District Administrators,

Alma – Steven Sedlmayr

Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan – Paul Fischer

Arcadia – Louie Ferguson

Bangor – David Laehn

Black River Falls – Shelly Severson

Blair-Taylor – Jeff Eide

Cochrane-Fountain City – Thomas Hiebert

De Soto – Jim Kuchta

Gale-Ettrick-Trempealeau – Roger Foegen

Hillsboro – Curt Bisarek

Holmen – Dale Carlson

Independence – Paul Vine

La Crosse – Randy Nelson

La Farge – Shawn Donovan

Melrose-Mindoro – Delroy DeBerg

Onalaska – Francis Finco

Royall – Mark Gruen

Sparta – John Hendricks

Tomah – Cindy Zahrte

Viroqua – Robert Knadle

West Salem – Troy Gunderson

Westby – Charles Norton

Whitehall – Michael Beighley

Wonewoc-Union Center – Steve Lozeau