

Strengths & Weaknesses



New board development tool aims to unite boards and improve efficiencies

Sue Peterson

A new and improved governance tool is now available at no cost for Wisconsin school boards. Developed jointly by the WASB and School Perceptions, a research firm that conducts surveys for schools, the new tool measures a school board's strengths and weaknesses.

"Early on, our goal was to develop a tool that would help

school board members learn about their roles and responsibilities as well as set planning priorities," said Bill Foster, School Perceptions founder and president. "It was designed so a board can quickly discern areas where they agree or disagree, and therefore optimize their time together."

The conceptual framework for the Annual Board Development Tool was conceived by Tom Joynt, retired superintendent and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor. Joynt had served as superintendent in the Pulaski, Menomonee Falls and Green Bay school districts during his tenure.

"I am a true believer that it is always important for individ-

uals and groups to evaluate their processes," he said. "What I saw was that wasn't being done very often at the board level."

Focus on Key Work

To further refine the tool over the past two years, School Perceptions teamed up with the WASB. The tool now includes elements based on the National School Boards Association's research, known as The Key Work of School Boards, which includes relationships, vision, accountability, community leadership and policy. Located on School Perceptions' web-based portal, the survey is offered at no cost to Wisconsin school districts.

Once all members of a board have completed the 10-15 minute survey, School Perceptions can provide a report that ranks priorities in each action area, compares the



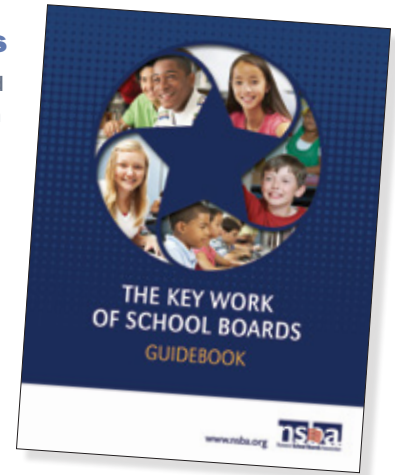
"Our results showed us that there was a desire to do more with advocacy as it relates to continuous improvement and supporting local control."

— Deb Kerr, superintendent of the Brown Deer School District and president of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA)

The Key Work of School Boards

This year, the National School Boards Association released an updated edition of *The Key Work of School Boards*. The new edition offers an expanded look at five key subject areas for school boards — vision, accountability, policy, community leadership and relationships.

For more information or to purchase the updated edition, visit WASB.org. Select “Publications Products & Postings” and then “Books.” Log-in is required. Discounted pricing is available when purchasing five or more copies.



district to statewide results and identifies items with the greatest discrepancy between respondents. WASB also offers districts a complimentary analysis of the report which includes recommendations and resources available for next steps.

“Completing the survey and analyzing the aggregate results is a great first step in moving a board forward in effective governance. We can provide a wide range of services customized to meet the needs of individual school boards,” states John Ashley, WASB Executive Director. “From providing training on a board’s legal roles and responsibilities to developing a comprehensive strategic plan, we have staff that are able to offer leadership and support.”

“There are strong boards and there are boards that are struggling,” Joynt said. “I believe both would benefit from this instrument.”

Insightful Data

The Brown Deer School District experienced benefits from completing the Annual Board Development Tool in June during their annual board retreat.

“Our results showed us that there was a desire to do more with advocacy as it relates to continuous improvement and supporting local control,” shares superintendent Deb Kerr. “As a result, we identified areas to work with our Legislature, made recommendations for WASB resolutions and began including a discussion on legislative issues at a board meeting each month.”

For Kerr and the Brown Deer School Board, the tool provided important data as they planned for the coming year and determined priorities.

“The tool was developed based on best practices of school governance,” Kerr adds. “It is an excellent resource to provide direction for

future learning, improvement and growth. Just as our school board wants our staff to use data to improve their practice, the board is now able to review each area for their own professional growth.”

Joynt said the tool provides an opportunity for individual board members to reflect on their role as part of the school board team.

“Board members do not necessarily have the experiences or training on how to work together as part of a school board team,” Joynt said. “This tool provides an opportunity for them to step back and reflect on how things are going.” ■

Sue Peterson is a project manager with School Perceptions.



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WASB Can Help...

After your school board completes the Annual Board Development Tool, the WASB can help school boards analyze its detailed report. This complimentary analysis includes recommendations and resources available for next steps. The WASB offers a wide range of Customized Leadership Services, including improving board climate and communication, building board/superintendent relations, and much more. If you have a leadership challenge, the WASB team can help provide guidance. For more information, contact WASB consultant Louis Birchbauer at lbirchbauer@wasb.org or 414-218-2805.