

Partnerships and Collaboration: The Elements of Success

The setting: Association of School Business Officials International Annual Meeting President's Dinner, October 2006, in Pittsburg, Pa. Presiding: Melody Douglas, chief financial officer of Alaska's Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) and president of ASBO International.

Perspective: Donna Peterson

As the superintendent of KPBSD, I filled several roles at the ASBO conference, including supporting Melody Douglas, presenting a session on partnering in instruction across disciplines, and participating in the professional development sessions.

I found myself seated between John Musso, executive director of ASBO, and Norm Wooten, president-elect of the National School Boards Association (NSBA). Norm

happens to be from Kodiak, Alaska, so I already knew him and was familiar with his outstanding work. John was a new acquaintance, but within moments of our meeting, I knew that his intent, drive, and leadership paralleled the work of superintendents and school board members.

My first contemplative moment of the evening came when I took a deep breath and realized that Alaska leaders had come a long way. Not only had a chief financial officer from Alaska reached the pinnacle of her professional career, but everyone in the room revered her. I knew Melody possessed qualities that contributed to strong, ethical leadership in our district, but I had no idea that those same traits had been transferred to an international audience.

This was also the moment I realized that I was presenting my ideas beyond the scope of my local and state audience. Even though I had been published nationally, this



By Donna Peterson, Ed.D., and John D. Musso, RSBA

presentation was unique to my previous experiences. My message on leadership was filled with universal truths that could be incorporated into districts across the country.

Then, I reflected on Norm's influence. I knew of his work in Alaska and I knew he had the skills and the leadership experience to really make things happen for school boards all over the nation.

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The next contemplative moment was the realization that when things are really happening at the local level it is because the superintendent, the chief financial officer, and the school board are all on the same page, working toward the same goals. We all know what happens when vision and policy align with leadership: great things for kids become a reality.

Melody Douglas brought us together at the table that night. The partnership of our organizations—ASBO, AASA, and NSBA—will keep us together. In Alaska, the state affiliates of these three organizations work together tirelessly on a joint resolution process so we speak with one voice to the legislature and governor. The executive directors for the three associations routinely consult each other, attend conferences as a team, participate in the professional development offered by the other groups, and work together to assure that children are Alaska's top priority.

This strong partnership and mutually supportive atmosphere has led to the incredible leadership for the state and for the country. Public education is society's tool to fulfill dreams; only by working together can our dreams for students be realized.

Perspective: John Musso

As a former teacher and school principal, I always seize the opportunity to discuss the instructional aspects of public education, especially with school board members, superintendents, and others directly involved in the educational process of children. I am firmly grounded in the belief that school support personnel play a key role in the educational process, but very rarely do we celebrate the success of those who make a difference in the life of a child on a daily basis.

The night of Melody Douglas' President's Dinner presented an opportunity to do that: to honor Melody for the fine work that she has done over the years for her school system and for ASBO International.

Having the great pleasure of sitting with Donna Peterson and Norm Wooten was indeed a golden opportunity for me. This was an opportunity to share my opinions about the state of education as well as the school business offi-

cial's role in the educational process. Immediately we were immersed in a sea of conversation dealing with today's education climate.

As the conversation would have it, this topic is not as dark and bleak a picture as our critics would have us believe. Indeed, education is alive and well in Alaska, just as it is in other states and jurisdictions around our nation and internationally. Great and wonderful things are happening every day in every classroom. Yes, we have our challenges, but so does every other profession and industry. And, we are making great strides toward educational excellence.

I firmly believe that teachers, support personnel, and administrators do not get up each day before they go to work, look in the mirror, and say to themselves, "I am going to do a bad job today." Nobody wants to do a bad job. Everyone wants to do and be the very best that they can possibly be.

All for One, One for All

Never before in the history of education have we had so much to do with so few resources and in the face of so much criticism. Yet, committed educators flock to the classrooms day in and day out with a common vision and goal of improving student achievement.

This was the general direction of our conversations that night. It was so uplifting to hear committed educators speak so passionately about their school systems, their employees, and their students, never once mincing words in the process. I couldn't help but think about the energy level at our table and in the room. How powerful to gather for the common good of children around the world. We could have gone on for hours that night, but instead committed to partnering for the continued success of public education.

I am convinced, more than ever, that with the collaboration of the school board, superintendent, and the school business official, great things are possible. Collaborations at this level are critical if we are serious about being advocates for children—advocates who will help students reach new levels in the educational process.

We are all educators. It doesn't matter if you set policy, implement it, or enforce it, your role in the educational process is critical to the success of public education. Partnerships and collaboration are necessary components of success. I am encouraged by the fact that we have forged a partnership in NSBA, AASA, and ASBO for the benefit of the children and the success of public education.

I challenge all of you to get up every morning, look in the mirror, and ask yourself this question: "How can I make a difference in the life of a child today?" ■

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