

How foundations support schools

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Now News Group

The Brown Deer Education Foundation began modestly in 2014 with a hat at a table outside of then-Superintendent Deb Kerr's office.

About eight people, including Barb Fleming and Mark Laux, wanted to see what they could do to give back to the district that had given so much to them and their children.

"We passed a hat around a table. We said, 'Who might be willing to be the president? Who'd be willing to work as the treasurer?' Fortunately, some of us were in a position to be able to take that on and do that. Then we recruited other people to help us, which was not difficult to do. That was how it started," said Fleming, who became president of the organization.

Laux, who became treasurer, said Kerr was instrumental in helping in the group's founding.

"Deb (Kerr) brought a lot of energy to the group that Barb's talking about. She really was right there with us as we got this thing put together," Laux said.

Education foundations are bridges between communities and people within them that can support education and the schools themselves, explained Lynnette Kallmadge, executive director for the Waukesha Education Foundation.

"I think education foundations give a lot of individuals a way to get involved that isn't overly intrusive and also provides them a little peek into the good things that are happening," said Kallmadge.

Education foundations play a key role in working with the school districts they are affiliated with, often helping to fund projects districts can't cover in their operating budgets or need extra assistance in obtaining. They exist in many school districts nationwide, including the suburban Milwaukee area.

Foundations provide scholarships and can help teachers who want to enhance classroom experiences.

"Many, if not most, school foundations were established as fund-raising arms of the school district," according to the American Association of School Administrators. "Indeed, many were set up in the wake of unsuccessful efforts to pass a bond or levy measure or after a particularly nasty round of budget cuts."

The AASA's article also said that, compared to private schools that have had decades-old school foundations that "often rely on their fund-raising prowess to generate a large percentage of their institutional budgets," "public school foundations generally are not held responsible for providing a substantial portion of their school district's budget."

For Fox Point-Bayside Education Foundation President Chrissy Kruger-Gruendyke, it's about not only the financial investment, but the time and energy in supporting the district.

"It organizes that investment, it organizes the sup-



The Fox Point-Bayside Educational Foundation raised \$210,000 over a two-year campaign to establish the first ADA-accessible playgrounds in the community. The playgrounds are at both Stormonth Elementary School and Bayside Middle School. SUBMITTED

port for the district, keeping the community quite literally invested in the district's performance, growth and development. It really comes down to the students. As we know, good schools means good neighborhoods means good property values. All of that supports one another and we're just this body that brings it together, connects it with a link in that chain," said Kruger-Gruendyke.

To do that work, it comes down to the foundation's members building relationships with businesses and community members.

For MPS Foundation executive director Wendell Willis, authenticity is important. He said the foundation wants to work with donors who are authentic about wanting to help students dream big and look beyond the challenges schools and students face.

Willis also said it's important for the foundation and donors to have shared expectations, and that authentic dialogue is important about what can be helpful, how it can be helpful and reporting back.

"We talk to our department that we're working with or the schools or the teachers that our donors are expecting something back. Yes, they want to feel good, but they would sure love to see that this meant a lot to the lives of students or even in a small way that change is happening academically to move students forward," he said.

Meeting the donor where they are is also important, Willis said.

"I think people appreciate authenticity, but I also think they appreciate the ability to find the common ground and the general setting of expectations that is equal," he said.

Still, area districts benefit greatly from such organizations.

"I think in any community, the more groups supporting one another for the better adds to a valued experience and more opportunities for our students,"

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