

# The Courage to Transform

Superintendent of the Year **Pat Deklotz** says school transformation is about vision and strong relationships

**P**at Deklotz, superintendent of the Kettle Moraine School District and the 2016 WASDA Superintendent of the Year, grew up poor on a farm in southwestern Minnesota. As a child, she was often sick and missed school. In high school, she hung out with the wrong crowd and the guidance counselor refused to help her sign up for the ACT, telling her that “kids like you don’t go to college.”

After only a year in college, she dropped out to work full time and support her family. At age 40, she went back to school and earned her teaching license. She loved the work but was dismayed at the school culture.

“Never in my life had I experienced such an uncollaborative workforce,” Deklotz said. “I knew we could do better.”

Deklotz wanted to make a difference and she continued her education with the goal of becoming a school administrator. She was working full time and going to school. It wasn’t easy but her family was supportive.

“My family was there throughout all of this and they taught me an important lesson,” Deklotz said. “They taught me that relationships matter; that people matter. They’re there for me always in spite and because of everything.”

With the support of her family, Deklotz completed her doctorate and was selected as the superintendent at the Kettle Moraine School District. When she stepped into the superintendent role, the district was performing at a high level — all six of the district’s schools were Blue Ribbon schools. At first she was concerned that the district wouldn’t have the impetus to change and get better.

“Luckily, I had a board that understood our public education model was not sustainable,” Deklotz said.

The district focused on its vision and continuous improvement and soon understood that in the modern world, education can take many different forms and can happen anywhere.

“Our board has come to learn



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that transformation is about personalized learning,” Deklotz said. “Our board understands this isn’t just for some students but for all students.”

As public education continues to evolve, Deklotz urged districts to work together.

“We must have the courage to work together and take the politics out of education,” she said. “We must embrace the problems that our rural and urban schools face and we must embrace the belief that all schools and all students can be successful.” ■