

Charlie Schneider: CESA 10 creating efficiencies that benefit school districts and taxpayers

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Educating our youth is a vital part of our society, and students and teachers here in Wisconsin are the backbone of our state's education system. In Wisconsin alone, 425 regular school districts operate over 2,000 public schools that serve over 962,000 students and staff. This is a big undertaking, and Wisconsin spends an average of \$1.8 billion in operating and capital budgets each year. The National Council on School Facilities estimates that number should actually be \$3.3 billion – meaning that our state's students, teachers, and communities are using public schools that have a combined budget gap of \$1.5 billion every year. That's where Cooperative Educational Service Agency 10 (CESA 10) comes into play as we help schools operate at their highest and most efficient capacities.

CESA 10's mission includes maximizing learning opportunities and school effectiveness. To that end, CESA 10 has been hard at work providing efficiencies for taxpayers across Wisconsin, especially in the northwestern region of the state. School facilities require large operations and investments to ensure that schools are healthy, safe, educationally appropriate, and sustainable.

Just look at some of the projects that have yielded big results in districts like Elk Mound, Winter, Webster, and Spooner. CESA 10's project management in the Elk Mound Area School District was a win for taxpayers and the school district. Through competitive bidding, CESA 10 saved the district \$2 million from original project cost estimates. The district also saved an additional \$1 million in planning and design fees by timing the hiring of consultants until after a referendum passed. That's real money, and it's making an impact for taxpayers.

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Similar savings were seen in the School District of Winter where competitive bidding allowed several projects to come in under budget. District Administrator Dr. Andrew Grimm said “Working with other companies on past projects, I felt like I was getting 40 cents on the dollar. With CESA 10, I feel like I’m getting more than my dollars’ worth!”

Supply chain and personnel issues in the wake of the pandemic have impacted all types of businesses and organizations, and the school districts that work with CESA 10 have not been immune. In Webster, the District was able to add \$1.2 million in projects to its \$6.5 million school construction budget through CESA 10’s strategic planning and competitive bidding. Mutual trust between CESA 10 and the Spooner Area School District led the district to ask CESA 10 to manage its current \$16 million construction project. Our innovative approach to competitive bidding resulted in more bids and the awarding of projects to local vendors.

CESA 10 prides itself on tailoring its services to meet the needs of its member districts. Through its work with district administrators, CESA 10 will continue to achieve its vision of uniting service and leadership while being a good steward of money from taxpayers.

-Schneider is executive director of Facilities Management of CESA 10, which encompasses 29 member districts across northwest Wisconsin.