

From Wales and Pewaukee to Washington, D.C.

Kettle Moraine, Pewaukee superintendents get seats at White House roundtable discussion

By Lauren Anderson

Freeman Staff

WALES — Two superintendents from Waukesha County are convening at the White House this week for a discussion on innovations in personalized learning.

Patricia Deklotz and **JoAnn sternke**, superintendents of the Kettle Moraine and Pewaukee school districts, were asked to join the invitation- only discussion with the U.S. Department of Education and the White House Domestic Policy Council, alongside others who are leading the charge on the effort to personalize education.

Sternke and Deklotz are joining leaders of districts that received Race to the Top grants, among other superintendents, for a listening session that will dig into the challenges related to policy and implementing innovative approaches to education.

Both Sternke and Deklotz have been named superintendent of the year by the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators — Sternke in 2013 and Deklotz in 2015. Both are also involved in the “Future Ready” initiative, a national effort in which school leaders commit to foster a culture of digital learning in their districts and to share what they have learned with other districts.

A regional hub

Waukesha County has been a hub of personalized learning initiatives in recent years, thanks in part to the Institute for Personalized Learning — a division of CESA 1 in Pewaukee that works with school districts to redesign educational systems to be more learner-centered. It’s allowed for the exchange of ideas among districts throughout the region, Deklotz said.

“The ability to collaborate through the Institute has been extremely powerful,” Deklotz said. “... And part of the benefit we’ve seen is to be able to collaborate with other educators on various topics, from classroom to board policy to community interactions and to show our communities that there are other progressive districts doing this work.”

In the Kettle Moraine School District, personalized learning is reflected in its three instrumentality charter high schools, a multiage project-based elementary charter school and an interdisciplinary project-based middle school house. In Pewaukee, personalized learning can be seen in the district’s Insight program — a high school offering that allows a cohort of students to work with area business representatives in a corporate office on projects they would find in a real-world setting.

Beyond that, there are traces of personalized learning throughout more traditional classrooms.

“Our region is recognized for being a leader in personalized learning and understanding what that term means, and working to scale it in a way that is not just bigger, but in a way that’s better for kids,” Sternke said. “And that, to me, is important.”

Sternke said a common misperception is that personalizing education means simply placing a student in front of a computer so he or she can complete math as fast as possible. Rather, she said, it's about creating a "learning environment that focuses on student readiness, student motivation and student interest."

"There's no doubt that personalized learning can be better leveraged with technology," Sternke said. "However, it is not about faster, more independent (work). It's really about moving away from a factory model that teaches a room full of children, all beaming to the middle, to a system that really takes into account student readiness."

While information is easily accessible at the click of a mouse or touch of a smartphone, Deklotz added that personalized learning shifts a teacher's role from being a disseminator of information to a coach.

"We live in a technology-rich society," Deklotz said. "And we can bring those technology tools into the classroom in a way that allows teachers to do what they have always wanted to do, which is to meet the needs of the individual student."

Email: landerson@conley.net



Deklotz



Sternke