With a new year comes new beginnings, the spirit of renewal and many shared wishes. The holiday exchanges may become so routine that we hardly consider a deeper level meaning and the intensity of the holiday season may yield to a refreshing opportunity to begin with a new start.

As board members and educational leaders, we are change agents. We are also the sustainers of support, stewards of commitment and shepherds of many. Ringing in the new year, with all its festivities, is also a time for bringing in some of what is new, but we need to take pause.

As the song goes: “Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver and the other gold.” We need to be careful regarding the temptation to simply get rid of that which is old, for the sake of novelty.

We could debate the value of continuity over change, and the definitions of some words we may use without thinking, such as “fiscal conservatism.” Many with progressive priorities may also consider themselves fiscally conservative. This is a time when a major part of the process of advocacy may hinge on creating shared definitions and clarifying our meaningful intent.

The decision about whether to re-use, re-cycle or toss wrapping paper for most occurs without much deliberation. We just do it. The decisions, however, regarding what to do with our educational systems are different.

A few years ago, after attending a college reunion and hearing Coretta Scott King speak at the alma mater we shared, albeit at different times, I found myself appreciating the progressive tradition. That may sound like an oxymoron - a contradiction of terms.

It succeeded, however, in describing a shared commitment to educational values that included understanding of the importance of experiential learning, real-life problem-solving, social justice integrated into the curriculum and ongoing advocacy. The progressive values of Horace Mann and other thought leaders are as important now as they were over one hundred years ago.

Hence, the progressive tradition lives on. Throwing out old systems and practices as we toss out old wrapping paper is neither necessary or advantageous.

New beginnings based on a disregard for what has been established and recognized as recommended practice is not efficient nor effective. We do not need change just for the sake of novelty. We need change that is based on careful consideration to serve children well, offering optimal opportunities for all. It is imperative that we maintain a clear vision of shared goals and that we work together to be effective.

We can continue to support that which is meaningful and motivating, moving past negative polarization, unifying rather that dividing. With limited resources, our commitment to support access to quality educational experiences for all children needs to be paramount.

We can remember and cherish the quilts made by our grandmothers, stitch by stitch, valuing our diversity. We can sustain that which is great and support that which reflects and respects our finest values. We can maintain our equilibrium, sense of purpose and possibility.

“Wishing you all a happy, healthy and productive 2017!”