

# Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance

## Wisconsin's PK-12 Pathway to World-Class Student Success



**The Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance is an alliance of:**

The Association of Wisconsin School Administrators  
The Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators  
The Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials  
The Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services  
The Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators - Affiliate



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# INTRODUCTION

It is hard to think of a bigger state priority than ensuring that every Wisconsin student graduates from high school prepared for college and career success. This is particularly crucial because education is among the most important determinants of success and prosperity in life, from health and lifetime earning potential to meaningful participation in civic life. Now, perhaps more than ever, the quality of education that we provide our children determines not only their individual futures, but also the collective social and economic well-being of the entire state. To realize our vision of preparing all students to be college and career-ready (as defined in Appendix 1), it is imperative that we continue to raise the academic bar for all students and close gaps for lower-performing groups.

Wisconsin's educators can and will meet this imperative, but only if the state's policymakers commit to evidence-based policies that are proven to drive whole-system improvement at the classroom, school, district, and state levels. Committing to evidence-based policies and prioritizing the goal that Wisconsin schools graduate every student college and career-ready is the right way forward for our students, as well as for our civic and economic growth. If prioritizing education and evidence-based policy is the right path, the *wrong* path is to see education primarily as a cost to be minimized and to base state policy more on ideology or emotion than on evidence.

There is real cause for concern that policy-making, at the state level, is moving down the wrong path. In national rankings of PK-12 per-pupil spending, for example, Wisconsin has plummeted from the 12<sup>th</sup>-highest state in 2003-04 to the 21<sup>st</sup> in 2011-12.<sup>1</sup> While evidence continues to increasingly support the importance of investment in early childhood development, educator preparation, and educational innovation, these issues are often overlooked in the Legislature in favor of less research-based and more ideology-driven reforms such as expanding vouchers or politicizing academic content standards.

The following policy recommendations were created through careful consideration of our state's past educational successes, as well as lessons learned from world leaders in student learning. National and international exemplars such as Massachusetts, Ontario, and Finland (see Appendix 2) have demonstrated high levels of academic achievement; in each case, policymakers have:

- » Invested in highly-trained and motivated teachers.
- » Designed accountability systems focused on effective intervention at the school and student levels.
- » Provided adequate and equitable funding
- » Ensured that all students are ready to learn by addressing early childhood development, health care, and poverty.

The policy recommendations that follow provide a policy pathway for ensuring that our system of public education is the best in the world. Wisconsin students and citizens deserve no less.

*There is a place in America to take a stand: it is public education. It is the underpinning of our cultural and political system. It is the great common ground. Public education after all is the engine that moves us as a society toward a common destiny...It is in public education that the American dream begins to take shape.*

*Tom Brokaw*



This document presents the biennial policy agenda of the School Administrators Alliance (SAA) for the upcoming state budget cycle and legislative session, set to begin following the November 2014 general election. The document builds upon the many strengths of public education in our state, but also outlines several of the clear challenges we face (see Appendix 3). The SAA is an organization representing *principals* (through the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, or AWSA), *superintendents* (through the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, or WASDA), *school business officials* (through the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, or WASBO), *directors of special education* (through the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services, or WCASS) and *human resource directors* (through the Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators, or WASPA) in Wisconsin's 424 public school districts and more than 2200 public schools.

SAA's policy agenda has been formulated by a workgroup that has met regularly since the summer of 2014 to identify key policy issues, review relevant research, and formulate specific policy recommendations intended to address these issues. We thank the [Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) for preparing research briefs that informed this work.

The SAA policy recommendations are organized around six key areas, as follows:

- » Students Ready to Learn
- » Supporting Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- » Innovation
- » Finance
- » Climate and Culture
- » Standards, Assessment, and Accountability

Each section contains background information on the topic(s), and recommendations for policymakers. Following a brief conclusion, a set of appendices, additional reading, and key research are provided for reference.

# A. STUDENTS READY TO LEARN

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Although Wisconsin has taken steps to improve early childhood education with the expansion of 4K funding and the YoungStar program to support childcare provider quality, the state has yet to realize a comprehensive preschool policy.

Research has demonstrated that adults who had access to preschool programming have higher earnings, are more likely to hold a job, commit fewer crimes and are more likely to graduate from high school than those who did not have access to preschool.<sup>3</sup> Numerous studies have confirmed that children from poor families are at a significant social and academic deficit by the time they reach their third birthday, and that improving the quality of preschool education can help reduce achievements gaps for starting kindergartners.<sup>4</sup>

Barriers to providing and accessing quality early childhood care include the following:<sup>5</sup>

- » Income: quality preschool programs are expensive, costing parents an average of between \$8,000 to over \$10,000 per year in Wisconsin;
- » Convenience and affordability: parents must both work and choose care that is available. For many, this means making preschool choices based on convenience and affordability, but not necessarily on quality
- » Quality: early childhood providers vary considerably in terms of credentials and the qualifications of staff
- » Funding: overall funding levels for school-based early childhood programs were reduced during the recent economic downturn. In addition, as a result of economic conditions, many states also cut pre-kindergarten expansion efforts and their monitoring of early childhood providers

The good news is that Wisconsin has a strong base from which to build and maintain a comprehensive preschool program. The Badger state's four-year-old kindergarten program and YoungStar programs provide a foundation for providing high quality early learning opportunities for all Wisconsin children.

Wisconsin's community-based approach to four-year-old kindergarten (4K) brings a broad range of early childhood actors together around the common goal of supporting the emotional, educational and physical well-being of children. Today, families have access to quality 4K programming in 93% of Wisconsin school districts.

YoungStar is a program the Department of Children and Families created to improve the quality of child care for Wisconsin children. YoungStar seeks to improve quality by evaluating and rating the quality of care given by childcare providers; helping parents choose the best childcare for their children; supporting providers with tools and training to deliver high quality early care; and setting a consistent standard for childcare quality.

While YoungStar has made great progress in moving children into higher quality programs, the funding base for childcare programs is increasingly inadequate and unstable. State funding for Wisconsin Shares, which supports YoungStar, has been frozen for seven-years, leading to a major loss in payments per child. This erosion of support for the childcare payment system is undermining the YoungStar system. In the last five years, overall funding for Wisconsin Shares has dropped \$100 million per year, and the number of children served has dropped by over 11,000. The Wisconsin Shares/YoungStar program can have a significant impact on children that have a high probability of not being ready for school, including students of low socioeconomic status, and therefore should be funded properly.

Wisconsin should build on its strong tradition of supporting early childhood education by committing to a comprehensive preschool policy. Improving early childhood opportunities will help prepare children for their PK-12 education experience and help reduce achievement gaps. The results for society include not only academic gains, but also financial savings for schools and broader public economic benefits.

*Public funding of education is another way that governments can help offset the advantages some households have in resources available for children. One of the most consequential examples is early childhood education. Research shows that children from lower-income households who get good-quality pre-Kindergarten education are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college as well as hold a job and have higher earnings, and they are less likely to be incarcerated or receive public assistance.*

*Janet Yellen, Chair of Federal Reserve, Conference of Economic Opportunity and Inequality, Boston, MA  
October 17, 2014*

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. Wisconsin should commit to the goal of providing universal access to four-year-old kindergarten.
2. Expand rewards for quality care measures, including: reversing the deep cuts to the Wisconsin Shares program, promoting child care centers' accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children and explore development of model early childhood provider assessment and support process.
3. Promote coordination of state agencies, such as the state's Department of Health Services and Department of Public Instruction and between public schools and child care providers to make connections with early childhood programs. In addition, these state agencies should publish an annual report detailing Wisconsin's goal of providing the opportunity for every Wisconsin child to participate in a high quality preschool program and share exemplary models of coordination at the local level.<sup>6</sup>

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

In Wisconsin, too many children have unmet mental health needs, with these unmet needs having serious negative consequences for the individual, their families and our communities and schools. In Wisconsin, the fact is that children's mental health needs go unmet too often because of systemic shortcomings in how such services are provided. The Johnson Foundation's Top of Mind report<sup>7</sup> identified these shortcomings as: poor system and service coordination, multiple barriers to access care, high service costs and limited funding, and, workforce and service shortages.<sup>8</sup>

The State of Minnesota has begun to successfully address children's mental health needs through a grant program supporting school-linked mental health services. This grant program has leveraged federal, state and local efforts to dramatically improve services to children. These school-connected clinical mental health treatments include interventions that:

- » Increase accessibility for children and youth who are uninsured or underinsured
- » Improve clinical and functional outcomes for children and youth with a mental health diagnosis,
- » Improve identification of mental health issues for children and youth.

The Minnesota initiative has found success by connecting or co-locating mental health services providers with schools and has proven particularly effective in reaching children who have never accessed mental health services. As a result of the program, many children with serious mental health needs were first identified including 45% of children who met the criteria for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed. This increased access was particularly important for students from cultural and ethnic minority communities<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly, school districts in Minnesota are documenting improved behavioral and academic progress for students whose mental health needs are being met. The Minneapolis school district, for example, has documented a decrease in suspensions and increased attendance and academic achievement, something that is attributed to the program.<sup>10</sup>

*Mental health and school success are closely related since untreated mental health issues can be significant barriers to learning.*

*Mark Sander, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Hennepin County, MN, Mental Health Coordinator*

#### Policy Recommendation:

1. Wisconsin should create a School-Linked Mental Health grant program, modeled after a successful initiative launched in Minnesota. The initiative would provide five-year grants that provide funding for start-up costs for providing services to children who are uninsured. Grants would also be used for coordination between school, county and mental health providers. Sample guidelines for policy grants appear as Appendix 5.

## B. SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEADING

### EDUCATOR PREPARATION

The most important school factor determining whether students achieve academically is the knowledge and skills of the classroom teacher. School principals represent the second most important school-based factor for student success. It is critically important, therefore, that we continue raising the bar for what our teachers and leaders know and are able to do.

Efforts to improve educator preparation programs (EPPs) need to take into account three important facets: *input* (how candidates are recruited/selected into programs), *training* (the content and quality of the preparation programs themselves), and *output* (the competencies and skills of graduates, as well as the ongoing support and training provided to them once they begin their careers). Additionally, teacher and leader preparation programs should train educators on key initiatives designed to increase rigor of teaching and leading as well as improve educator performance feedback. Two of these initiatives in Wisconsin are the Educator Effectiveness System and implementation of the Common Core State Standards and related assessments.

Recent research has identified a number of issues and challenges that face EPPs.

#### Key Research Findings:

Economic and other factors affect recruitment to teacher preparation programs and retention within the profession. Specifically:

- » Studies show that college graduates with the highest levels of measured ability tend not to go into teaching. Evidence also shows that teachers with higher measured ability have a higher probability of leaving the profession.<sup>11</sup>
- » Attrition rates are higher in schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, and low-performing students.<sup>12</sup>
- » “True” real wages of teachers have declined in comparison with wages for other college graduates, and studies repeatedly show that higher salary is associated with higher teacher retention rates.<sup>13</sup>
- » Pre-service testing requirements appear to adversely affect the entry of minority candidates into teaching.<sup>14</sup>
- » Colleges that are more selective in their admissions produce more effective teachers; however, candidates with higher academic credentials also have higher turnover rates when districts don’t address those factors (e.g., salary, working conditions, prestige) that cause teachers who have the most other options to leave the classroom.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of rigorous preparation programs is quite clear, but the nature of what those programs should entail is less clear:

- » Teacher preparation helps candidates develop the knowledge and skills they need in the classroom.
- » The literature comparing traditional preparation programs and alternative certification programs is sparse and the studies tend to suffer from measurement and methodological issues.
- » Both strong content knowledge and strong pedagogical content knowledge are important elements of high quality teacher preparation programs.

- » Well prepared teachers are more likely to remain in the profession.
- » New educators tend to report that they were not adequately prepared to meet challenges in the classroom<sup>16</sup>.

There is even less research on this topic as pertains to *principal* preparation, but the general findings are that the majority of principal preparation programs are not adequately preparing school leaders.<sup>17</sup>

While research is inconclusive about many facets of teacher and leader preparation, industrialized nations whose students outperform U.S. students tend to invest heavily in pre-service preparation.<sup>20</sup> Compared to the U.S., these nations had very different teacher preparation criteria than teachers in the U.S., marked by more extensive advanced coursework and specialization in content knowledge, more rigorous selection and admissions criteria, more pedagogical content and general pedagogical preparation, exit exams and certification and licensing exams. Similarly, countries that outperform the U.S. have different pay, incentives, and working conditions that may better attract and retain higher quality educators in the teaching professions.

#### Implications:

There is a conflict between two key factors related to the recruitment, preparation and retention of effective educators. While the evidence suggests that more selective and rigorous educator preparation programs are connected to improved student outcomes, the prevailing rates of compensation and other factors (working conditions, personal satisfaction, morale, societal respect for the profession) do not incentivize the “best and brightest” to enter or remain in the profession. Those nations whose students outperform U.S. students not only have more rigorous preparation programs, but also have reward and incentive structures in place. These, in turn, contribute to the prestige of the profession that then serves to attract and retain top candidates.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The State Superintendent should convene a commission to:
  - a) Create a state-wide initiative to identify and recruit talented candidates into teacher and administrator preparation programs, with an emphasis on diversity
  - b) Conduct a review of teacher and educational leader preparation programs and make recommendations on how best to prepare and support educators (i.e., through formal residencies as done in Finland and other high achieving countries)
  - c) Ensure that training programs prepare educators for the Common Core State Standards and Educator Effectiveness process

*Better performing countries did not set out to have a very good teacher here and another good one there. They were successful because they developed the entire teaching profession.*

*Michael Fullan*

## EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS

After three years of development and pilot testing, Wisconsin is implementing a new state Educator Effectiveness System for teachers and school administrators this school year. The system was developed based on recommendations from a design team convened by the state superintendent, with working teams articulating specific teacher and leader evaluation measures and processes.



Act 166 called on the Department of Public Instruction to request funding and develop the system, and required districts to implement it, which bases evaluations on a “multiple measures” approach incorporating professional practice (including an option for districts to use alternatives to the state-approved model) plus student outcomes. The approach was a key part of the state’s approved federal waiver to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The system is designed to focus on educators’ professional growth, and has been carefully revised based on educator feedback during the multi-year pilot process. Additional funding is required to comprehensively evaluate the system and make adjustments based on results. Continued resources are also needed to support administrators in effectively carrying out the more rigorous teacher and leader evaluation processes.

#### Key Research Findings:<sup>21</sup>

- » Teacher quality and principal leadership are the two most important school-based factor influencing student achievement.
- » New teacher and leader evaluation systems can be viewed as a response to several well-documented problems that characterized traditional evaluations, including the following:
  - Inconsistency across (and within) districts, as different observation rubrics, schedules, and rater training were the norm
  - Little or no differentiation in ratings (the “Widget Effect”)
  - Minimal (if any) consideration for student outcomes
  - Minimal feedback to provided educators that included specific, targeted areas for improvement and strategies to help educators improve
- » Standards-based teacher and leader evaluation systems show promise, but research is still relatively thin on their impact on teaching and leadership effectiveness, as well as their cost-benefit to districts and educators.
- » New teacher evaluation requirements create higher expectations for principals to implement evaluation practices with fidelity, provide timely instructional feedback, complete more observations, and assess more areas of practice and teacher impact on student growth (i.e., through SLOs). Principals and district leaders will clearly face significant challenges in adjusting to the time demands of the new systems, and will need additional support to manage these new roles.<sup>22</sup>

Although the new measures of practice and outcomes for teacher and leader evaluation have the potential to guide professional growth and improve educator accountability, the systems represent increased demands on time and resources. This will particularly be the case for principals, who will not only be evaluating teachers with more rigorous systems, but will also be evaluated themselves with a new principal evaluation process. Further, with different models of practice in use by districts, there is a need to determine the relative validity of the different models.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The Legislature must continue funding Educator Effectiveness implementation, particularly for:
  - » an external evaluation to assess validity and reliability and school district capacity to maintain these systems over time, and,
  - » ongoing training and support

2. The Department of Public Instruction should continue to engage school districts to explore alternative approaches to teacher evaluation that address capacity issues while maintaining overall system quality and fidelity. These may include:
  - » further allowance for differentiation in use for new versus veteran educators, self-directed growth options for highly effective educators
  - » use of peer evaluators or released teachers for evaluation
3. Continue to monitor emerging research and policy implications from other states around teacher and school leader evaluations, including “early adopter” states, such as those receiving federal Race to the Top funding.

## INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Information technology provides tools to enhance educational opportunities. But acquiring technology is not a stand-alone fix. Both training and access to infrastructure is necessary to utilize the promise of technological advances. A broad group of individuals and organizations have come together to advance the second generation of Wisconsin’s Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) program. TEACH was launched in the 1990s to allow schools and libraries to take advantage of technology to improve learning. The TEACH 2.0 consortium has developed recommendations in four key areas: broadband, hardware and infrastructure, access to digital learning, and staff development.

### *Broadband*

It is a simple fact that access to high-speed broadband is now as vital a component of PK-12 school infrastructure as electricity, air conditioning, and heating. The same tools and resources that have transformed our personal, civic, and professional lives must be part of learning experiences intended to prepare today’s students for college and careers. The scope of the state and nation’s educational broadband needs is large and growing rapidly.

While a 2010 Federal Communications Commission survey of E-Rate funded schools found that most had access to some form of broadband service, nearly 80% of respondents reported that their broadband connections were inadequate to meet their current needs. Outside of school, home broadband adoption rates have all but stalled since 2009, leveling off at roughly 65%.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly important when considering that Wisconsin will join other states across the country in moving to online administration of state standardized assessments in 2014-15, replacing the paper-and-pencil-based Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination.

Broadband expansion will become even more critical as services move to the “cloud.” While the TEACH program is increasing the bandwidth to many school districts and libraries on BadgerNet, it likely will not be able to meet their needs into the future without a significant funding increase or more affordable prices. It is clear that some form of private-public partnership is critical to ensure equitable access for every student and citizen across the state.

Approximately 75% of the state’s school districts and 95% of its libraries have a connection to BadgerNet. Since 1995, the Department of Administration has undertaken several BadgerNet procurements and contract updates. The latest update was done in November 2011 when the state’s Department of Administration and AT&T agreed to extend the current contract to November 2016. The extension includes significant cost reductions of approximately 50% in bandwidths above 20Mbps and reductions of 20% in bandwidths below 20Mbps. From the PK-12 school and library perspective, no discussion of BadgerNet is complete without reference to the TEACH program. TEACH subsidizes access to BadgerNet for educational agencies

as defined in state statutes (§16.99(2g)). These include school districts, private PK-12 schools, public libraries, private academic institutions, and technical colleges.

To reach the goal of sufficient broadband access for enhanced PK-12 teaching and learning and improved school operations, the State Educational Technology Directors Association recommends that schools and districts have a ratio of at least one gigabyte per second for every 1,000 students/staff of bandwidth by the 2017-18 school year.

### *Hardware and Infrastructure*

Just as it is important to provide higher levels of bandwidth at affordable prices, it is imperative that schools and libraries have the local infrastructure systems to facilitate the use of those systems when there is an increase in the number of users. For schools, this includes more “one computer per student” programs. In libraries, more and more users bring into the library their own mobile computing devices or use computers made available at the library. In addition, PK-12 instructional services, like many services within our economy, are moving to the “cloud.” It is essential that we provide support for school districts and libraries to maximize the potential for these services to reside within a secure environment.

### *School District Access to Digital Learning*

State resources are needed to support the development and implementation of statewide digital learning opportunities offered through the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative. The rationale for doing so is driven by a need for equitable access to high quality instruction and lowered costs through economy of scale purchases.

Equity of access to high quality digital learning options remains a challenge for all school districts in Wisconsin. Virtual and blended learning classes, digital content and resources (like that of Badgerlink), and a learning software platform would all be tremendous value-adds to small and large districts alike. Statewide licensing of these resources is an economical benefit to districts, and much lower cost to taxpayers.

Some 25 states provide funding for state-led digital learning programs including Michigan, Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota, Montana and Iowa. The Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative receives no state financial support. Funding could cover the fixed costs, maintenance costs, licensing costs and development costs for digital curriculum, integrated software and learning repositories.

### *Staff Development in Technology*

Professional development in technology, an absolutely necessary component of transforming education, has been reduced in many districts to save student programs. Technology can only drive improved student learning when it is employed in rich teaching practices. Wisconsin should ensure every teacher has access to high quality professional learning related to using technology to improve teaching and learning. In addition, high quality professional development should include:

- » pedagogy and classroom management for personalized learning,
- » administrative planning
- » implementation and evaluation of digital learning initiatives
- » district technology planning

### *Policy Recommendation:*

1. Technology is an important lever in school improvement. The state should implement the TEACH 2.0 recommendations to address school district needs related to broadband, digital learning content and high-quality professional development to realize the potential of technology improving student learning.

## C. INNOVATION

Wisconsin must develop a PK-12 educational innovation strategy. The strategy should provide incentives for districts to pilot innovative practices that evidence suggests will improve student learning, and include rigorous performance evaluation that provides guidance for practitioners and policy-makers to continuously improve teaching and learning.

The SAA believes that there are three specific areas in which innovation should be encouraged and monitored: personalized teaching and learning, potential modifications to the traditional school calendar, and conducting rigorous research on charter schools to identify and disseminate innovative practices shown to improve student learning.

*Overall, the U.S. spends about three percent of its total expenditures on research and development, with that figure reaching as high as twenty-three percent in pharmaceuticals. In education, however, only 0.2 percent of expenditures are spent on research and development. Increasing effectiveness and innovation requires identifying promising approaches, testing those approaches rigorously, and disseminating results.<sup>24</sup>*

### PERSONALIZING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Personalized learning is grounded in the premise that all learning is personal and autonomous. Unless students see a purpose or significance in their learning, make a connection, or otherwise have a reason to pay attention to what they have the potential to learn, learning does not occur.

In Wisconsin, the Institute at CESA#1 has been working with a group of school districts since 2010 on a Personalized Learning initiative. The Institute has developed a model for personalized learning that focuses learning and teaching in such a way that the student is at the center. The change strategy involved in the model begins with changes to learning and teaching strategies that allow students to achieve success while moving along a learning continuum with the end goal being independent, life-long learners. Roles and relationships for all stakeholders will shift as the new learning and teaching strategies are implemented. There are the three core components to a personalized learning system: comprehensive learner profiles, customized learning paths, and proficiency-based progress.

The model developed by the Institute is based on a wide variety of excellent research spanning a number of decades. It ranges from Benjamin Bloom's work on the effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring more than three decades ago to more recent work by Carol Dweck on growth mindsets and John Hattie's work around visible learning.

### SCHOOL CALENDARS THAT SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING

The SAA also recommends that Wisconsin look anew at the traditional school calendar, both in terms of the amount of instructional time provided to students as well as how instructional time is "packaged."

American public schools provide, on average, 180 days of instruction to students; by one standard of comparison, the international average is around 200 to 220 days.<sup>25</sup> In a historical sense, the U.S. public school calendar was set up to accommodate students living in agrarian settings. Despite dramatic changes in the labor force and economy, however, the traditional school calendar has proven remarkably durable, for reasons which include tradition, family preferences, tourism-related businesses, youth sports, and other interests which seek to protect the summer months for non-academic purposes.

Schools and districts across the country have, however, begun to experiment with alternate academic calendars. The list below describes several different types of non-traditional school year calendars; note that there is a distinction between alternative calendars that involve *extended instructional time* (e.g., extra time above and beyond minimal requirements in state law, often in the form of additional or longer school days/years) and those that merely “re-package” the *same amount of instructional time* (180 days, 1000 hours, etc.) into a different calendar:

- » *Extended School Year*: calendar that includes more than the minimum number of instruction days (usually 180), with modified start and/or end dates
- » *Balanced, Modified, or Year-Round Schedule*: calendar with the traditional number of instruction days that reduces long summer break by balancing periods of instruction days:
  - *Single-Track*: a balanced calendar in which all students and school staff follow the same instructional and vacation schedule (60 days on/20 days off, etc.)
  - *Multi-Track*: a balanced calendar in which students and educators are divided into groups (or tracks), each with its own instructional and vacation schedule

#### Key Research Findings:

During the 2006-07 school year, approximately 2.1 million students across 3,000 public, charter, and private schools in the U.S. attended school on a year-round schedule; this represents some 2% of all K-12 schools and 4% of total K-12 enrollment. Only 12 districts in the nation are known to implement district-wide, year-round schedules at the present time. It is more common for a subset of schools within a district to opt into an alternative school calendar. A precise and up-to-date count of districts that have experimented with alternative calendars is difficult to come by, due to the evolving nature of this issue, although a few noteworthy examples include the following:

- » Wake County, North Carolina: about 50 of the 163 schools (mostly elementary schools) operate on a multi-track, year-round schedule
- » Des Moines: extended school year, with a two-week break in October, a break over Christmas, and at least one more inter-session break before the year ends in June
- » Albuquerque: 8 elementary schools operate on year-round calendars in 2013-14

The National Association for Year-Round Education reports that in Wisconsin, just over 6,000 students in 14 schools and 2 districts attended year-round schools in 2007.<sup>26</sup> This does not include approximately 20 of the 160 schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools system which operate on a year-round calendar, featuring an earlier summer start (early August, as opposed to early September), along with a week-long fall “intersession” and a two-week (as opposed to one-week) spring break. Racine, Eau Claire, Beloit, and La Crosse have also experimented with or considered year-round or extended-year schools as well, and an unknown number of other districts have considered similar options.

While reasons for implementing alternative schedules vary, the two main drivers are enrollment growth and the desire to counteract summer learning loss. Summer learning loss has been extensively documented in academic literature, and has been estimated to be as much as two months of instructional time. According to a meta-analysis study on the effect of summer vacation on achievement tests, summer learning loss is most pronounced for mathematics and spelling, and is most acute among students from low-income families which have limited or no access to summer enrichment programs<sup>27</sup>

Despite the significant number of schools and districts that have experimented with alternative school calendars, the academic literature shows mixed results in terms of effects on student achievement. A primary



reason for the inconclusive nature of the research to date is the lack of rigorous, randomized studies that can easily isolate the effect of alternative school calendar from other policy initiatives and interventions. One theme which *does* appear in the research is that simply re-packaging existing instructional time – and perhaps even adding additional time – is, by itself, unlikely to stimulate large-scale improvement in student achievement without corresponding investments in key areas such as teacher and school leader quality. In other words, investments in extended learning time for students are most likely to produce positive results when coupled with efforts to prioritize each and every minute of instructional time, individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student, and build a school culture of high expectations and mutual accountability.<sup>28</sup>

*In 2014, the National Center on Time & Learning published Time Well Spent that studied dozens of outstanding expanded-time schools across the country that are achieving impressive academic outcomes. The report highlights how these schools are demonstrating that with more time, strong leaders and teachers, and well-designed educational programs, schools can close the achievement and opportunity gaps for poor children.*

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

In the 1990's states began adopting legislation allowing for the formation of charter schools, which are public schools that are exempt from many state education regulations in order to promote innovation. In Wisconsin, charter schools are exempt from the provisions of Chapters 115 through 121 of the statutes, with certain statutorily specified exceptions, including the state's pupil assessment program, the school district's annual school performance report, and the licensure of all instructional staff.<sup>29</sup>

Many recent studies suggest at least some positive impacts of charters upon student performance, although there appear to be few studies that show *across-the-board positive results* for both reading and math achievement at multiple grade levels. The literature also suggests some positive impacts of charters on other measures of student performance and engagement, such as attendance, satisfaction, and college entry rates, but again no clear-cut, across-the-board indication that charters as a whole are either superior or inferior to traditional public schools.

A key theme which emerges from several major recent studies comparing charter schools as a group to traditional public schools is that there is often greater performance variation *within* a particular "sector" of schools (traditional public, charter, or private) than exists *across* sectors; in other words, within each sector at a local, state, or national level are both higher-performing and lower-performing schools, as well as many in the middle of the performance distribution. This is perhaps not surprising given the diversity that exists among charter schools with respect to key attributes such as size, academic focus, and management/structure (operated by school districts vs. independent entities, and locally-run vs. operated by national management companies). The variance observed among charter schools with respect to both student achievement and how these schools are organized and operated points to another key theme for future research: the need to identify specific features and practices of charter schools that are associated with higher levels of student performance.

### Recent Literature

A 2014 meta-analysis of literature on charter schools and achievement performed by Julian R. Betts and Y. Emily Tang was entitled A Meta-Analysis of the Literature on the Effect of Charter Schools on Student Achievement found. This study was based on a meta-analysis of the literature on charter school achievement between 2006 and 2014 that focuses particularly on academic outcomes for lottery-based charter schools using value-added performance measures. The analysis found no significant differences for reading



achievement between charter and traditional public schools but did find that charter schools are producing higher achievement gains in math in most grade groupings. The researchers also found that the impact of charter schools on student outcomes varies considerably, especially across different geographic areas with urban areas accounting for strong positive effects.<sup>30</sup>

A 2014 working paper on the long-term impact of charter high schools by Kevin Booker, Brian Gill, Tim Sass, and Ron Zimmer entitled *Charter High Schools' Effects on Long-Term Attainment and Earnings* found:

- » Charter high school enrollment is associated with a positive increase in the probability of earning a high school diploma within five years.
- » Charter high school enrollment is associated with a positive increase in the probability of attending a college within six years.
- » Charter high school enrollment is associated with a positive increase in the probability of persisting in college for at least two years.
- » A positive impact of charter high schools on long-term earnings.<sup>31</sup>

A 2013 national charter school study conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University assessed the performance of students in charter schools in 26 states as well as New York City, which is often considered its own entity for education policy purposes. The analysis is based on a matched comparison study of student growth on state achievement tests in both reading and math from the 2005-06 school year through the 2010-11 school year with controls for student demographics and eligibility. Researchers aimed to gauge whether students who attended charter schools would have done better if they had enrolled in a traditional public school they otherwise were eligible to attend. They concluded that in the 26 states studied, charter school students now have greater learning gains in reading than their peers in traditional public schools. They found that traditional public schools and charter schools have equivalent learning gains in mathematics<sup>32</sup>.

Researchers at CREDO also analyzed school performance in California and concluded that, compared to the educational gains that charter students might have had in a traditional public school, students in California charter schools make larger learning gains in reading and learn less in mathematics. Specifically, they found that 32 percent of California charters outpace the learning impacts of traditional public schools in reading and 29 percent do so in math. However, they also found that 21 percent of charter schools have results that are significantly worse than traditional public schools for reading and that 37 percent of charter schools in math are underperforming.<sup>33</sup>

CREDO researchers also studied charter school performance in Los Angeles, and found that, on average, compared to the educational gains that charter students might have had in a traditional public school in a year's time, students in Los Angeles charter schools make larger learning gains in reading and mathematics. Such results were among the strongest observed all previous CREDO studies. Further, the results were particularly striking for Hispanic charter students.<sup>34</sup>

The Evaluation of Charter School Impacts<sup>5</sup>:

- » On average, study charter schools did not have a statistically significant impact on student achievement nor 35 other outcome measures examined, including absences, suspensions, and college expectations
- » Parent and student satisfaction with their schools was significantly higher than for the control group (students whose families applied to one of 36 participating charter middle schools in 15 different states but were not admitted).<sup>36</sup>

### How New York City's Charter Schools Affect Achievement:<sup>37</sup>

- » Students who attend charter schools for grades K-8 would close most (86%) of the achievement gap between the highest-performing and lowest-performing schools in the New York City area in Math and 66% in English Language Arts, compared to students who applied (but were not admitted to) charter schools.<sup>38</sup>

Additional studies have attempted to make comparisons between traditional public schools and charter schools with respect to a “return on investment” analysis that includes not just student performance, but also per-pupil spending levels. In most cases, the conclusion that emerges here is that charters deliver similar, if not superior, levels of performance for lower per-pupil costs. Since charters overall tend to enroll fewer (and in some cases far fewer) students with disabilities, however, it is not clear whether simple per-pupil spending comparisons accurately reflect the full cost of educating students with special needs. Similarly, only a few studies of charter school effectiveness have been able to really control for potential selection bias inherent in having students apply to attend charters. That is, the best control group for this type of selection bias is students who applied to attend charter schools but were turned away based only on capacity (via a lottery), rather than for other reasons (including academic performance and disability status). In most cases, charters that are over-subscribed must conduct lotteries for enrollment, but suitable records of who was turned away via lottery have not always been available for research purposes.

### Policy Recommendations:

The SAA believes that the state of Wisconsin should create a PK-12 educational innovation strategy, overseen by the Department of Public Instruction, with input from an advisory panel, that includes representatives from PK-12 educators, higher education organizations, parental organizations, student leadership organizations, and business leaders. The innovation strategy should provide for five-year grants for school districts to pilot promising innovations related to:

- » **Developing and modeling personalized learning that includes data rich learner profiles, customized learning paths, and proficiency-based progress (rather than seat time).**
- » **Developing and modeling evidence-based school calendars (e.g., calendars that address summer drop, extended-learning opportunities, and teacher professional development).**

In addition, the innovation strategy should:

- » **Include a robust system for the evaluation of innovative practices funded by grants, as well as charter programs**
- » **Provide for the intentional dissemination of information related to innovative practices that have been shown to improve student learning.**

# D. FINANCE AND STEWARDSHIP

## SCHOOL FINANCE

Wisconsin consistently ranks relatively well on school finance equity measures. However, the state share of school funding has shrunk in real dollars over the past decade and districts sustained large funding cuts in 2011. Additionally, Wisconsin school districts suffer from the systemic gap between allowable revenue growth under revenue limits and increases in school district fixed costs.

In such an unstable environment, school districts across Wisconsin are pushed to stretch limited resources. The impacts are not equal across districts. They are more serious in districts with a large share of higher-needs students (including those in poverty, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners), as well as those with declining enrollment. They also represent a major challenge for Wisconsin's many small rural districts, where the loss of just a few students, coupled with increases in transportation costs, can have significant budget impact. Increasingly, Wisconsin school leaders struggle with a funding system that is failing to keep pace with the growing and ever-changing educational needs of the students they serve.

The following data highlights some of the immediate problems with Wisconsin's school finance systems and illustrates the state's shrinking commitment to its schoolchildren.

- » Wisconsin's national ranking in K-12 per pupil spending has plummeted from 12<sup>th</sup> highest in 2003-04 to 21<sup>st</sup> in 2011-12.<sup>39</sup>
- » Wisconsin school aid as a percentage of the state general-purpose budget has declined from 43.1% in 2003-04 to 32.4% in 2014-15.<sup>40</sup>
- » Wisconsin's total school costs as a percentage of Wisconsin's gross domestic product has declined from 4.1% in 2003-04 to 3.74% in 2014-15.<sup>41</sup>
- » Wisconsin's percentage of all school districts in declining enrollment has hovered around the 60% mark for a decade, with 60.6% of districts in declining enrollment in 2013-14. This compares to just 29.8% of districts that were in declining enrollment in 1997-98.<sup>42</sup>
- » Wisconsin's reduction in spending per student (\$1,038, adjusted for inflation) from 2007-08 to 2013-14 were the second highest in the nation, behind only that of Alabama.<sup>43</sup>

*When I was a boy on the Mississippi River there was a proposition in a township there to discontinue public schools because they were too expensive. An old farmer spoke and said if they stopped building schools they would not save anything, because every time a school was closed a jail had to be built.*

*Mark Twain*

### Guiding Principles:

Developing and implementing the "perfect" school finance system has proven to be an elusive endeavor, and we do not proclaim that we have a "magic bullet." We do believe, however, that the following non-negotiable, student-centered principles should guide our efforts at school finance reform in Wisconsin. A high-quality, effective school finance system designed to foster improvements in student achievement for all Wisconsin school children must:

1. Be fair and equitable for all children.
2. Be sustainable to afford all children continued access to high quality instructional programming.

3. Recognize and address the unique and extraordinary needs of students in poverty, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, and students with disabilities.
4. Recognize and address the unique needs of students in different regions of the state. We simply cannot tolerate disparities in instructional resources and programming based on zip codes.
5. Provide equitable access to instructional technology, 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum and well-prepared, high quality teachers and leaders.

#### Key Research Findings:

- » Research on funding fairness historically centers on two main components: 1) factors associated with student needs, including special education, ELL, and the social context, and 2) those related to regional differences in costs, due to economies of scale, teacher costs, and others. Although a general understanding exists that school funding ought to “strive to improve equity and adequacy of student outcomes,”<sup>44</sup> many state funding formulas fail to accomplish this, often because of an over-reliance of local property taxes.
- » Many low-income schools are challenged by inequitable access to teaching quality and financial resources. According to a 2011 U.S. Department of Education report, more than 40 percent of Title I schools “spent less state and local money on teachers and other personnel than schools that don’t receive Title I money at the same grade level in the same district.”
- » School finance adequacy is one prominent area of focus in school finance policy. Odden et al.<sup>45</sup>, in their work on school finance, define adequacy “as providing a level of resources to schools that will enable them to make substantial improvements in student performance [...] as progression toward ensuring that all, or almost all, students meet their state’s performance standards in the long term.” (630) To arrive at such an adequacy number, they use an evidence-based method, which helps determine funding needed to cover effective school strategies and related staffing. Staffing and resource costs are then aggregated for teachers, guidance, general resources, materials, and other inputs.
- » In a prior study of funding Wisconsin schools adequately, Odden et al.<sup>46</sup> make a number of recommendations, with related cost estimates, concluding that total K-12 spending would have to increase by 9.2% to achieve adequacy. Recommendations from the Wisconsin adequacy study included additional per pupil support for high needs students as well as resources to support tutoring, extended day programming, additional instructional planning time, and summer school. Odden et al.<sup>47</sup> summarize ten strategies for improving performance, including analyzing and becoming more familiar with student data, setting higher goals, reviewing effective curricula and instruction, investing in teacher training and development, providing extra help for struggling students, creating smaller classrooms, restructuring school days and instructional time, providing strong leadership that fosters professional school cultures, and bringing external professional knowledge into schools.

#### Implications:

Although international comparisons suggest that higher spending nations do not necessarily correlate to high achievement, funding inequities hinder the ability of high poverty districts to provide an adequate education, and contribute to larger societal inequalities. According to the Wisconsin school finance adequacy report by Odden et al.<sup>48</sup>, “These findings suggest that equity issues should always be included in school finance analyses, and that variation in both student needs and the purchasing power of the education dollar should be recognized in the school finance system. Otherwise, conclusions about equity and undoubtedly adequacy could be incorrect. Further, these issues need to be centrally involved in an adequacy analysis.”

## A MORE SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM

One of the greatest problems in Wisconsin's system of school finance is the systemic gap between allowable revenue growth under revenue caps and school district fixed cost increases (i.e., staffing, transportation, utilities) as driven by state and federal requirements and community expectations. In such an unstable fiscal environment, many districts find it extremely difficult to repurpose budget funds and to make new investments in innovation and continuous instructional improvement. In order to provide much-needed fiscal stability and sustainability in our school finance system, Wisconsin must align allowable revenue growth with cost increases.

### Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase the annual per pupil adjustment under revenue caps by the annual percentage increase in the consumer price index (CPI).
2. Adopt State Superintendent Tony Evers' Fair Funding for Our Future Plan, which includes:
  - » Distributing the \$897 million in school levy and first dollar credits to school districts in the equalization aid formula.
  - » Distributing a minimum level of school aid for every student in every school district.
  - » Increasing the secondary cost ceiling from 90% to 100% of the prior year's average statewide shared cost.
  - » Additional formula "weighting" in the equalization aid formula for students eligible for free and reduced price lunch.
  - » A significant revenue limit per pupil increase as well as a corresponding increase in general aid.
  - » A provision to "hold harmless" in the short term the school districts that lose resources under the plan.

## STUDENTS WITH HIGH NEEDS

Funding for students with high needs played a significant role in the debate over the constitutionality of the Wisconsin school finance system. In *Vincent v. Voight*, the State Supreme Court found the Wisconsin school finance system constitutional, so long as the legislature provided sufficient resources to ensure that all students are offered an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education. The Court specifically enumerated three classes of students to which the state has a special obligation for ensuring equitable opportunities: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Today, the limited school funding directed to each of these enumerated classes of students challenges the abilities of local school districts to meet the Court's standard.

## STUDENTS IN POVERTY

The student poverty rate continues to climb in Wisconsin.<sup>49</sup> For the 2013-14 school year, 43.3% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals – up from 29.5% in the 2003-04 school year. There are now 117 of Wisconsin's 424 school districts that have 50% or more of their students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals, including the state's five largest districts: Milwaukee (82%), Madison (54%), Kenosha (55%), Green Bay (58%) and Racine (63%).

The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program is one of the only state programs that targets funding to economically disadvantaged students.<sup>50</sup> SAGE was established in the 1996-97 school year to improve student achievement by employing four school improvement strategies: 1) class size reduction

in grades K-3; 2) increased collaboration between schools and their communities; 3) rigorous curriculum; and 4) improved professional development and staff evaluation practices.

Under the program, schools receive a per pupil allocation for each eligible low income student in a participating grade (K-3). Currently that allocation is \$2,250 in statute, but it has been prorated since 2008-09. The last year's prorated amount was \$2,027.25.

SAGE aid in 2013-14 totaled \$108,934,500. In order to fully fund the statutory pupil allocation, Wisconsin lawmakers would need to appropriate an additional \$11,969,250 annually.

The SAGE program serves 53,735 (K-3) of the state's 359,400 (K-12) public school students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. These SAGE students attend 425 elementary schools in 205 school districts. Despite this, Wisconsin has no comprehensive program that targets additional resources to raise achievement among economically disadvantaged students. A review of SAGE data suggests that some elementary schools with more than 50% of their students eligible for free and reduced-price meals do not currently participate in the program.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The Fair Funding for Our Future Plan, as recommended in the previous section, includes additional formula "weighting" in the equalization aid formula for students eligible for free and reduced-price meals. This option would require per pupil revenue limit increases and increases in general aid to offset the effects of aid redistribution and to provide districts with real spending authority.
2. Convene a study group to develop additional funding options that will support the needs of all economically disadvantaged students in Wisconsin.

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Federal and State categorical aids for special education have not kept pace with rising costs. The categorical aid is the state's primary source for recognizing the additional costs of educating students with disabilities. The state level of reimbursement fell below 30% in 2004-05 and is projected to fall below 25% in 2014-15. As recently as 1993-94, the level of reimbursement was 44.6%. The special education categorical aid appropriation of \$368,939,100 has been flat since 2008-09. Many believe (with considerable justification) that, under revenue limits, districts are being forced to take money from regular education to pay for special education.

Meeting the needs of pupils with low-incidence and high-cost special education requirements can be very costly for school districts. To assist school districts in meeting these needs, the state created an additional appropriation for funding certain high-cost special education services. The appropriation consists of approximately \$1.9 million annually of federal IDEA state discretionary funding and \$3.5 million of state general purpose revenue (GPR). All costs (except administration) related to educating pupils with high-cost special education needs are "aidable" under the program. Costs reimbursed by IDEA flow-through dollars, Medicaid, and state special education categorical aids are deducted. Reimbursement is then calculated at 90% of the amount in excess of \$30,000 that it costs to provide services to an individual pupil in the prior year.

The state level of reimbursement for high-cost special education services fell below 50% in 2011-12<sup>51</sup> and is projected to fall to 40.9% in 2014-15.



#### Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase state special education categorical aid funding to reimburse 30% of the prior year's aidable costs.
2. Increase categorical aid funding for high-cost special education services to reimburse 100% of the prior year's aidable costs under the program formula outlined above.
3. Make the special education categorical aid and the high cost special education categorical aid "sum sufficient" appropriations.

## LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

Wisconsin requires school districts to establish a bilingual-bicultural (BLBC) program if they meet the following thresholds of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students from the same language group within a given school:

- » 10 or more pupils in grades K-3
- » 20 or more pupils in grades 4-8
- » 20 or more pupils in grades 9-12

The state reimbursement rate for these BLBC programs has fallen below 8% of approved prior year costs. Between LEPs attending districts that do not meet the above thresholds and LEPs not covered by their districts BLBC program, furthermore, the majority of LEPs in Wisconsin do not have any targeted BLBC resources behind them to assist with the additional costs of educating them to English proficiency. It is also reasonable to assume that, absent sufficient BLBC categorical aid, most district BLBC expenditures are being funded from regular education aid sources.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The Legislature should double the current \$8.59 million annual appropriation for BLBC Programs. Also, create a new categorical aid appropriation to award up to \$100 per LEP pupil to districts that have LEP populations that do not currently qualify for BLBC categorical aid.
2. DPI should convene a study group to restructure BLBC program requirements and Wisconsin's approach to educating LEP students in general. The study group should also make recommendations for restructuring Wisconsin's BLBC categorical aid program to support the additional education costs of every LEP student in Wisconsin.

## PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

Geographically large, sparsely populated rural school districts that transport students significant distances have been hardest hit by increasing transportation costs. Costs vary widely among school districts, from little more than \$50 per pupil in some districts to nearly \$1,500 per pupil in others.<sup>52</sup>

Under current law, school districts are required to provide transportation services to public and private school students enrolled in regular education programs if the student resides more than two miles from the nearest public school they are entitled to attend. State pupil transportation categorical aid is based upon a flat annual amount per transported student that was last changed in the 2007-09 biennial budget.

It is estimated that total school district transportation costs for transporting students to and from school are approximately \$420 million annually. Thus, the state pupil transportation aid appropriation (\$23,703,600 annually) reimburses only about 5.5% of actual transportation costs. Even with the infusion of \$5 million annually for high cost transportation funding in 2013-14, state reimbursement is still less than 7% of actual school transportation costs.<sup>53</sup>

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently distributed \$5 million under the first year of the high cost categorical aid. Districts are eligible for this aid if their transportation costs exceed 150% of the statewide average cost per member. Wisconsin districts submitted \$14.84 million in eligible costs, resulting in the new categorical aid funding being prorated at about 33%; the obvious policy implication here is that while this new infusion of funding for student transportation was extremely helpful, it was inadequate in covering actual costs being incurred each year by districts.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase funding for the pupil transportation aid appropriation by 10% annually until the state level of reimbursement reaches 30% of prior year aidable costs.
2. Increase funding for the high cost transportation categorical aid to cover 100% of the prior year aidable costs.
3. Make the pupil transportation aid and high cost transportation aid appropriations “sum sufficient.”
4. Convene a study group to explore: 1) alternatives to our current method of distributing transportation aid to school districts; and 2) strategies for school districts to reduce school transportation costs.

## STATE AID STABILIZATION FUND

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The State of Wisconsin maintains a “rainy day fund” to buffer state finances during economic recessions. As PK-12 funding in Wisconsin equals about one-third of the state budget, an equal percentage of the state’s rainy day fund should be earmarked for PK-12 education funding. This “state aid stabilization” mechanism would be used during recessions to buffer school aids from dramatic cuts, as was the case in 2011-13 where school funding was reduced by \$792 million.

## E. CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Every school should be a warm and welcoming place for students, parents, staff and community. Research demonstrates the importance of a productive school climate and culture characterized by trust, academic press (e.g. high expectations), and collaboration.<sup>54</sup> District and school leadership is instrumental in establishing productive school working conditions. But the state also has an important role to play in fostering safe and welcoming schools by:

- » Addressing systemic deficiencies in the delivery of children’s mental health services
- » Assisting, facilitating, and encouraging more schools to adopt a prevention-based, evidence-based behavioral system of support and trauma sensitive practices (e.g., Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support or PBIS)
- » Providing a clearinghouse of effective practices and policies related to school climate and crisis preparedness
- » Providing assistance to schools that are responding to a crisis
- » Connecting state agencies to provide coherent and consistent support to local officials

### Policy Recommendation:

The State should create an Office of Mental Health, School Safety and Violence Prevention within the Department of Public Instruction to:

- » Coordinate the PK-12 community’s work with the Office of Children’s Mental Health
- » Provide a clearinghouse for effective practices, policies and training related to school climate and crisis preparedness
- » Assist, facilitate, and encourage more schools to adopt a prevention-based, evidence-based behavioral system of support and trauma sensitive practices (e.g., Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support or PBIS)
- » Provide assistance to schools who are responding to crisis
- » Coordinate with the Department of Justice, Department of Health Services and other state agencies to promote coherent and consistent recommendations to school districts and local law enforcement and child welfare agencies
- » Collect, analyze and share data related to important issues impacting school climate

## **F. STANDARDS, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

Over the past twenty years, Wisconsin has developed and adopted academic content standards in over twenty-five different content areas, spanning the four core areas of English, mathematics, science and social studies, to the career and technical education fields, to world languages, the arts, and health and physical education.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction adopts model standards in an academic area as a guide for school districts to use in planning and adopting curriculum that is aligned to clear, concise, and rigorous expectations for what students are expected to know and be able to do at regular intervals during their K-12 education. In large-scale assessment areas, such as mathematics and reading, the standards adopted by the Department of Public Instruction also provide a roadmap for districts for what to expect of that assessment, as state and federal law require the state to adopt standards in these areas for the purpose of aligning a state-mandated assessment to those standards.

Though the Department of Public Instruction adopts model standards, school districts have always had the local control to adopt the state standards, or to adapt, modify, or create new standards that meet their needs. They also retain control over how to best design a curriculum that aligns to state-approved content standards. Local control over standards, instructional methods and practices, curriculum, and textbooks, is a valuable hallmark of public education in Wisconsin, and one that should be preserved.

Wisconsin students, parents and teachers are best served by having a transparent, thoughtful and timely state process for standards adoption and revision. Furthermore, the State should move ahead with greatly needed revisions to the state's science and social studies standards that have not been revised since 1998.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Assessing student learning, which provides an understanding for what students know and can do in relation to established content standards, serves an important purpose in education. It can provide feedback to the learner, diagnostic information for the educator, and actionable information for parents, schools, and future employers and institutions of higher education.

When reported in the aggregate, assessment data is also used to provide the public with information on learning in schools. Finally, assessments provide a valuable means of tracking achievement gaps that all too often exist between different student subgroups in Wisconsin, including white students and their non-white peers.

While assessment serves an important purpose, it is subsidiary to the paramount goal of providing high quality learning for all students. Assessment must be incorporated in a manner that supports the larger school mission. Assessment practices need to be balanced, evidence-based, and properly aligned to the fundamental purposes of teaching and learning. Development of school and educator capacity must be integral and not an afterthought. Wisconsin's assessment system should:

- » Include a balance of formative, interim, and summative assessment forms
- » Provide valid, timely, and reliable information
- » Be relevant to teachers and students
- » Be universally designed for the full diversity of learners in our schools
- » Not excessively detract from instructional time

- » Include robust professional development provided to educators to develop high quality classroom assessments and interpret standardized assessments
- » Promote discussion around attaching high stakes outcomes to students, educators, or schools, including asking and answering the following questions:
  - Is the design of the assessment appropriate for the intended high stakes purpose?
  - Will the use of the assessment for high stakes lead to inappropriate test preparation that will generate invalid results and ethical failures?
  - Have adequate resources, professional learning, and implementation been provided so that educators are ready and students have the opportunity to learn what is being assessed?
  - Do decision makers and other stakeholders have accurate information on the validity, reliability, and measurement uncertainty of the assessment data?

Assessment has become an increasingly central and visible component of state and federal policy initiatives in elementary and secondary education. In Wisconsin, the 1990's introduced the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), which assessed reading and mathematics, along with English Language Arts, science, and social studies at grades 4, 8, and 10.

The first decade of the 21st century brought additional assessments, with the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act requiring additional summative accountability assessments of reading and mathematics at grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 and Response to Intervention (RtI) encouraging increased use of standardized benchmark assessments as part of a universal screening system.

Now, in the second decade of the century, Wisconsin schools are experiencing further expansion of mandated assessments. Common Core-aligned Smarter Balanced assessments are replacing the WKCE reading and mathematics assessments at grades 3-8, while the WKCE will continue to be administered in grades 4, 8, and 10 in science, social studies, English Language Arts, and writing.

The ACT suite of Aspire at grades 9-10, ACT in grade 11, and WorkKeys in grade 11 is arriving, with only the grade 10 WKCE in reading, language, and mathematics being removed. In addition, the PALS early literacy screener is now mandated as a benchmark assessment in grades 4K-2. This increase in standardized assessment has been accompanied by the introduction of new accountability systems for schools and educators that rely substantially on assessment data.

Given these widespread changes in the state's assessment and accountability systems, it is time for an evidence-based dialogue around assessment and accountability policies and practices to reinforce current initiatives. This dialogue should engage several topics, which include (but are not limited to) the following:

- » Reviewing the current portfolio of mandated assessments for alignment, relevance, time, reporting, and usefulness of results.
- » Reviewing intended and unintended consequences of using assessment for high stakes, including asking the question, "Are current policies and practices driving or inhibiting improved teaching and learning?"
- » Examining opportunities for promoting innovative and authentic assessment practices across the curriculum that facilitate personalized learning and the demonstration of creativity, problem-solving, and other higher order skills.
- » Recommending professional development for current and pre-service educators in assessment literacy, evidence-based assessment practices, and evidence-based grading practices.
- » Reviewing which resources and structures schools and educators need to effectively administer the mandated assessment program and utilize the results.
- » Developing ethical guidance to educators around assessment practices.

The enterprise should be consistent with our values as a state, and should aspire to incorporate the best evidence-based practices in place nationally and internationally. Increasing learning for all students should be the guiding principle.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability systems in high-performing entities, including frameworks for both content standards and assessments, vary widely. These range from an almost complete lack of standardized exams in Finland to a focus on high-stakes assessment in Massachusetts. A related gap exists across accountability systems, as schools in Massachusetts and Ontario link test scores and other student and school-level performance metrics to a school for decision-making purposes, while Finnish schools, which are largely controlled at a local level, do not distinguish and rate schools on standardized metrics.

Even with these drastically different approaches to accountability, a common thread is evident: the need for effective intervention and support to address areas of need and growth at both the school level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing schools) and at the student level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing students). Although the means of identifying where development is needed vary between the systems, each tries to provide useful support rather than punishment or blame; for example, an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report from 2010 describes Ontario's system as one that assumes "that teachers are professionals who are trying to do the right thing, and that performance problems are much more likely to be a product of lack of knowledge than lack of motivation."

### Policy Recommendations:

- » Establish a State Academic Standards and Assessment Review Council that would be charged with reviewing the adoption and adaptation of the state's academic standards and assessments, as well as the appropriate uses of assessment data:
- » Council members would be appointed by the State Superintendent and recommended by parent organizations, institutions of higher education, professional associations, education labor organizations and educational research organizations. In addition, the Council would include representatives from the Office of the Governor, and the chairs of the Assembly and Senate Education Committees and the ranking member from the minority party on each education committee.
- » The Council should use commonly accepted principles for standard development, such as those established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
- » The council should review and provide input on the menu of supports provided to schools and districts that are identified for need of intervention through the state accountability system.

*Accountability looks drastically different in high performing systems (Massachusetts, Ontario, Finland) however, the common thread is that each system includes effective intervention and support to address areas of need and growth at both the school and at the student level.*



# CONCLUSION

Wisconsin adopted its constitution in 1848 mandating a uniform system of public schools throughout the state. Since that time we have invested in a public education system that is among the nation's leaders in graduation rates and academic achievement.

Today, that system is challenged to both raise the academic bar for all students to meet the increasingly rigorous standards of today's global society and to close persistent learning gaps for lower-performing groups of students to provide equal opportunity to all our citizens. Whether the Badger State rises to that challenge will be the single most important factor to our future economic and civic growth.

Wisconsin can and will meet this challenge, but only if the state's policymakers commit to evidence-based policies that are proven to drive whole-system improvement at the school, district, and state levels. Wisconsin can provide world-class opportunities for all of our students by ensuring that:

- Students are ready to learn by committing to a comprehensive preschool policy and meeting children's mental health needs;
- All students are served by effective educators by investing in proven strategies to support teaching excellence;
- Wisconsin schools continually evolve in a rapidly changing world by developing a PK-12 innovation strategy; and,
- We meet our constitutional standard for uniform educational opportunities by providing adequate and equitable funding for all students.

Wisconsin will not meet the challenge before us if education is viewed as a cost to be minimized and legislation is based more on ideology or emotion than evidence. For every dollar that the State of Wisconsin spends on an ineffective program, such as vouchers, it loses the opportunity to invest in programs that are effective in improving teaching and learning for all students.

The policy recommendations put forward in the preceding report provide a policy pathway for ensuring that our system of public education is the best in the world for every student regardless of their background or address.

# APPENDIX #1: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

## Defining College and Career Readiness

In 2012 the Wisconsin Accountability Design Team developed the following definition of college and career readiness that sets the standard for preparing our students and is the ultimate benchmark by which we measure our progress:

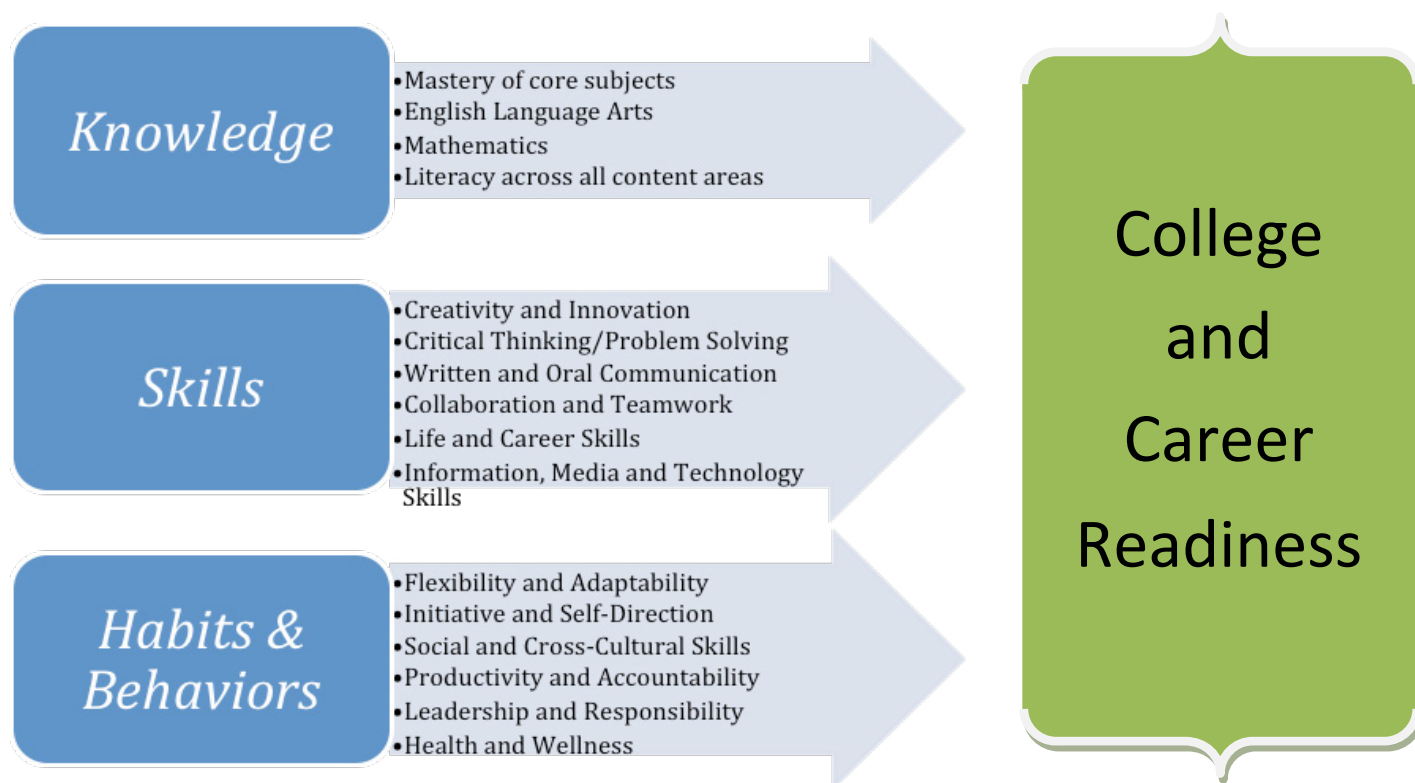
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Students who are college and/or career ready have, upon graduation, the knowledge, habits, and skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and/or training that maximize their opportunities for sustainable employment.

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In Wisconsin, we expect our schools to prepare all students to be ready for college and careers. This can include pursuing a degree at two-or four-year institutions, technical/vocational programs, community college, apprenticeship, significant on-the-job training, or the military. Entry into career or college should be without remediation. All students in Wisconsin should graduate from high school possessing and demonstrating the *knowledge* (academic and technical content), *skills* (e.g., critical thinking, application of knowledge), and *habits* (e.g., perseverance, time management) that only come from a rigorous, rich, and well-rounded curriculum and effective schools.

### Conceptualizing College & Career Readiness



# APPENDIX #2: LEARNING FROM NATIONAL AND WORLD LEADERS

In developing its policy recommendations, the School Administrators Alliance reviewed the literature related to the World's highest performing educational systems. This appendix includes two important sources on this topic: 1) a summary of Michael Fullan's article on the right and wrong drivers for whole system reform, and 2) a research summary prepared by the WI Center for Education Research on National and International Exemplars.

## MICHAEL FULLAN: CHOOSING THE WRONG DRIVERS FOR WHOLE SYSTEM REFORM

Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, is recognized as a worldwide authority on educational reform. This is a summary from his article entitled *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform* (2011) in which he examines drivers typically chosen by leaders to accomplish whole system school reform, critiques the inadequacy of those drivers for achieving the intended outcomes, and offers an alternative set of drivers that have been proven to be more effective for accomplishing the desired goals. He argues that many systems not only fail to feature these components, but choose drivers that actually make matters worse. He concludes that the most successful systems around the world are using drivers that lead to learning and teaching being based on individual and collective intrinsic motivation, which has permanent staying power. Fullan argues that if countries lagging behind – currently including the U.S. and Australia – do not change their ways, the gap will become larger and larger.

*Drivers* are those policy and strategy levers that have the least and best chance of driving successful reform. A 'wrong driver' then is a deliberate policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired result, while a 'right driver' is one that ends up achieving better measurable results for students. Whole system reform is just that – 100 per cent of the system – a whole state, province, region or entire country.

The interest in whole system reform has been fueled recently by better analyses of how different countries are faring in international benchmark comparisons. OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 results received strong media coverage as it released its latest results on 7 December 2010 (OECD, 2010a). At the same time, McKinsey and Company published its insightful analysis of how 'improved school systems keep getting better' (Mourshed et al, 2010). The McKinsey report examined 20 entities (countries or sub-regions of countries) including developing countries going from 'poor to fair', 'fair to good', 'good to great', and 'great to excellent'.

In the rush to move forward, leaders, especially from countries that have not been progressing, tend to choose the wrong drivers. Such ineffective drivers fundamentally miss the target. There are four main 'wrong driver' culprits discussed:

1. **Accountability:** using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools vs. capacity building
2. **Individual teacher and leadership quality:** promoting individual vs. group solutions
3. **Technology:** investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs. instruction
4. **Fragmented strategies** vs. integrated or systemic strategies

The four ‘wrong drivers’ are not forever wrong. They are just badly placed as lead drivers. The four ‘right drivers’ – capacity building, group work, pedagogy, and ‘systemness’ – are the anchors of whole system reform. You don’t have to give up your affinity to accountability, individual quality, technology, and favored quality components of the reform package. Stated another way, Fullan asserts that he is not talking about presence or absence or even sequence, but rather dominance. Dominance is another word for saying what system leaders state and acknowledge as the anointed, explicitly articulated lead drivers. The encouraging news is that the judicious use of the four right drivers ends up accomplishing better the goals that those espousing the wrong drivers are seeking. And it does so in a fundamentally more powerful and sustainable manner.

**The right drivers – capacity building, group work, instruction, and systemic solutions – are effective because they work directly on changing the culture of school systems (values, norms, skills, practices, relationships); by contrast the wrong drivers alter structure, procedures and other formal attributes of the system without reaching the internal substance of reform – and that is why they fail.**

The essence of this paper is that if you want to be successful at whole system reform, then base your dominant set of strategies on the four right drivers in combination.

## **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXEMPLARS<sup>55</sup>**

The factors affecting student performance and learning are complicated and interconnected; not surprisingly, no single panacea exists, and policymakers should resist the temptation to assume that factors which contribute to success in one setting (as challenging as those are to identify) can be replicated quickly and easily in other settings. In recent years, policymakers and educators alike have taken a strong interest in identifying jurisdictions (nations, states, and school districts) where student performance (typically measured through standardized assessments) has been high, and then seeking to identify factors which appear to have contributed to this success. In particular, students in Finland, Ontario, and Massachusetts have demonstrated high levels of scholastic performance on international and national examinations, including the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). In reviewing recent research key policy commonalities among high achieving nations and states emerge including the following:

- » A highly trained and motivated teaching staff, drawn from the top ranks of college students
- » Accountability systems focused on effective intervention at the school and student level
- » Equitable funding
- » Addressing societal factors that impact student learning

## **TEACHER AND LEADER QUALITY**

Substantial research in recent years has confirmed that effective teachers and school leaders are the most important within-school influences on student achievement. Having effective educators, in turn, depends on both (a) the ability of schools to develop existing staff, and (b) access to a “pipeline” of well-prepared educators. One theme which emerges from the highest-performing countries is that teachers are drawn from the top percentiles of their college class, and subsequently receive ample training and experience prior to leading their own classroom. For example, becoming an educator in Finland generally takes between 5 and 7 years, 15-25% of which is practicum experience. Specifically, primary school teachers in Finland must receive a master’s degree in teaching which, in addition to including coursework on subject-specific content and pedagogy and general theory, also includes research experience and a thesis, while secondary

teachers first receive a master's in their content area, and then study pedagogy.

Closer to home, the Boston Teacher Residency has been training teachers for work in Boston schools since 2003; residents simultaneously study theory—by attending courses and seminars—and practice—by spending four days a week in a classroom environment—before receiving support as they begin full time teaching. This program, which has a rigorous selection process, has demonstrated success, with highly positive reviews from principals and high retention rates.

With respect to compensation, there is some evidence that the highest performing education systems, as a result of prioritizing teacher quality, tend to offer attractive compensation and opportunities for advancement. The relationship between educators' compensation and student performance is complex, however, as teacher salaries by themselves across all OECD countries tend to be below the average for other comparable careers. In order to attract the best teachers, some higher-performing countries, states, and districts offer alternate benefits, including job security and vacations, in addition to salary increases (with experience and education) and performance bonuses, which in recent years have increasingly been tied to new performance-based teacher evaluation programs.

Beyond effective training and compensation programs, the most successful education systems foster a popular culture where teaching is a well-respected career, and teachers are trusted to provide high levels of instruction. This is reflected through the professional autonomy and independence educators are given, especially in Finland, but also elsewhere, including in Massachusetts, where teachers largely retain the freedom to design their own lesson plans and curricula, albeit with substantial support and opportunity for professional development. These conditions are much harder to replicate, of course, than new educator training and compensation programs, especially in the short term, but should clearly be part of long-term discussions about how to elevate education as a profession with the goal of increasing student achievement.

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY, ASSESSMENTS, AND STANDARDS**

Accountability systems, including frameworks for both content standards (to define what students are expected to know at various ages/grade levels) and assessments (which measure students' mastery of content standards), vary widely, even among high-performing entities. These range from an almost complete lack of standardized exams (in Finland) to a focus on high-stakes assessment (in Massachusetts, for example). A related gap exists across accountability systems, as schools in Massachusetts and Ontario link test scores and other student and school-level performance metrics to a school for decision-making purposes, while Finnish schools, which are largely controlled at a local level, do not distinguish and rate schools on standardized metrics.

Even with these drastically different approaches to accountability, a common thread is evident: the need for effective intervention and support to address areas of need and growth at both the school level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing *schools*) and at the student level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing *students*). Although the means of identifying where development is needed vary between the systems, each tries to provide useful support rather than punishment or blame; for example, an OECD report from 2010 describes Ontario's system as one that assumes "that teachers are professionals who are trying to do the right thing, and that performance problems are much more likely to be a product of lack of knowledge than lack of motivation."

The creation of content standards varies widely from system to system, as some create comprehensive standards, while others describe broader goals. However, each of the highest performing systems appears to have a progression of skills and guidelines for where students should be by a certain point; in some cases, such as in Massachusetts, these guidelines also inform the standardized state examination. Another common theme with respect to content standards, which has informed the development of the Common Core State Standards in the U.S. in recent years, is to focus on fewer standards at a greater level of depth and rigor, as opposed to more standards at less depth (the “mile wide/inch deep” problem).

### **EQUITABLE FUNDING**

How schools are funded, and the level of local control over distribution of funding, also varies widely; for example, schools in Finland are funded entirely at a local level, while funding in Ontario occurs almost entirely at the province level. Each approach has its merits, although one clear challenge inherent in a localized approach to funding in the U.S. has been how to ensure funding adequacy given vast differences in local wealth (between central cities and suburbs, for example). Generally, funding that takes into account the needs of different schools and students more effectively provides the necessary resources to all schools.

### **OTHER SOCIETAL FACTORS**

One of the more salient conclusions to be drawn from national (and especially international) comparisons of educational performance is the extent to which such comparisons are, in a sense, as much about societal issues (poverty, segregation, etc.) – and how different jurisdictions respond to these conditions – as they are about the performance measures themselves.

In other words, each of the successful reforms and strategies described above are influenced by conditions and decisions that lie outside the immediate purview of schools themselves, such as access to early childhood resources, health care, and efforts to address poverty. For example, Canadian schools operate in a context where equity is prized and where the out-of-school situation is defined, in part, by the social supports that exist, including access to health care and other services. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has also been shown to have result in more equitable outcomes and better student performance; high performing nations have recently emphasized ECEC, including Finland, which has higher than average spending on care and education for three to five year olds, in addition to longer maternity and paternity leave entitlements. In many of the more highly-performing education systems, societal supports which encourage a culture supportive of education, health, and aid have yielded results.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Much of our selection of the highest performing education systems is informed by their performance on international examinations such as the PISA and TIMSS. Although those tests do provide a comparison point, they can also be over-interpreted. For example, although Finland performs very well on the PISA, its results on the TIMSS are in the center of the pack, and some university mathematicians there complained that students were increasingly beginning college unprepared in math. It is also worth noting that, as with any test, the PISA and TIMSS scores come with a standard error, which makes some test score differences not statistically significant.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

There is no easy or quick path to creating a high performing education system; however, evidence from the current role models in education does highlight some promising practices and worthwhile investments. Specifically, a selective and comprehensive teacher training program, dedicated policy, district and school leadership, and effective intervention and support at the school and district levels are key strategies for creating highly effective educational systems.



## APPENDIX #3: PK-12 WISCONSIN EDUCATION: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

### STRENGTHS TO BUILD UPON:

**Graduation rate:** Eighty-seven and a half percent of Wisconsin public school students graduate with their cohort, based on the standardized graduation calculation. This is one of the highest graduation rates in the country.

<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state.html>

**Advanced placement:** Not only does Wisconsin have the highest percentage of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in the Midwest, but our state's students also score higher on AP tests.

In 2013, Wisconsin graduates took over 51,000 AP exams while in high school, with 22.2 percent scoring a three or better on an exam, qualifying students for credit or advanced standing at most colleges and universities. The 22.2 percent is above the national total of 20.1 percent of students scoring three or better, out of the million students taking an AP exam.

[http://host.madison.com/news/local/wisconsin-students-best-in-midwest-on-advanced-placement-exam/article\\_205dda6a-edf3-57d2-9c99-425b7d1dcb68.html](http://host.madison.com/news/local/wisconsin-students-best-in-midwest-on-advanced-placement-exam/article_205dda6a-edf3-57d2-9c99-425b7d1dcb68.html)

**ACT:** For years, Wisconsin students were among the highest average ACT scorers in the U.S. In 2013, Wisconsin graduates who took the ACT posted an average score of 22.1. Wisconsin tied with Iowa for the second-highest composite ACT score among states where more than half the students take the ACT. Among those states, Minnesota has the highest average ACT score: 23.

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/wisconsin-ties-for-second-nationally-in-act-test-scores-b9980125z1-220432501.html>

### ACHIEVEMENT GAPS THAT REQUIRE URGENT, INTELLIGENT AND UNITED ACTION:

While Wisconsin's graduation rate is one of the highest in the country there is a significant graduation gap between students of color and white students. While 94.5% of white students graduated within six years in 2012-13, only 73.8% of black students and 80.5% of Hispanic students graduated in that same time frame.

Results from the 2013-14 Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) showed improvements for most student groups compared to 2008-09 in reading and mathematics, but achievement gaps remain large. In fact, Wisconsin has the widest race-based gaps in the nation. The results from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the "Nation's Report Card" showed no other state had wider gaps in both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics.

## APPENDIX #4: VOUCHERS: PATH TO SECOND RATE

Under the Milwaukee, Racine and statewide private school choice programs, state funds are used to subsidize the cost of children to attend private, primarily religious, schools participating in the program. Table 1 shows the expansion of vouchers since Wisconsin began subsidizing private education in 1989.

Today, there is a push to expand the statewide program by increasing the enrollment cap of 1,000 students. This push is the quintessential example of ideology trumping evidence and violates the first rule of policy development--do no harm. Below, we summarize some of the primary arguments against the expansion of the voucher program, and cite leading editorial voices from major Wisconsin newspapers.

### **Vouchers Do Not Improve Student Learning**

The fact is that numerous studies from across the country have shown that students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. For example, in its analysis of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in 2011, the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau released a five-year longitudinal study, which concluded that students in Milwaukee using vouchers to attend private schools performed no better on standardized tests than their counterparts in public schools (see the study at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lab/reports/12-14full.pdf>).

*Judging from years of evidence in Milwaukee, where the (Milwaukee Parental Choice) program has existed since the 1990s, there is precious little data to show that students in the voucher program do any better than students in the mainline Milwaukee Public Schools.*

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Editorial, February 19, 2013*

### **The Opportunity Costs of Vouchers: Path to Second Rate**

For every dollar the State of Wisconsin spends on an ineffective program, such as vouchers, it loses the opportunity to invest in programs that are effective in improving teaching and learning for all students.

In the 2014-15 school year almost seventy-five percent of applications for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program were for students previously enrolled in private schools.<sup>56</sup> When you consider voucher advocates stated goal of “a voucher in every backpack” you begin to understand just how expensive it would be to fund two systems of education. As of 2012-13, there were 97,488 students enrolled in private schools who did not receive a taxpayer subsidy. Multiplying that number by the current voucher amount<sup>57</sup> totals over \$700 million.

If leading states and nations continue to invest in proven strategies to raise achievement for ALL students while Wisconsin resources are tied up in an ineffective and expensive entitlement the Badger State will relegate itself to a second-rate competitor on the global stage.

*Let's be perfectly clear about this: Wisconsin cannot afford two parallel school structures — a public school system, which is constitutionally mandated for those who profess to care about the state constitution, and a private school system operating without the same mandates as the public schools.*

*Oshkosh Northwestern, Editorial, February 9, 2013*

## **Vouchers Lack Public Accountability**

Private voucher schools have little public accountability, which is in stark contrast to the strong controls imposed on public schools. For example, private voucher schools do not have to comply with the state's Open Meetings and Open Records laws, are not required to meet the federal standards of hiring "highly qualified" teachers, and in fact, can even hire teachers who are unlicensed.

In addition, private voucher schools are not bound by most state instructional requirements, do not follow uniform state graduation requirements, and are not required to be part of the state's educator effectiveness system. They do not have to accept all students, nor provide students with the same due process protections afforded by public schools.

*What guarantee do taxpayers have that the private "voucher" schools that open up shop have properly trained staff and aren't scams managed by someone simply trying to make a quick buck? And over time what happens to the public school system in general as more money is diverted elsewhere while the public system is left to deal with those students who have various special needs that require more resources?*

*That's why expanding vouchers needs to be done only when everything else to improve the educational environment has failed. And why in the world wouldn't we all do what we can to help our local public schools succeed?*

*Eau Claire Leader Telegram, Editorial, February 28, 2013*

And the argument posed by some that "I pay property taxes so my taxes should go to the school that I want my child to go to" is faulty. We don't pay taxes to fund our child's education. We pay taxes to fund public education, plain and simple — and, again, mandated by the state constitution.

*There are those with much money and many powerful lobbyists, in Wisconsin and across the nation, who are pushing voucher schools as a way, step by step, to promote private education at the expense of public education. Their ultimate goal is to have taxpayers pay for any student, no matter their zip code or their income level, to go to a private school.*

*They have a foothold in our Legislature through campaign spending for like-minded legislators. They have an ally in Walker. But they can't be allowed to win.*

*Public education is on the line in Wisconsin. The governor's plan is indeed a serious threat to those 870,000 children who depend on it.*

*Appleton Post Crescent: Editorial, February 23, 2013*

*Those special-interests groups, which are offshoots of national groups and get much of their money from outside the state, have mixed motives. Some of their supporters are truly devoted to preserving private, especially religious, education. But others on a national level see the voucher push as a way for them to make money investing in private schools. And others, for philosophical or political reasons, want to undermine public education. Whatever the motivation, these groups are extremely well-financed and well-connected politically.*

*The half of the state's population that knows little about voucher schools needs to learn—and learn quickly. This push is coming hard already. And the future of public education is at stake.*

*Appleton Post Crescent: Editorial, March 23, 2013*

Table 1: History of Wisconsin's Voucher Program

Year	Act	Decision
1989	336	Open to pupils in City of Milwaukee
		Family income less than 175% of the federal poverty level
		Private schools had to be nonsectarian and in the City of Milwaukee
		No more than 1% of the MPS enrollment could participate
		No more than 49% of a choice school's enrollment could be choice pupils
1993	16	Increased limit to 1.5% of the MPS enrollment could participate
		No more than 65% of a choice school's enrollment could be choice pupils
1995	27	Sectarian schools could now participate
		Increased limit to 15% of the MPS enrollment could participate
		Deleted the percentage limit on the share of choice pupils in a choice school
2005	125	Increased enrollment limit for the program to 22,500 pupils
		Continuing pupils and siblings of pupils were eligible for the program if their family income was under 220% of the federal poverty level
2011	32	Deleted the enrollment limit on the program
		Raised the income threshold to 300% of the federal poverty level
		Deleted the geographic requirement for schools in the program
		Created a process under which a parental choice program could be created in eligible school districts other than MPS
2011	15	Voucher program created for Racine
		Statewide voucher program established. Initially, it would be limited to 500
2013	20	students the first year and 1,000 students every year thereafter.
		Family income less than 185% of the federal poverty level

# APPENDIX #5: GUIDELINES FOR POLICY GRANTS TO SCHOOLS

Several of the legislative priorities identified by the School Administrators Alliance (SAA) contain a policy recommendation for the state to establish a grant program for Wisconsin school districts. The purpose of these grants would be for districts to request short-term funding (perhaps 3-5 years) to pilot innovative, high-quality programs designed to address key issues such as innovation.

We believe that policy grants should be awarded on a competitive basis (in accordance with the guidelines proposed below) and evaluated under rigorous conditions, with key findings and best practices disseminated statewide for modification and scale-up as appropriate. Key guiding principles include the following:

- » Rather than being awarded strictly on either (a) a merit-based or first-come-first-served process (which might encourage high-quality proposals, but could advantage districts that employ or could hire professional grant writers), or (b) a formula-based process based on district size and/or poverty level (which could be more fair, but might wind up funding lower-quality proposals), SAA recommends a hybrid approach featuring components of both models:
  - Grants must meet standards of quality that include a sound theory of action backed by research, an adequate staffing and management plan, a timeline denoting key project activities, and a matching or cost-sharing component aimed at ensuring sustainability
  - Funded grants must either build in funding for their own evaluation OR agree to participate in a state-funded evaluation which will address questions around successful fidelity of implementation, effects on the intended outcomes, and dissemination of lessons learned/ best practices
  - Grants should be available to all Wisconsin public schools, and should be reasonably distributed across factors such as *district size* (large, medium, small), *geography* (urban, suburban, rural), and *student characteristics* (high-poverty vs. lower-poverty)
    - In some cases, it will be reasonable (and desirable) to have student need serve as a determining factor in awarding grants; for example, a school that demonstrates a comparatively high level of need for mental health services would be a good candidate to receive funding
- » Applicants must provide a reasonably detailed budget outlining how funds would be spent, and activities would need to provide standard assurances around IDEA, Title IX, etc.
- » The agency administering the grants (for example, DPI) would develop a rubric for scoring grant applications; this should involve (for example) scores of 1-10 assigned by a panel of reviewers to each core component of the grant (theory of action, staffing/management plan, etc.). The panel would also decide ahead of time whether each core component should be weighted equally or whether some are weighted more than others.
- » Prospective applicants for grant programs would benefit from knowing in advance the dollar range for each program.

# APPENDIX #6: FURTHER READING/ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## **Early Childhood**

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## **Children's Mental Health**

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- Minnesota Department of Health Services: School Linked Mental Health Services Top of Mind, Johnson Foundation, 2012

## **Educator Preparation**

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- National Council on Teacher Quality. (2014). *2013 state teacher policy yearbook: National summary*. Retrieved from [http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2013\\_State\\_Teacher\\_Policy\\_Yearbook\\_National\\_Summary\\_NCTQ\\_Report](http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2013_State_Teacher_Policy_Yearbook_National_Summary_NCTQ_Report)



- Sartain, L., Stoelinga, S., & Brown, E. (November, 2011). *Rethinking teacher evaluation in Chicago: Lessons learned from classroom observations, principal-teacher conferences, and district implementation*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- White, T. (2014). *Evaluating teachers more strategically: Using performance results to streamline evaluation systems*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Retrieved from: [http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/CF\\_evaluating\\_teachers\\_strategically.pdf](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/CF_evaluating_teachers_strategically.pdf)

### **School Calendars that Support Teaching and Learning**

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# Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance

2014

## Wisconsin's PK-12 Pathway to World Class Student Success



**The Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance is an alliance of:**

The Association of Wisconsin School Administrators  
The Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators  
The Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials  
The Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services



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# INTRODUCTION

It is hard to think of a bigger state priority than ensuring that every Wisconsin student graduates from high school prepared for college and career success. This is particularly crucial because education is among the most important determinants of success and prosperity in life, from health and lifetime earning potential to meaningful participation in civic life. Now, perhaps more than ever, the quality of education that we provide our children determines not only their individual futures, but also the collective social and economic well-being of the entire state. To realize our vision of preparing all students to be college and career-ready (as defined in Appendix 1), it is imperative that we continue to raise the academic bar for all students and close gaps for lower-performing groups.

Wisconsin's educators can and will meet this imperative, but only if the state's policymakers commit to evidence-based policies that are proven to drive whole-system improvement at the classroom, school, district, and state levels. Committing to evidence-based policies and prioritizing the goal that Wisconsin schools graduate every student college and career-ready is the right way forward for our students, as well as for our civic and economic growth. If prioritizing education and evidence-based policy is the right path, the *wrong* path is to see education primarily as a cost to be minimized and to base state policy more on ideology or emotion than on evidence.

There is real cause for concern that policy-making, at the state level, is moving down the wrong path. In national rankings of PK-12 per-pupil spending, for example, Wisconsin has plummeted from the 12<sup>th</sup>-highest state in 2003-04 to the 21<sup>st</sup> in 2011-12.<sup>1</sup> While evidence continues to increasingly support the importance of investment in early childhood development, educator preparation, and educational innovation, these issues are often overlooked in the Legislature in favor of less research-based and more ideology-driven reforms such as expanding vouchers or politicizing academic content standards.

The following policy recommendations were created through careful consideration of our state's past educational successes, as well as lessons learned from world leaders in student learning. National and international exemplars such as Massachusetts, Ontario, and Finland (see Appendix 2) have demonstrated high levels of academic achievement; in each case, policymakers have:

- » Invested in highly-trained and motivated teachers.
- » Designed accountability systems focused on effective intervention at the school and student levels.
- » Provided adequate and equitable funding
- » Ensured that all students are ready to learn by addressing early childhood development, health care, and poverty.

The policy recommendations that follow provide a policy pathway for ensuring that our system of public education is the best in the world. Wisconsin students and citizens deserve no less.

This document presents the biennial policy agenda of the School Administrators Alliance (SAA) for the upcoming state budget cycle and legislative session, set to begin following the November 2014 general election. The document builds upon the many strengths of public education in our state, but also outlines several of the clear challenges we face (see Appendix 3). The SAA is an organization representing *principals* (through the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, or AWSA), *superintendents* (through the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, or WASDA), *school business officials* (through the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, or WASBO), and *directors of special education* (through the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services, or WCASS) in Wisconsin's 424 public school districts and more than 2200 public schools.

SAA's policy agenda has been formulated by a workgroup that has met regularly since the summer of 2014 to identify key policy issues, review relevant research, and formulate specific policy recommendations intended to address these issues. We thank the [Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) for preparing research briefs that informed this work.

The SAA policy recommendations are organized around six key areas, as follows:

- » Students Ready to Learn
- » Supporting Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- » Innovation
- » Finance
- » Climate and Culture
- » Standards, Assessment, and Accountability

Each section contains a background information on the topic(s), and recommendations for policymakers. Following a brief conclusion, a set of appendices, additional reading, and key research are provided for reference.

# A. STUDENTS READY TO LEARN

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Although Wisconsin has taken steps to improve early childhood education with the expansion of 4K funding and the YoungStar program to support childcare provider quality, the state has yet to realize a comprehensive preschool policy.

Research has demonstrated that adults who had access to preschool programming have higher earnings, are more likely to hold a job, commit fewer crimes and are more likely to graduate from high school than those who did not have access to preschool.<sup>3</sup> Numerous studies have confirmed that children from poor families are at a significant social and academic deficit by the time they reach their third birthday, and that improving the quality of preschool education can help reduce achievements gaps for starting kindergartners.<sup>4</sup>

Barriers to providing and accessing quality early childhood care include the following:<sup>5</sup>

- » Income: quality preschool programs are expensive, costing parents an average of between \$8,000 to over \$10,000 per year in Wisconsin;
- » Convenience and affordability: parents must both work and choose care that is available. For many, this means making preschool choices based on convenience and affordability, but not necessarily on quality
- » Quality: early childhood providers vary considerably in terms of credentials and the qualifications of staff
- » Funding: overall funding levels for school-based early childhood programs were reduced during the recent economic downturn. In addition, as a result of economic conditions, many states also cut pre-kindergarten expansion efforts and their monitoring of early childhood providers

The good news is that Wisconsin has a strong base from which to build and maintain a comprehensive preschool program. The Badger state's four-year-old kindergarten program and YoungStar programs provide a foundation for providing high quality early learning opportunities for all Wisconsin children.

Wisconsin's community-based approach to four-year-old kindergarten (4K) brings a broad range of early childhood actors together around the common goal of supporting the emotional, educational and physical well-being of children. Today, families have access to quality 4K programming in 93% of Wisconsin school districts.

YoungStar is a program the Department of Children and Families created to improve the quality of child care for Wisconsin children. YoungStar seeks to improve quality by evaluating and rating the quality of care given by childcare providers; helping parents choose the best childcare for their children; supporting providers with tools and training to deliver high quality early care; and setting a consistent standard for childcare quality.

While YoungStar has made great progress in moving children into higher quality programs, the funding base for childcare programs is increasingly inadequate and unstable. State funding for Wisconsin Shares, which supports YoungStar, has been frozen for seven-years, leading to a major loss in payments per child. This erosion of support for the childcare payment system is undermining the YoungStar system. In the last five years, overall funding for Wisconsin Shares has dropped \$100 million per year, and the number of children served has dropped by over 11,000. The Wisconsin Shares/YoungStar program can have a significant impact on children that have a high probability of being not ready for school, including students of low socioeconomic status, and therefore should be funded properly.

Wisconsin should build on its strong tradition of supporting early childhood education by committing to a comprehensive preschool policy. Improving early childhood opportunities will help prepare children for their PK-12 education experience and help reduce achievement gaps. The results for society include not only academic gains, but also financial savings for schools and broader public economic benefits. -

Public funding of education is another way that governments can help offset the advantages some households have in resources available for children. One of the most consequential examples is early childhood education. Research shows that children from lower-income households who get good-quality pre-Kindergarten education are more likely to graduate incarcerated or receive public assistance.

Janet Yellen, Chair, Conference of Economic Opportunity and Inequality, Federal Reserve, Boston, MA  
October 17, 2014

### Policy Recommendations:

1. Wisconsin should commit to the goal of providing universal access to four-year-old kindergarten.
2. Expand rewards for quality care measures, including: reversing the deep cuts to the Wisconsin Shares program, promoting child care centers' accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children and explore development of model early childhood provider assessment and support process.
3. Promote coordination of state agencies, such as the state's Department of Health Services and Department of Public Instruction and between public schools and child care providers to make connections with early childhood programs. In addition, these state agencies should publish an annual report detailing Wisconsin's goal of providing the opportunity for every Wisconsin child to participate in a high quality preschool program and share exemplary models of coordination at the local level.<sup>6</sup>

## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

In Wisconsin, too many children have unmet mental health needs, with these unmet needs having serious negative consequences for the individual, their families and our communities and schools. In Wisconsin, the fact is that children's mental health needs go unmet too often because of systemic shortcomings in how such services are provided. The Johnson Foundation's Top of Mind report<sup>7</sup> identified these shortcomings as: poor system and service coordination, multiple barriers to access care, high service costs and limited funding, and, workforce and service shortages.<sup>8</sup>

The State of Minnesota has begun to successfully address children's mental health needs through a grant program supporting school-linked mental health services. This grant program has leveraged federal, state and local efforts to dramatically improve services to children. These school-connected clinical mental health treatments include interventions that:

- » Increase accessibility for children and youth who are uninsured or underinsured
- » Improve clinical and functional outcomes for children and youth with a mental health diagnosis,
- » Improve identification of mental health issues for children and youth.

The Minnesota initiative has found success by connecting or co-locating mental health services providers with schools and has proven particularly effective in reaching children who have never accessed mental health services. As a result of the program, many children with serious mental health needs were first identified including 45% of children who met the criteria for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed. This increased access was particularly important for students from cultural and ethnic minority communities<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly, school districts in Minnesota are documenting improved behavioral and academic progress for students whose mental health needs are being met. The Minneapolis school district, for example, has documented a decrease in suspensions and increased attendance and academic achievement, something that is attributed to the program.<sup>10</sup>

Mental health and school success are closely related since untreated mental health issues can be significant barriers to learning.

Mark Sander, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Hennepin County, MN, Mental Health Coordinator

#### Policy Recommendation:

1. Wisconsin should create a School-Linked Mental Health grant program, modeled after a successful initiative launched in Minnesota. The initiative would provide five-year grants that provide funding for start-up costs for providing services to children who are uninsured. Grants would also be used for coordination between school, county and mental health providers. Sample guidelines for policy grants appear as Appendix 5.



## B. SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEADING

### EDUCATOR PREPARATION

The most important school factor determining whether students achieve academically is the knowledge and skills of the classroom teacher. School principals represent the second most important school-based factor for student success. It is critically important, therefore, that we continue raising the bar for what our teachers and leaders know and are able to do.

Efforts to improve educator preparation programs (EPPs) need to take into account three important facets: *input* (how candidates are recruited/selected into programs), *training* (the content and quality of the preparation programs themselves), and *output* (the competencies and skills of graduates, as well as the ongoing support and training provided to them once they begin their careers). Additionally, teacher and leader preparation programs should train educators on key initiatives designed to increase rigor of teaching and leading as well as improve educator performance feedback. Two of these initiatives in Wisconsin are the Educator Effectiveness System and implementation of the Common Core State Standards and related assessments.

Recent research has identified a number of issues and challenges that face EPPs.

#### Key Research Findings:

Economic and other factors affect recruitment to teacher preparation programs and retention within the profession. Specifically:

- » Studies show that college graduates with the highest levels of measured ability tend not to go into teaching. Evidence also shows that teachers with higher measured ability have a higher probability of leaving the profession.<sup>11</sup>
- » Attrition rates are higher in schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, and low-performing students.<sup>12</sup>
- » “True” real wages of teachers have declined in comparison with wages for other college graduates, and studies repeatedly show that higher salary is associated with higher teacher retention rates.<sup>13</sup>
- » Pre-service testing requirements appear to adversely affect the entry of minority candidates into teaching.<sup>14</sup>
- » Colleges that are more selective in their admissions produce more effective teachers; however, candidates with higher academic credentials also have higher turnover rates when districts don’t address those factors (e.g., salary, working conditions, prestige) that cause teachers who have the most other options to leave the classroom.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of rigorous preparation programs is quite clear, but the nature of what those programs should entail is less clear:

- » Teacher preparation helps candidates develop the knowledge and skills they need in the classroom.
- » The literature comparing traditional preparation programs and alternative certification programs is sparse and the studies tend to suffer from measurement and methodological issues.
- » Both strong content knowledge and strong pedagogical content knowledge are important elements of high quality teacher preparation programs.

- » Well prepared teachers are more likely to remain in the profession.
- » New educators tend to report that they were not adequately prepared to meet challenges in the classroom<sup>16</sup>.

There is even less research on this topic as pertains to *principal* preparation, but the general findings are that the majority of principal preparation programs are not adequately preparing school leaders.<sup>17</sup>

While research is inconclusive about many facets of teacher and leader preparation, industrialized nations whose students outperform U.S. students tend to invest heavily in pre-service preparation.<sup>20</sup> Compared to the U.S., these nations had very different teacher preparation criteria than teachers in the U.S., marked by more extensive advanced coursework and specialization in content knowledge, more rigorous selection and admissions criteria, more pedagogical content and general pedagogical preparation, exit exams and certification and licensing exams. Similarly, countries that outperform the U.S. have different pay, incentives, and working conditions that may better attract and retain higher quality educators in the teaching professions.

#### Implications:

There is a conflict between two key factors related to the recruitment, preparation and retention of effective educators. While the evidence suggests that more selective and rigorous educator preparation programs are connected to improved student outcomes, the prevailing rates of compensation and other factors (working conditions, personal satisfaction, morale, societal respect for the profession) do not incentivize the “best and brightest” to enter or remain in the profession. Those nations whose students outperform U.S. students not only have more rigorous preparation programs, but also have reward and incentive structures in place. These, in turn, contribute to the prestige of the profession that then serves to attract and retain top candidates.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The State Superintendent should convene a commission to:
  - a) Create a state-wide initiative to identify and recruit talented candidates into teacher and administrator preparation programs, with an emphasis on diversity
  - b) Conduct a review of teacher and educational leader preparation programs and make recommendations on how best to prepare and support educators (i.e., through formal residencies as done in Finland and other high achieving countries)
  - c) Ensure that training programs prepare educators for the Common Core State Standards and Educator Effectiveness process

*Better performing countries did not set out to have a very good teacher here and another good one there. They were successful because they developed the entire teaching profession.*  
 – Michael Fullan

## EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS

After three years of development and pilot testing, Wisconsin is implementing a new state Educator Effectiveness System for teachers and school administrators this school year. The system was developed based on recommendations from a design team convened by the state superintendent, with working teams articulating specific teacher and leader evaluation measures and processes.

Act 166 called on the Department of Public Instruction to request funding and develop the system, and required districts to implement it, which bases evaluations on a “multiple measures” approach incorporating professional practice (including an option for districts to use alternatives to the state-approved model) plus student outcomes. The approach was a key part of the state’s approved federal waiver to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The system is designed to focus on educators’ professional growth, and has been carefully revised based on educator feedback during the multi-year pilot process. Additional funding is required to comprehensively evaluate the system and make adjustments based on results. Continued resources are also needed to support administrators in effectively carrying out the more rigorous teacher and leader evaluation processes.

#### Key Research Findings:<sup>21</sup>

- » Teaching quality is the most important school-based factor influencing student achievement, with principal leadership the next most important.
- » New teacher and leader evaluation systems can be viewed as a response to several well-documented problems that characterized traditional evaluations, including the following:
  - Inconsistency across (and within) districts, as different observation rubrics, schedules, and rater training were the norm
  - Little or no differentiation in ratings (the “Widget Effect”)
  - Minimal (if any) consideration for student outcomes
  - Minimal feedback to provided educators that included specific, targeted areas for improvement and strategies to help educators improve
- » Standards-based teacher and leader evaluation systems show promise, but research is still relatively thin on their impact on teaching and leadership effectiveness, as well as their cost-benefit to districts and educators.
- » New teacher evaluation requirements create higher expectations for principals to implement evaluation practices with fidelity, provide timely instructional feedback, complete more observations, and assess more areas of practice and teacher impact on student growth (i.e., through SLOs). Principals and district leaders will clearly face significant challenges in adjusting to the time demands of the new systems, and will need additional support to manage these new roles.<sup>22</sup>

Although the new measures of practice and outcomes for teacher and leader evaluation have the potential to guide professional growth and improve educator accountability, the systems represent increased demands on time and resources. This will particularly be the case for principals, who will not only be evaluating teachers with more rigorous systems, but will also be evaluated themselves with a new principal evaluation process. Further, with different models of practice in use by districts, there is a need to determine the relative validity of the different models.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The Legislature must continue funding Educator Effectiveness implementation, particularly for:
  - » an external evaluation to assess validity and reliability and school district capacity to maintain these systems over time, and,
  - » ongoing training and support

2. The Department of Public Instruction should continue to engage school districts to explore alternative approaches to teacher evaluation that address capacity issues while maintaining overall system quality and fidelity. These may include:
  - » further allowance for differentiation in use for new versus veteran educators, self-directed growth options for highly effective educators
  - » use of peer evaluators or released teachers for evaluation
3. Continue to monitor emerging research and policy implications from other states around teacher and school leader evaluations, including “early adopter” states, such as those receiving federal Race to the Top funding.

## INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Information technology provides tools to enhance educational opportunities. But acquiring technology is not a stand-alone fix. Both training and access to infrastructure is necessary to utilize the promise of technological advances. A broad group of individuals and organizations have come together to advance the second generation of Wisconsin’s Technology for Educational Achievement (TEACH) program. TEACH was launched in the 1990s to allow schools and libraries to take advantage of technology to improve learning. The TEACH 2.0 consortium has developed recommendations in four key areas: broadband, hardware and infrastructure, access to digital learning, and staff development.

### *Broadband*

It is a simple fact that access to high-speed broadband is now as vital a component of PK-12 school infrastructure as electricity, air conditioning, and heating. The same tools and resources that have transformed our personal, civic, and professional lives must be part of learning experiences intended to prepare today’s students for college and careers. The scope of the state and nation’s educational broadband needs is large and growing rapidly.

While a 2010 Federal Communications Commission survey of E-Rate funded schools found that most had access to some form of broadband service, nearly 80% of respondents reported that their broadband connections were inadequate to meet their current needs. Outside of school, home broadband adoption rates have all but stalled since 2009, leveling off at roughly 65%.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly important when considering that Wisconsin will join other states across the country in moving to online administration of state standardized assessments in 2014-15, replacing the paper-and-pencil-based Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination.

Broadband expansion will become even more critical as services move to the “cloud.” While the TEACH program is increasing the bandwidth to many school districts and libraries on BadgerNet, it likely will not be able to meet their needs into the future without a significant funding increase or more affordable prices. It is clear that some form of private-public partnership is critical to ensure equitable access for every student and citizen across the state.

Approximately 75% of the state’s school districts and 95% of its libraries have a connection to BadgerNet. Since 1995, the Department of Administration has undertaken several BadgerNet procurements and contract updates. The latest update was done in November 2011 when the state’s Department of Administration and AT&T agreed to extend the current contract to November 2016. The extension includes significant cost reductions of approximately 50% in bandwidths above 20Mbps and reductions of 20% in bandwidths below 20Mbps. From the PK-12 school and library perspective, no discussion of BadgerNet is complete without reference to the TEACH program. TEACH subsidizes access to BadgerNet for educational agencies

as defined in state statutes (§16.99(2g)). These include school districts, private PK-12 schools, public libraries, private academic institutions, and technical colleges.

To reach the goal of sufficient broadband access for enhanced PK-12 teaching and learning and improved school operations, the State Educational Technology Directors Association recommends that schools and districts have a ratio of at least one gigabyte per second for every 1,000 students/staff of bandwidth by the 2017-18 school year.

### *Hardware and Infrastructure*

Just as it is important to provide higher levels of bandwidth at affordable prices, it is imperative that schools and libraries have the local infrastructure systems to facilitate the use of those systems when there is an increase in the number of users. For schools, this includes more “one computer per student” programs. In libraries, more and more users bring into the library their own mobile computing devices or use computers made available at the library. In addition, PK-12 instructional services, like many services within our economy, are moving to the “cloud.” It is essential that we provide support for school districts and libraries to maximize the potential for these services to reside within a secure environment.

### *School District Access to Digital Learning*

State resources are needed to support the development and implementation of statewide digital learning opportunities offered through the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative. The rationale for doing so is driven by a need for equitable access to high quality instruction, and lowered costs through economy of scale purchases.

Equity of access to high quality digital learning options remains a challenge for all school districts in Wisconsin. Virtual and blended learning classes, digital content and resources (like that of Badgerlink), and a learning software platform would all be tremendous value-adds to small and large districts alike. Statewide licensing of these resources is an economical benefit to districts, and much lower cost to taxpayers.

Some 25 states provide funding for state-led digital learning programs including Michigan, Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota, Montana and Iowa. The Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative receives no state financial support. Funding could cover the fixed costs, maintenance costs, licensing costs and development costs for digital curriculum, integrated software and learning repositories.

### *Staff Development in Technology*

Professional development in technology, an absolutely necessary component of transforming education, has been reduced in many districts to save student programs. Technology can only drive improved student learning when it is employed in rich teaching practices. Wisconsin should ensure every teacher has access to high quality professional learning related to using technology to improve teaching and learning. In addition, high quality professional development should include:

- » Pedagogy and classroom management for personalized learning,
- » administrative planning
- » implementation and evaluation of digital learning initiatives
- » district technology planning

### *Policy Recommendation:*

1. Technology is an important lever in school improvement. The state should implement the TEACH 2.0 recommendations to address school district needs related to broadband, digital learning content and high-quality professional development to realize the potential of technology improving student learning.

## C. INNOVATION

Overall, the U.S. spends about three percent of its total expenditures on research and development, with that figure reaching as high as twenty-three percent in pharmaceuticals. In education, however, only 0.2 percent of expenditures are spent on research and development. Increasing effectiveness and innovation requires identifying promising approaches, testing those approaches rigorously, and disseminating results.<sup>24</sup>

Wisconsin must develop a PK-12 educational innovation strategy. The strategy should provide incentives for districts to pilot innovative practices that evidence suggests will improve student learning, and include rigorous performance evaluation that provides guidance for practitioners and policy-makers to continuously improve teaching and learning.

The SAA believes that there are three specific areas in which innovation should be encouraged and monitored: personalized teaching and learning, potential modifications to the traditional school calendar, and conducting rigorous research on charter schools to identify and disseminate innovative practices shown to improve student learning.

### PERSONALIZING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Personalized learning is grounded in the premise that all learning is personal and autonomous. Unless students see a purpose or significance in their learning, make a connection, or otherwise have a reason to pay attention to what they have the potential to learn, learning does not occur.

In Wisconsin, the Institute at CESA#1 has been working with a group of school districts since 2010 on a Personalized Learning initiative. The Institute has developed a model for personalized learning that focuses learning and teaching in such a way that the student is at the center. The change strategy involved in the model begins with changes to learning and teaching strategies that allow students to achieve success while moving along a learning continuum with the end goal being independent, life-long learners. Roles and relationships for all stakeholders will shift as the new learning and teaching strategies are implemented.

The model developed by the Institute is based on a wide variety of excellent research spanning a number of decades. It ranges from Benjamin Bloom's work on the effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring more than three decades ago to more recent work by Carol Dweck on growth mindsets and John Hattie's work around visible learning.

### SCHOOL CALENDARS THAT SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING

The SAA also recommends that Wisconsin look anew at the traditional school calendar, both in terms of the amount of instructional time provided to students as well as how instructional time is "packaged."

American public schools provide, on average, 180 days of instruction to students; by one standard of comparison, the international average is around 200 to 220 days.<sup>25</sup> In a historical sense, the U.S. public school calendar was set up to accommodate students living in agrarian settings. Despite dramatic changes in the labor force and economy, however, the traditional school calendar has proven remarkably durable, for reasons which include tradition, family preferences, tourism-related businesses, youth sports, and other interests which seek to protect the summer months for non-academic purposes.

Schools and districts across the country have, however, begun to experiment with alternate academic calendars. The list below describes several different types of non-traditional school year calendars; note that there is a distinction between alternative calendars that involve *extended instructional time* (e.g., extra time above and beyond minimal requirements in state law, often in the form of additional or longer school



days/years) and those that merely “re-package” the *same amount of instructional time* (180 days, 1000 hours, etc.) into a different calendar:

- » *Extended School Year*: calendar that includes more than the minimum number of instruction days (usually 180), with modified start and/or end dates
- » *Balanced, Modified, or Year-Round Schedule*: calendar with the traditional number of instruction days that reduces long summer break by balancing periods of instruction days:
  - *Single-Track*: a balanced calendar in which all students and school staff follow the same instructional and vacation schedule (60 days on/20 days off, etc.)
  - *Multi-Track*: a balanced calendar in which students and educators are divided into groups (or tracks), each with its own instructional and vacation schedule

#### Key Research Findings:

During the 2006-07 school year, approximately 2.1 million students across 3,000 public, charter, and private schools in the U.S. attended school on a year-round schedule; this represents some 2% of all K-12 schools and 4% of total K-12 enrollment. Only 12 districts in the nation are known to implement district-wide, year-round schedules at the present time. It is more common for a subset of schools within a district to opt into an alternative school calendar. A precise and up-to-date count of districts that have experimented with alternative calendars is difficult to come by, due to the evolving nature of this issue, although a few noteworthy examples include the following:

- » Wake County, North Carolina: about 50 of the 163 schools (mostly elementary schools) operate on a multi-track, year-round schedule
- » Des Moines: extended school year, with a two-week break in October, a break over Christmas, and at least one more inter-session break before the year ends in June
- » Albuquerque: 8 elementary schools operate on year-round calendars in 2013-14

The National Association for Year-Round Education reports that in Wisconsin, just over 6,000 students in 14 schools and 2 districts attended year-round schools in 2007.<sup>26</sup> This does not include approximately 20 of the 160 schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools system which operate on a year-round calendar, featuring an earlier summer start (early August, as opposed to early September), along with a week-long fall “intersession” and a two-week (as opposed to one-week) spring break. Racine, Eau Claire, Beloit, and La Crosse have also experimented with or considered year-round or extended-year schools as well, and an unknown number of other districts have considered similar options.

While reasons for implementing alternative schedules vary, the two main drivers are enrollment growth and the desire to counteract summer learning loss. Summer learning loss has been extensively documented in academic literature, and has been estimated to be as much as two months of instructional time. According to a meta-analysis study on the effect of summer vacation on achievement tests, summer learning loss is most pronounced for mathematics and spelling, and is most acute among students from low-income families which have limited or no access to summer enrichment programs<sup>27</sup>

Despite the significant number of schools and districts that have experimented with alternative school calendars, the academic literature shows mixed results in terms of effects on student achievement. A primary reason for the inconclusive nature of the research to date is the lack of rigorous, randomized studies that can easily isolate the effect of alternative school calendar from other policy initiatives and interventions.

One theme which *does* appear in the research is that simply re-packaging existing instructional time – and

perhaps even adding additional time – is, by itself, unlikely to stimulate large-scale improvement in student achievement without corresponding investments in key areas such as teacher and school leader quality. In other words, investments in extended learning time for students are most likely to produce positive results when coupled with efforts to prioritize each and every minute of instructional time, individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student, and build a school culture of high expectations and mutual accountability.<sup>28</sup>

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

In the 1990's states began adopting legislation allowing for the formation of charter schools, which are public schools that are exempt from many state education regulations in order to promote innovation. In Wisconsin, charter schools are exempt from the provisions of Chapters 115 through 121 of the statutes, with certain statutorily specified exceptions, including the state's pupil assessment program, the school district's annual school performance report, and the licensure of all instructional staff.<sup>29</sup>

Many recent studies suggest at least some positive impacts of charters upon student performance, although there appear to be few studies that show *across-the-board positive results* for both reading and math achievement at multiple grade levels. The literature also suggests some positive impacts of charters on other measures of student performance and engagement, such as attendance, satisfaction, and college entry rates, but again no clear-cut, across-the-board indication that charters as a whole are either superior or inferior to traditional public schools.

A key theme which emerges from several major recent studies comparing charter schools as a group to traditional public schools is that there is often greater performance variation *within* a particular "sector" of schools (traditional public, charter, or private) than exists *across* sectors; in other words, within each sector at a local, state, or national level are both higher-performing and lower-performing schools, as well as many in the middle of the performance distribution. This is perhaps not surprising given the diversity that exists among charter schools with respect to key attributes such as size, academic focus, and management/structure (operated by school districts vs. independent entities, and locally-run vs. operated by national management companies). The variance observed among charter schools with respect to both student achievement and how these schools are organized and operated points to another key theme for future research: the need to identify specific features and practices of charter schools that are associated with higher levels of student performance.

### Recent Literature

A 2014 meta-analysis of literature on charter schools and achievement performed by Julian R. Betts and Y. Emily Tang was entitled *A Meta-Analysis of the Literature on the Effect of Charter Schools on Student Achievement* found. This study was based on a meta-analysis of the literature on charter school achievement between 2006 and 2014 that focuses particularly on academic outcomes for lottery-based charter schools using value-added performance measures. The analysis found no significant differences for reading achievement between charter and traditional public schools but did find that charter schools are producing higher achievement gains in math in most grade groupings. The researchers also found that the impact of charter schools on student outcomes varies considerably, especially across different geographic areas with urban areas accounting for strong positive effects.<sup>30</sup>

A 2014 working paper on the long-term impact of charter high schools by Kevin Booker, Brian Gill, Tim Sass, and Ron Zimmer entitled *Charter High Schools' Effects on Long-Term Attainment and Earnings* found:

- » Charter high school enrollment is associated with a positive increase in the probability of earning a high school diploma within five years.

- » Charter high school enrollment is associated with a positive increase in the probability of attending a college within six years.
- » Charter high school enrollment is associated with a positive increase in the probability of persisting in college for at least two years.
- » A positive impact of charter high schools on long-term earnings.<sup>31</sup>

A 2013 national charter school study conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University assessed the performance of students in charter schools in 26 states as well as New York City, which is often considered its own entity for education policy purposes. The analysis is based on a matched comparison study of student growth on state achievement tests in both reading and math from the 2005-06 school year through the 2010-11 school year with controls for student demographics and eligibility. Researchers aimed to gauge whether students who attended charter schools would have done better if they had enrolled in a traditional public school they otherwise were eligible to attend. They concluded that in the 26 states studied, charter school students now have greater learning gains in reading than their peers in traditional public schools. They found that traditional public schools and charter schools have equivalent learning gains in mathematics<sup>32</sup>.

Researchers at CREDO also analyzed school performance in California and concluded that, compared to the educational gains that charter students might have had in a traditional public school, students in California charter schools make larger learning gains in reading and learn less in mathematics. Specifically, they found that 32 percent of California charters outpace the learning impacts of traditional public schools in reading and 29 percent do so in math. However, they also found that 21 percent of charter schools have results that are significantly worse than traditional public schools for reading and that 37 percent of charter schools in math are underperforming.<sup>33</sup>

CREDO researchers also studied charter school performance in Los Angeles, and found that, on average, compared to the educational gains that charter students might have had in a traditional public school in a year's time, students in Los Angeles charter schools make larger learning gains in reading and mathematics. Such results were among the strongest observed all previous CREDO studies. Further, the results were particularly striking for Hispanic charter students.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Evaluation of Charter School Impacts<sup>5</sup>:

- » On average, study charter schools did not have a statistically significant impact on student achievement nor 35 other outcome measures examined, including absences, suspensions, and college expectations
- » Parent and student satisfaction with their schools was significantly higher than for the control group (students whose families applied to one of 36 participating charter middle schools in 15 different states but were not admitted).<sup>36</sup>

#### How New York City's Charter Schools Affect Achievement:<sup>37</sup>

- » Students who attend charter schools for grades K-8 would close most (86%) of the achievement gap between the highest-performing and lowest-performing schools in the New York City area in Math and 66% in English Language Arts, compared to students who applied (but were not admitted to) charter schools.<sup>38</sup>

Additional studies have attempted to make comparisons between traditional public schools and charter schools with respect to a “return on investment” analysis that includes not just student performance, but also per-pupil spending levels. In most cases, the conclusion that emerges here is that charters deliver similar, if not superior, levels of performance for lower per-pupil costs. Since charters overall tend to enroll fewer (and in some cases far fewer) students with disabilities, however, it is not clear whether simple per-pupil spending comparisons accurately reflect the full cost of educating students with special needs. Similarly, only a few studies of charter school effectiveness have been able to really control for potential selection bias inherent in having students apply to attend charters. That is, the best control group for this type of selection bias is students who applied to attend charter schools but were turned away based only on capacity (via a lottery), rather than for other reasons (including academic performance and disability status). In most cases, charters that are over-subscribed must conduct lotteries for enrollment, but suitable records of who was turned away via lottery have not always been available for research purposes.

### Policy Recommendations:

The State of Wisconsin should create a PK-12 educational innovation strategy, overseen by the Department of Public Instruction, with input from an advisory panel, that includes representatives from PK-12 educators, higher education, parent organizations, student leadership organizations, and business leaders. Activities and goals of the innovation strategy should include grants for school districts to pilot promising innovations related to:

- » Developing and modeling personalized learning that includes: data rich learner profiles, customized learning paths, and, proficiency-based progress (rather than seat time)
- » Developing and modeling evidence-based school calendars (e.g. calendars that address: summer drop, extended-learning opportunities, teacher professional development)
- » Robust system of evaluation of charter programs and intentional dissemination of information related to innovative practices that have been shown to improve student learning.

Projects that are funded will be evaluated to inform practitioners and policy-makers to speed the implementation of proven practices and educational policies.

# D. FINANCE AND STEWARDSHIP

## SCHOOL FINANCE

Wisconsin consistently ranks relatively well on school finance equity measures. However, the state share of school funding has shrunk in real dollars over the past decade and districts sustained large funding cuts in 2011. Additionally, Wisconsin school districts suffer from the systemic gap between allowable revenue growth under revenue limits and increases in school district fixed costs.

In such an unstable environment, school districts across Wisconsin are pushed to stretch limited resources. The impacts are not equal across districts. They are more serious in districts with a large share of higher-needs students (including those in poverty, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners), as well as those with declining enrollment. They also represent a major challenge for Wisconsin's many small rural districts, where the loss of just a few students, coupled with increases in transportation costs, can have significant budget impact. Increasingly, Wisconsin school leaders struggle with a funding system that is failing to keep pace with the growing and ever-changing educational needs of the students they serve.

The following data highlights some of the immediate problems with Wisconsin's school finance systems and illustrates the state's shrinking commitment to its schoolchildren.

- » Wisconsin's national ranking in K-12 per pupil spending has plummeted from 12<sup>th</sup> highest in 2003-04 to 21<sup>st</sup> in 2011-12.<sup>39</sup>
- » Wisconsin school aid as a percentage of the state general-purpose budget has declined from 43.1% in 2003-04 to 32.4% in 2014-15.<sup>40</sup>
- » Wisconsin's total school costs as a percentage of Wisconsin's gross domestic product has declined from 4.1% in 2003-04 to 3.74% in 2014-15.<sup>41</sup>
- » Wisconsin's percentage of all school districts in declining enrollment has hovered around the 60% mark for a decade, with 60.6% of districts in declining enrollment in 2013-14. This compares to just 29.8% of districts that were in declining enrollment in 1997-98.<sup>42</sup>
- » Wisconsin's reduction in spending per student (\$1,038, adjusted for inflation) from 2007-08 to 2013-14 were the second highest in the nation, behind only that of Alabama.<sup>43</sup>

### Guiding Principles:

Developing and implementing the "perfect" school finance system has proven to be an elusive endeavor, and we do not proclaim that we have a "magic bullet." We do believe, however, that the following non-negotiable, student-centered principles should guide our efforts at school finance reform in Wisconsin. A high-quality, effective school finance system designed to foster improvements in student achievement for all Wisconsin school children must:

1. Be fair and equitable for all children.
2. Be sustainable to afford all children continued access to high quality instructional programming.
3. Recognize and address the unique and extraordinary needs of students in poverty, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, and students with disabilities.
4. Recognize and address the unique needs of students in different regions of the state. We simply cannot tolerate disparities in instructional resources and programming based on zip codes.

5. Provide equitable access to instructional technology, 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum and well-prepared, high quality teachers and leaders.

#### Key Research Findings:

- » Research on funding fairness historically centers on two main components: 1) factors associated with student needs, including special education, ELL, and the social context, and 2) those related to regional differences in costs, due to economies of scale, teacher costs, and others. Although a general understanding exists that school funding ought to “strive to improve equity and adequacy of student outcomes”,<sup>44</sup> many state funding formulas fail to accomplish this, often because of an over-reliance of local property taxes.
- » Many low-income schools are challenged by inequitable access to teaching quality and financial resources. According to a 2011 U.S. Department of Education report, more than 40 percent of Title I schools “spent less state and local money on teachers and other personnel than schools that don’t receive Title I money at the same grade level in the same district.”
- » School finance adequacy is one prominent area of focus in school finance policy. Odden et al.<sup>45</sup>, in their work on school finance, define adequacy “as providing a level of resources to schools that will enable them to make substantial improvements in student performance [...] as progression toward ensuring that all, or almost all, students meet their state’s performance standards in the long term.” (630) To arrive at such an adequacy number, they use an evidence-based method, which helps determine funding needed to cover effective school strategies and related staffing. Staffing and resource costs are then aggregated for teachers, guidance, general resources, materials, and others inputs.
- » In a prior study of funding Wisconsin schools adequately, Odden et al.<sup>46</sup> make a number of recommendations, with related cost estimates, concluding that total K-12 spending would have to increase by 9.2% to achieve adequacy. Recommendations from the Wisconsin adequacy study included additional per pupil support for high needs students as well as resources to support tutoring, extended day programming, additional instructional planning time, and summer school. Odden et al.<sup>47</sup> summarize ten strategies for improving performance, including analyzing and becoming more familiar with student data, setting higher goals, reviewing effective curricula and instruction, investing in teacher training and development, providing extra help for struggling students, creating smaller classrooms, restructuring school days and instructional time, providing strong leadership that fosters professional school cultures, and bringing external professional knowledge into schools.

#### Implications:

Although international comparisons suggest that higher spending nations do not necessarily correlate to high achievement, funding inequities hinder the ability of high poverty districts to provide an adequate education, and contribute to larger societal inequalities. According to the Wisconsin school finance adequacy report by Odden et al.<sup>48</sup>, “These findings suggest that equity issues should always be included in school finance analyses, and that variation in both student needs and the purchasing power of the education dollar should be recognized in the school finance system. Otherwise, conclusions about equity and undoubtedly adequacy could be incorrect. Further, these issues need to be centrally involved in an adequacy analysis.”

## A MORE SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM

One of the greatest problems in Wisconsin’s system of school finance is the systemic gap between allowable revenue growth under revenue caps and school district fixed cost increases (i.e., staffing, transportation, utilities) as driven by state and federal requirements and community expectations. In such an unstable fiscal environment, many districts find it extremely difficult to repurpose budget funds and to make new



investments in innovation and continuous instructional improvement. In order to provide much-needed fiscal stability and sustainability in our school finance system, Wisconsin must align allowable revenue growth with cost increases.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase the annual per pupil adjustment under revenue caps by the annual percentage increase in the consumer price index (CPI).
2. Adopt State Superintendent Tony Evers' Fair Funding for Our Future Plan, which includes:
  - » Distributing the \$897 million in school levy and first dollar credits to school districts in the equalization aid formula.
  - » Distributing a minimum level of school aid for every student in every school district.
  - » Increasing the secondary cost ceiling from 90% to 100% of the prior year's average statewide shared cost.
  - » Additional formula "weighting" in the equalization aid formula for students eligible for free and reduced price lunch.
  - » A significant revenue limit per pupil increase as well as a corresponding increase in general aid.
  - » A provision to "hold harmless" in the short term the school districts that lose resources under the plan.

## STUDENTS WITH HIGH NEEDS

Funding for students with high needs played a significant role in the debate over the constitutionality of the Wisconsin school finance system. In *Vincent v. Voight*, the State Supreme Court found the Wisconsin school finance system constitutional, so long as the legislature provided sufficient resources to ensure that all students are offered an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education. The Court specifically enumerated three classes of students to which the state has a special obligation for ensuring equitable opportunities: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Today, the limited school funding directed to each of these enumerated classes of students challenges the abilities of local school districts to meet the Court's standard.

## STUDENTS IN POVERTY

The student poverty rate continues to climb in Wisconsin.<sup>49</sup> For the 2013-14 school year, 43.3% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals – up from 29.5% in the 2003-04 school year. There are now 117 of Wisconsin's 424 school districts that have 50% or more of their students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals, including the state's five largest districts: Milwaukee (82%), Madison (54%), Kenosha (55%), Green Bay (58%) and Racine (63%).

The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program is one of the only state programs that targets funding to economically disadvantaged students.<sup>50</sup> SAGE was established in the 1996-97 school year to improve student achievement by employing four school improvement strategies: 1) class size reduction in grades K-3; 2) increased collaboration between schools and their communities; 3) rigorous curriculum; and 4) improved professional development and staff evaluation practices.

Under the program, schools receive a per pupil allocation for each eligible low income student in a participating grade (K-3). Currently that allocation is \$2,250 in statute, but it has been prorated since 2008-09. The last year's prorated amount was \$2,027.25.

SAGE aid in 2013-14 totaled \$108,934,500. In order to fully fund the statutory pupil allocation, Wisconsin lawmakers would need to appropriate an additional \$11,969,250 annually.

The SAGE program serves 53,735 (K-3) of the state's 359,400 (K-12) public school students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. These SAGE students attend 425 elementary schools in 205 school districts. Despite this, Wisconsin has no comprehensive program that targets additional resources to raise achievement among economically disadvantaged students. A review of SAGE data suggests that some elementary schools with more than 50% of their students eligible for free and reduced-price meals do not currently participate in the program.

#### **Policy Recommendations:**

1. The Fair Funding for Our Future Plan, as recommended in the previous section, includes additional formula "weighting" in the equalization aid formula for students eligible for free and reduced-price meals. This option would require per pupil revenue limit increases and increases in general aid to offset the effects of aid redistribution and to provide districts with real spending authority.
2. Convene a study group to develop additional funding options that will support the needs of all economically disadvantaged students in Wisconsin.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Federal and State categorical aids for special education have not kept pace with rising costs. The categorical aid is the state's primary source for recognizing the additional costs of educating students with disabilities. The state level of reimbursement fell below 30% in 2004-05 and is projected to fall below 25% in 2014-15. As recently as 1993-94, the level of reimbursement was 44.6%. The special education categorical aid appropriation of \$368,939,100 has been flat since 2008-09. Many believe (with considerable justification) that, under revenue limits, districts are being forced to take money from regular education to pay for special education.

Meeting the needs of pupils with low-incidence and high-cost special education requirements can be very costly for school districts. To assist school districts in meeting these needs, the state created an additional appropriation for funding certain high-cost special education services. The appropriation consists of approximately \$1.9 million annually of federal IDEA state discretionary funding and \$3.5 million of state general purpose revenue (GPR). All costs (except administration) related to educating pupils with high-cost special education needs are "aidable" under the program. Costs reimbursed by IDEA flow-through dollars, Medicaid, and state special education categorical aids are deducted. Reimbursement is then calculated at 90% of the amount in excess of \$30,000 that it costs to provide services to an individual pupil in the prior year.

The state level of reimbursement for high-cost special education services fell below 50% in 2011-12<sup>51</sup> and is projected to fall to 40.9% in 2014-15.

#### **Policy Recommendations:**

1. Increase state special education categorical aid funding to reimburse 30% of the prior year's aidable costs.

2. Increase categorical aid funding for high-cost special education services to reimburse 100% of the prior year's aidable costs under the program formula outlined above.
3. Make the special education categorical aid and the high cost special education categorical aid "sum sufficient" appropriations.

## LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

Wisconsin requires school districts to establish a bilingual-bicultural (BLBC) program if they meet the following thresholds of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students from the same language group within a given school:

- » 10 or more pupils in grades K-3
- » 20 or more pupils in grades 4-8
- » 20 or more pupils in grades 9-12

The state reimbursement rate for these BLBC programs has fallen below 8% of approved prior year costs. Between LEPs attending districts that do not meet the above thresholds and LEPs not covered by their districts BLBC program, furthermore, the majority of LEPs in Wisconsin do not have any targeted BLBC resources behind them to assist with the additional costs of educating them to English proficiency. It is also reasonable to assume that, absent sufficient BLBC categorical aid, most district BLBC expenditures are being funded from regular education aid sources.

### Policy Recommendations:

1. The Legislature should double the current \$8.59 million annual appropriation for BLBC Programs. Also, create a new categorical aid appropriation to award up to \$100 per LEP pupil to districts that have LEP populations that do not currently qualify for BLBC categorical aid.
2. DPI should convene a study group to restructure BLBC program requirements and Wisconsin's approach to educating LEP students in general. The study group should also make recommendations for restructuring Wisconsin's BLBC categorical aid program to support the additional education costs of every LEP student in Wisconsin.

## PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

Geographically large, sparsely populated rural school districts that transport students significant distances have been hardest hit by increasing transportation costs. Costs vary widely among school districts, from little more than \$50 per pupil in some districts to nearly \$1,500 per pupil in others.<sup>52</sup>

Under current law, school districts are required to provide transportation services to public and private school students enrolled in regular education programs if the student resides more than two miles from the nearest public school they are entitled to attend. State pupil transportation categorical aid is based upon a flat annual amount per transported student that was last changed in the 2007-09 biennial budget.

It is estimated that total school district transportation costs for transporting students to and from school are approximately \$420 million annually. Thus, the state pupil transportation aid appropriation (\$23,703,600 annually) reimburses only about 5.5% of actual transportation costs. Even with the infusion of \$5 million annually for high cost transportation funding in 2013-14, state reimbursement is still less than 7% of actual school transportation costs.<sup>53</sup>

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently distributed \$5 million under the first year of the high cost categorical aid. Districts are eligible for this aid if their transportation costs exceed 150% of the statewide average cost per member. Wisconsin districts submitted \$14.84 million in eligible costs, resulting in the new categorical aid funding being prorated at about 33%; the obvious policy implication here is that while this new infusion of funding for student transportation was extremely helpful, it was inadequate in covering actual costs being incurred each year by districts.

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. Increase funding for the pupil transportation aid appropriation by 10% annually until the state level of reimbursement reaches 30% of prior year aidable costs.
2. Increase funding for the high cost transportation categorical aid to cover 100% of the prior year aidable costs.
3. Make the pupil transportation aid and high cost transportation aid appropriations “sum sufficient.”
4. Convene a study group to explore: 1) alternatives to our current method of distributing transportation aid to school districts; and 2) strategies for school districts to reduce school transportation costs.

## STATE AID STABILIZATION FUND

#### Policy Recommendations:

1. The State of Wisconsin maintains a “rainy day fund” to buffer state finances during economic recessions. As PK-12 funding in Wisconsin equals about one-third of the state budget an equal percentage of the state’s rainy day fund should be earmarked for PK-12 education funding. This “state aid stabilization” mechanism would be used during recessions to buffer school aids from dramatic cuts, as was the case in 2011-13 where school funding was reduced by \$792 million.

## E. CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Every school should be a warm and welcoming place for students, parents, staff and community. Research demonstrates the importance of a productive school climate and culture characterized by trust, academic press, and collaboration.<sup>54</sup> District and school leadership is instrumental in establishing productive school working conditions. But the state also has an important role to play in fostering safe and welcoming schools by:

- » Addressing systemic deficiencies in the delivery of children’s mental health services
- » Assisting, facilitating, and encouraging more schools to adopt a prevention-based
- » Providing a clearinghouse of effective practices and policies related to school climate and crisis preparedness
- » Providing assistance to schools who are responding to a crisis
- » Connecting state agencies to provide coherent and consistent support to local officials

### Policy Recommendation:

The State should create an Office of Mental Health, School Safety and Violence Prevention within the Department of Public Instruction to:

- » Coordinate the PK-12 community’s work with the Office of Children’s Mental Health
- » Provide a clearinghouse for effective practices, policies and training related to school climate and crisis preparedness
- » Assist, facilitate, and encourage more schools to adopt a prevention-based, evidence-based behavioral system of support and trauma sensitive practices (e.g., Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support or PBIS)
- » Provide assistance to schools who are responding to crisis
- » Coordinate with the Department of Justice, Department of Health Services and other state agencies to promote coherent and consistent recommendations to school districts and local law enforcement and child welfare agencies
- » Collect, analyze and share data related to important issues impacting on school climate

## **F. STANDARDS, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

Over the past twenty years, Wisconsin has developed and adopted academic content standards in over twenty-five different content areas, spanning the four core areas of English, mathematics, science and social studies, to the career and technical education fields, to world languages, the arts, and health and physical education.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction adopts model standards in an academic area as a guide for school districts to use in planning and adopting curriculum that is aligned to clear, concise, and rigorous expectations for what students are expected to know and be able to do at regular intervals during their K-12 education. In large-scale assessment areas, such as mathematics and reading, the standards adopted by the Department of Public Instruction also provide a roadmap for districts for what to expect of that assessment, as state and federal law require the state to adopt standards in these areas for the purpose of aligning a state-mandated assessment to those standards.

Though the Department of Public Instruction adopts model standards, school districts have always had the local control to adopt the state standards, or to adapt, modify, or create new standards that meet their needs. They also retain control over how to best design a curriculum that aligns to state-approved content standards. Local control over standards, instructional methods and practices, curriculum, and textbooks, is a valuable hallmark of public education in Wisconsin, and one that should be preserved.

Wisconsin students, parents and teachers are best served by having a transparent, thoughtful and timely state process for standards adoption and revision. Furthermore, the State should move ahead with greatly needed revisions to the state's science and social studies standards that have not been revised since 1998.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Assessing student learning, which provides an understanding for what students know and can do in relation to established content standards, serves an important purpose in education. It can provide feedback to the learner, diagnostic information for the educator, and actionable information for parents, schools, and future employers and institutions of higher education.

When reported in the aggregate, assessment data is also used to provide the public with information on the learning in schools that plays a crucial role in the future of children, communities, and is supported with public funding. Finally, assessments provide a valuable means of tracking achievement gaps that all too often exist between different student subgroups in Wisconsin, including white students and their non-white peers.

While assessment serves an important purpose, it is subsidiary to the paramount goal of providing high quality learning for all students. Assessment must be incorporated in a manner that supports the larger school mission. Assessment practices need to be balanced, evidence-based, and properly aligned to the fundamental purposes of teaching and learning. Development of school and educator capacity must be integral and not an afterthought. Wisconsin's assessment system should:

- » Include a balance of formative, interim, and summative assessment forms.
- » Provide valid, timely, and reliable information.
- » Be relevant to teachers and students.
- » Be universally designed for the full diversity of learners in our schools.
- » Not excessively detract from instructional time.



- » Include robust professional development provided to educators to develop high quality classroom assessments and interpret standardized assessments.
- » Promote discussion around attaching high stakes outcomes to students, educators, or schools, including asking and answering the following questions:
  - Is the design of the assessment appropriate for the intended high stakes purpose?
  - Will the use of the assessment for high stakes lead to inappropriate test preparation that will generate invalid results and ethical failures?
  - Have adequate resources, professional learning, and implementation been provided so that educators are ready and students have the opportunity to learn what is being assessed?
  - Do decision makers and other stakeholders have accurate information on the validity, reliability, and measurement uncertainty of the assessment data?

Assessment has become an increasingly central and visible component of state and federal policy initiatives in elementary and secondary education. In Wisconsin, the 1990's introduced the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), which assessed reading and mathematics, along with English Language Arts, science, and social studies at grades 4, 8, and 10.

The first decade of the 21st century brought additional assessments, with the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act requiring additional summative accountability assessments of reading and mathematics at grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 and Response to Intervention (RtI) encouraging increased use of standardized benchmark assessments as part of a universal screening system.

Now, in the second decade of the century, Wisconsin schools are experiencing further expansion of mandated assessments. Common Core-aligned Smarter Balanced assessments are replacing the WKCE reading and mathematics assessments at grades 3-8, while the WKCE will continue to be administered in grades 4, 8, and 10 in science, social studies, English Language Arts, and writing.

The ACT suite of Aspire at grades 9-10, ACT in grade 11, and WorkKeys in grade 11 is arriving, with only the grade 10 WKCE in reading, language, and mathematics being removed. In addition, the PALS early literacy screener is now mandated as a benchmark assessment in grades 4K-2. This increase in standardized assessment has been accompanied by the introduction of new accountability systems for schools and educators that rely substantially on assessment data.

Given these widespread changes in the state's assessment and accountability systems, it is time for an evidence-based dialogue around assessment and accountability policies and practices to reinforce current initiatives. This dialogue should engage several topics, which include (but are not limited to) the following:

- » Reviewing the current portfolio of mandated assessments for alignment, relevance, time, reporting, and usefulness of results.
- » Reviewing intended and unintended consequences of using assessment for high stakes, including asking the question, "Are current policies and practices driving or inhibiting improved teaching and learning?"
- » Examining opportunities for promoting innovative and authentic assessment practices across the curriculum that facilitate personalized learning and the demonstration of creativity, problem-solving, and other higher order skills.
- » Recommending professional development for current and pre-service educators in assessment literacy, evidence-based assessment practices, and evidence-based grading practices.
- » Reviewing which resources and structures schools and educators need to effectively administer the mandated assessment program and utilize the results.
- » Developing ethical guidance to educators around assessment practices.

The enterprise should be consistent with our values as a state, and should aspire to incorporate the best evidence-based practices in place nationally and internationally. Increasing learning for all students should be the guiding principle.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability systems in high-performing entities, including frameworks for both content standards and assessments, vary widely. These range from an almost complete lack of standardized exams in Finland to a focus on high-stakes assessment in Massachusetts. A related gap exists across accountability systems, as schools in Massachusetts and Ontario link test scores and other student and school-level performance metrics to a school for decision-making purposes, while Finnish schools, which are largely controlled at a local level, do not distinguish and rate schools on standardized metrics.

**Even with these drastically different approaches to accountability, a common thread is evident: the need for effective intervention and support to address areas of need and growth at both the school level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing schools) and at the student level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing students).** Although the means of identifying where development is needed vary between the systems, each tries to provide useful support rather than punishment or blame; for example, an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report from 2010 describes Ontario's system as one that assumes "that teachers are professionals who are trying to do the right thing, and that performance problems are much more likely to be a product of lack of knowledge than lack of motivation."

### Policy Recommendations:

- » Establish a State Academic Standards and Assessment Review Council that would be charged with reviewing the adoption and adaptation of the state's academic standards and assessments, as well as the appropriate uses of assessment data:
- » Council members would be appointed by the State Superintendent and recommended by parent organizations, institutions of higher education, professional associations, education labor organizations and educational research organizations. In addition, the Council would include representatives from the Office of the Governor, and the chairs of the Assembly and Senate Education Committees and the ranking member from the minority party on each education committee.
- » The Council should use commonly accepted principles for standard development, such as, those established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
- » The council should review and provide input on the menu of supports provided to schools and districts that are identified for need of intervention through the state accountability system.

# CONCLUSION

The Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance (SAA) is pleased to offer, through the preceding report, a pathway to ensure a bright future for all of Wisconsin's more than 850,000 public school students. We strongly believe that making evidence-based investments in public education should be the most important policy priority for our state, given the well-documented link between educational outcomes and lifelong prosperity. In this document, we have provided an overview of the history, current policy context, and relevant research around six key policy areas, and have offered specific policy recommendations to the Legislature, the Department of Public Instruction, and other policymakers for their consideration. Working together around a set of shared values, we can provide the education that all of our students, regardless of their background or address, richly deserve.

# APPENDIX #1: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

## Defining College and Career Readiness

In 2012 the Wisconsin Accountability Design Team developed the following definition of college and career readiness that sets the standard for preparing our students and is the ultimate benchmark by which we measure our progress:

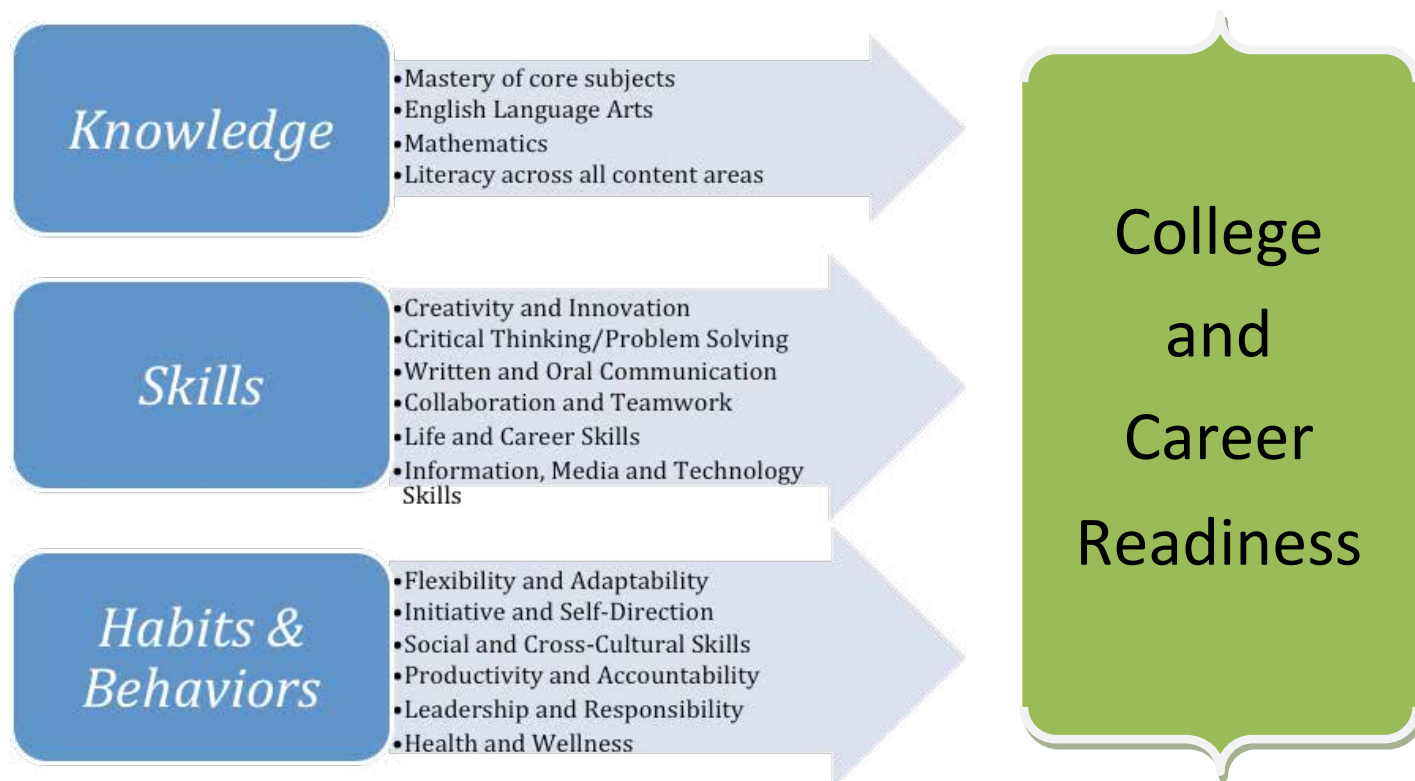
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Students who are college and/or career ready have, upon graduation, the knowledge, habits, and skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and/or training that maximize their opportunities for sustainable employment.

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In Wisconsin, we expect our schools to prepare all students to be ready for college and careers. This can include pursuing a degree at two-or four-year institutions, technical/vocational programs, community college, apprenticeship, significant on-the-job training, or the military. Entry into career or college should be without remediation. All students in Wisconsin should graduate from high school possessing and demonstrating the *knowledge* (academic and technical content), *skills* (e.g., critical thinking, application of knowledge), and *habits* (e.g., perseverance, time management) that only come from a rigorous, rich, and well-rounded curriculum and effective schools.

### Conceptualizing College & Career Readiness



# APPENDIX #2: LEARNING FROM NATIONAL AND WORLD LEADERS

In developing its policy recommendations, the School Administrators Alliance reviewed the literature related to the World's highest performing educational systems. This appendix includes two important sources on this topic: 1) a summary of Michael Fullan's article on the right and wrong drivers for whole system reform, and 2) a research summary prepared by the WI Center for Education Research on National and International Exemplars.

## MICHAEL FULLAN: CHOOSING THE WRONG DRIVERS FOR WHOLE SYSTEM REFORM

Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, is recognized as a worldwide authority on educational reform. This is a summary from his article entitled *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform* (2011) in which he examines drivers typically chosen by leaders to accomplish whole system school reform, critiques the inadequacy of those drivers for achieving the intended outcomes, and offers an alternative set of drivers that have been proven to be more effective for accomplishing the desired goals. He argues that many systems not only fail to feature these components, but choose drivers that actually make matters worse. He concludes that the most successful systems around the world are using drivers that lead to learning and teaching being based on individual and collective intrinsic motivation, which has permanent staying power. Fullan argues that if countries lagging behind – currently including the U.S. and Australia – do not change their ways, the gap will become larger and larger.

*Drivers* are those policy and strategy levers that have the least and best chance of driving successful reform. A 'wrong driver' then is a deliberate policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired result, while a 'right driver' is one that ends up achieving better measurable results for students. Whole system reform is just that – 100 per cent of the system – a whole state, province, region or entire country.

The interest in whole system reform has been fueled recently by better analyses of how different countries are faring in international benchmark comparisons. OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 results received strong media coverage as it released its latest results on 7 December 2010 (OECD, 2010a). At the same time, McKinsey and Company published its insightful analysis of how 'improved school systems keep getting better' (Mourshed et al, 2010). The McKinsey report examined 20 entities (countries or sub-regions of countries) including developing countries going from 'poor to fair', 'fair to good', 'good to great', and 'great to excellent'.

In the rush to move forward, leaders, especially from countries that have not been progressing, tend to choose the wrong drivers. Such ineffective drivers fundamentally miss the target. There are four main 'wrong driver' culprits discussed:

1. **Accountability:** using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools vs. capacity building
2. **Individual teacher and leadership quality:** promoting individual vs. group solutions
3. **Technology:** investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs. instruction
4. **Fragmented strategies** vs. integrated or systemic strategies

The four ‘wrong drivers’ are not forever wrong. They are just badly placed as lead drivers. The four ‘right drivers’ – capacity building, group work, pedagogy, and ‘systemness’ – are the anchors of whole system reform. You don’t have to give up your affinity to accountability, individual quality, technology, and favored quality components of the reform package. Stated another way, Fullan asserts that he is not talking about presence or absence or even sequence, but rather dominance. Dominance is another word for saying what system leaders state and acknowledge as the anointed, explicitly articulated lead drivers. The encouraging news is that the judicious use of the four right drivers ends up accomplishing better the goals that those espousing the wrong drivers are seeking. And it does so in a fundamentally more powerful and sustainable manner.

**The right drivers – capacity building, group work, instruction, and systemic solutions – are effective because they work directly on changing the culture of school systems (values, norms, skills, practices, relationships); by contrast the wrong drivers alter structure, procedures and other formal attributes of the system without reaching the internal substance of reform – and that is why they fail.**

The essence of this paper is that if you want to be successful at whole system reform, then base your dominant set of strategies on the four right drivers in combination.

## **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXEMPLARS<sup>55</sup>**

The factors affecting student performance and learning are complicated and interconnected; not surprisingly, no single panacea exists, and policymakers should resist the temptation to assume that factors which contribute to success in one setting (as challenging as those are to identify) can be replicated quickly and easily in other settings. In recent years, policymakers and educators alike have taken a strong interest in identifying jurisdictions (nations, states, and school districts) where student performance (typically measured through standardized assessments) has been high, and then seeking to identify factors which appear to have contributed to this success. In particular, students in Finland, Ontario, and Massachusetts have demonstrated high levels of scholastic performance on international and national examinations, including the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). In reviewing recent research key policy commonalities among high achieving nations and states emerge including the following:

- » A highly trained and motivated teaching staff, drawn from the top ranks of college students
- » Accountability systems focused on effective intervention at the school and student level
- » Equitable funding
- » Addressing societal factors that impact student learning

Substantial research in recent years has confirmed that effective teachers and school leaders are the most important within-school influences on student achievement. Having effective educators, in turn, depends on both (a) the ability of schools to develop existing staff, and (b) access to a “pipeline” of well-prepared educators. One theme which emerges from the highest-performing countries is that teachers are drawn from the top percentiles of their college class, and subsequently receive ample training and experience prior to leading their own classroom. For example, becoming an educator in Finland generally takes between 5 and 7 years, 15-25% of which is practicum experience. Specifically, primary school teachers in Finland must receive a master’s degree in teaching which, in addition to including coursework on subject-specific content and pedagogy and general theory, also includes research experience and a thesis, while secondary teachers first receive a master’s in their content area, and then study pedagogy.



Closer to home, the Boston Teacher Residency has been training teachers for work in Boston schools since 2003; residents simultaneously study theory—by attending courses and seminars—and practice—by spending four days a week in a classroom environment—before receiving support as they begin full time teaching. This program, which has a rigorous selection process, has demonstrated success, with highly positive reviews from principals and high retention rates.

With respect to compensation, there is some evidence that the highest performing education systems, as a result of prioritizing teacher quality, tend to offer attractive compensation and opportunities for advancement. The relationship between educators' compensation and student performance is complex, however, as teacher salaries by themselves across all OECD countries tend to be below the average for other comparable careers. In order to attract the best teachers, some higher-performing countries, states, and districts offer alternate benefits, including job security and vacations, in addition to salary increases (with experience and education) and performance bonuses, which in recent years have increasingly been tied to new performance-based teacher evaluation programs.

Beyond effective training and compensation programs, the most successful education systems foster a popular culture where teaching is a well-respected career, and teachers are trusted to provide high levels of instruction. This is reflected through the professional autonomy and independence educators are given, especially in Finland, but also elsewhere, including in Massachusetts, where teachers largely retain the freedom to design their own lesson plans and curricula, albeit with substantial support and opportunity for professional development. These conditions are much harder to replicate, of course, than new educator training and compensation programs, especially in the short term, but should clearly be part of long-term discussions about how to elevate education as a profession with the goal of increasing student achievement.

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY, ASSESSMENTS, AND STANDARDS**

Accountability systems, including frameworks for both content standards (to define what students are expected to know at various ages/grade levels) and assessments (which measure students' mastery of content standards), vary widely, even among high-performing entities. These range from an almost complete lack of standardized exams (in Finland) to a focus on high-stakes assessment (in Massachusetts, for example). A related gap exists across accountability systems, as schools in Massachusetts and Ontario link test scores and other student and school-level performance metrics to a school for decision-making purposes, while Finnish schools, which are largely controlled at a local level, do not distinguish and rate schools on standardized metrics.

Even with these drastically different approaches to accountability, a common thread is evident: the need for effective intervention and support to address areas of need and growth at both the school level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing *schools*) and at the student level (how do we identify and improve the lowest-performing *students*). Although the means of identifying where development is needed vary between the systems, each tries to provide useful support rather than punishment or blame; for example, an OECD report from 2010 describes Ontario's system as one that assumes "that teachers are professionals who are trying to do the right thing, and that performance problems are much more likely to be a product of lack of knowledge than lack of motivation."

The creation of content standards varies widely from system to system, as some create comprehensive standards, while others describe broader goals. However, each of the highest performing systems appears to have a progression of skills and guidelines for where students should be by a certain point; in some cases, such as in Massachusetts, these guidelines also inform the standardized state examination. Another common theme with respect to content standards, which has informed the development of the Common Core State Standards in the U.S. in recent years, is to focus on fewer standards at a greater level of depth and rigor, as opposed to more standards at less depth (the "mile wide/inch deep" problem).

## **EQUITABLE FUNDING**

How schools are funded, and the level of local control over distribution of funding, also varies widely; for example, schools in Finland are funded entirely at a local level, while funding in Ontario occurs almost entirely at the province level. Each approach has its merits, although one clear challenge inherent in a localized approach to funding in the U.S. has been how to ensure funding adequacy given vast differences in local wealth (between central cities and suburbs, for example). Generally, funding that takes into account the needs of different schools and students more effectively provides the necessary resources to all schools. For more detail on school funding in Wisconsin, please see the “funding” brief.

## **OTHER SOCIETAL FACTORS**

One of the more salient conclusions to be drawn from national (and especially international) comparisons of educational performance is the extent to which such comparisons are, in a sense, as much about societal issues (poverty, segregation, etc.) – and how different jurisdictions respond to these conditions – as they are about the performance measures themselves.

In other words, each of the successful reforms and strategies described above are influenced by conditions and decisions that lie outside the immediate purview of schools themselves, such access to early childhood resources, health care, and efforts to address poverty. For example, Canadian schools operate in a context where equity is prized and where the out-of-school situation is defined, in part, by the social supports that exist, including access to health care and other services. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has also been shown to have result in more equitable outcomes and better student performance; high performing nations have recently emphasized ECEC, including Finland, which has higher than average spending on care and education for three to five year olds, in addition to longer maternity and paternity leave entitlements. In many of the more highly-performing education systems, societal supports which encourage a culture supportive of education, health, and aid have yielded results.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Much of our selection of the highest performing education systems is informed by their performance on international examinations such as the PISA and TIMSS. Although those tests do provide a comparison point, they can also be over-interpreted. For example, although Finland performs very well on the PISA, its results on the TIMSS are in the center of the pack, and some university mathematicians there complained that students were increasingly beginning college unprepared in math. It is also worth noting that, as with any test, the PISA and TIMSS scores come with a standard error, which makes some test score differences not statistically significant.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

There is no easy or quick path to creating a high performing education system; however, evidence from the current role models in education does highlight some promising practices and worthwhile investments. Specifically, a selective and comprehensive teacher training program, dedicated policy, district and school leadership, and effective intervention and support at the school and district levels are key strategies for creating highly effective educational systems.

## APPENDIX #3: PK-12 WISCONSIN EDUCATION: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

### STRENGTHS TO BUILD UPON:

**Graduation rate:** Eighty-seven and a half percent of Wisconsin public school students graduate with their cohort, based on the standardized graduation calculation. This is one of the highest graduation rates in the country.

<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state.html>

**Advanced placement:** Not only does Wisconsin have the highest percentage of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in the Midwest, but our state's students also score higher on AP tests.

In 2013, Wisconsin graduates took over 51,000 AP exams while in high school, with 22.2 percent scoring a three or better on an exam, qualifying students for credit or advanced standing at most colleges and universities. The 22.2 percent is above the national total of 20.1 percent of students scoring three or better, out of the million students taking an AP exam.

[http://host.madison.com/news/local/wisconsin-students-best-in-midwest-on-advanced-placement-exam/article\\_205dda6a-edf3-57d2-9c99-425b7d1dcb68.html](http://host.madison.com/news/local/wisconsin-students-best-in-midwest-on-advanced-placement-exam/article_205dda6a-edf3-57d2-9c99-425b7d1dcb68.html)

**ACT:** For years, Wisconsin students were among the highest average ACT scorers in the U.S. In 2013, Wisconsin graduates who took the ACT posted an average score of 22.1. Wisconsin tied with Iowa for the second-highest composite ACT score among states where more than half the students take the ACT. Among those states, Minnesota has the highest average ACT score: 23.

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/wisconsin-ties-for-second-nationally-in-act-test-scores-b9980125z1-220432501.html>

### ACHIEVEMENT GAPS THAT REQUIRE URGENT, INTELLIGENT AND UNITED ACTION:

While Wisconsin's graduation rate is one of the highest in the country there is a significant graduation gap between students of color and white students. While 94.5% of white students graduated within six years in 2012-13, only 73.8% of black students and 80.5% of Hispanic students graduated in that same time frame.

Results from the 2013-14 Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) showed improvements for most student groups compared to 2008-09 in reading and mathematics, but achievement gaps remain large. In fact, Wisconsin has the widest race-based gaps in the nation. The results from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the "Nation's Report Card" showed no other state had wider gaps in both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics.

## APPENDIX #4: VOUCHERS: PATH TO SECOND RATE

Under the Milwaukee, Racine and statewide private school choice programs, state funds are used to subsidize the cost of children to attend private, primarily religious, schools participating in the program. Table 1 shows the expansion of vouchers since Wisconsin began subsidizing private education in 1989.

Today, there is a push to expand the statewide program by increasing the enrollment cap of 1,000 students. This push is the quintessential example of ideology trumping evidence and violates the first rule of policy development--do no harm. Below, we summarize some of the primary arguments against the expansion of the voucher program, and cite leading editorial voices from major Wisconsin newspapers.

### Vouchers Do Not Improve Student Learning

The fact is that numerous studies from across the country have shown that students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. For example, in its analysis of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in 2011, the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau released a five-year longitudinal study, which concluded that students in Milwaukee using vouchers to attend private schools performed no better on standardized tests than their counterparts in public schools (see the study at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lab/reports/12-14full.pdf>).

*Judging from years of evidence in Milwaukee, where the (Milwaukee Parental Choice) program has existed since the 1990s, there is precious little data to show that students in the voucher program do any better than students in the mainline Milwaukee Public Schools.*

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Editorial, February 19, 2013*

### The Opportunity Costs of Vouchers: Path to Second Rate

For every dollar the State of Wisconsin spends on an ineffective program, such as vouchers, it loses the opportunity to invest in programs that are effective in improving teaching and learning for all students.

In the 2014-15 school year almost seventy-five percent of applications for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program were for students previously enrolled in private schools.<sup>56</sup> When you consider voucher advocates stated goal of “a voucher in every backpack” you begin to understand just how expensive it would be to fund two systems of education. As of 2012-13, there were 97,488 students enrolled in private schools who did not receive a taxpayer subsidy. Multiplying that number by the current voucher amount<sup>57</sup> totals over \$700 million.

If leading states and nations continue to invest in proven strategies to raise achievement for ALL students while Wisconsin resources are tied up in an ineffective and expensive entitlement the Badger State will relegate itself to a second-rate competitor on the global stage.

*Let's be perfectly clear about this: Wisconsin cannot afford two parallel school structures — a public school system, which is constitutionally mandated for those who profess to care about the state constitution, and a private school system operating without the same mandates as the public schools.*

*Oshkosh Northwestern, Editorial, February 9, 2013*

## **Vouchers Lack Public Accountability**

Private voucher schools have little public accountability, which is in stark contrast to the strong controls imposed on public schools. For example, private voucher schools do not have to comply with the state's Open Meetings and Open Records laws, are not required to meet the federal standards of hiring "highly qualified" teachers, and in fact, can even hire teachers who are unlicensed.

In addition, private voucher schools are not bound by most state instructional requirements, do not follow uniform state graduation requirements, and are not required to be part of the state's educator effectiveness system. They do not have to accept all students, nor provide students with the same due process protections afforded by public schools.

*What guarantee do taxpayers have that the private "voucher" schools that open up shop have properly trained staff and aren't scams managed by someone simply trying to make a quick buck? And over time what happens to the public school system in general as more money is diverted elsewhere while the public system is left to deal with those students who have various special needs that require more resources?*

*That's why expanding vouchers needs to be done only when everything else to improve the educational environment has failed. And why in the world wouldn't we all do what we can to help our local public schools succeed?*

*Eau Claire Leader Telegram, Editorial, February 28, 2013*

And the argument posed by some that "I pay property taxes so my taxes should go to the school that I want my child to go to" is faulty. We don't pay taxes to fund our child's education. We pay taxes to fund public education, plain and simple — and, again, mandated by the state constitution.

*There are those with much money and many powerful lobbyists, in Wisconsin and across the nation, who are pushing voucher schools as a way, step by step, to promote private education at the expense of public education. Their ultimate goal is to have taxpayers pay for any student, no matter their zip code or their income level, to go to a private school.*

*They have a foothold in our Legislature through campaign spending for like-minded legislators. They have an ally in Walker. But they can't be allowed to win.*

*Public education is on the line in Wisconsin. The governor's plan is indeed a serious threat to those 870,000 children who depend on it.*

*Appleton Post Crescent: Editorial, February 23, 2013*

*Those special-interests groups, which are offshoots of national groups and get much of their money from outside the state, have mixed motives. Some of their supporters are truly devoted to preserving private, especially religious, education. But others on a national level see the voucher push as a way for them to make money investing in private schools. And others, for philosophical or political reasons, want to undermine public education. Whatever the motivation, these groups are extremely well-financed and well-connected politically.*

*The half of the state's population that knows little about voucher schools needs to learn—and learn quickly. This push is coming hard already. And the future of public education is at stake.*

*Appleton Post Crescent: Editorial, March 23, 2013*

Table 1: History of Wisconsin's Voucher Program

Year	Act	Decision
1989	336	Open to pupils in City of Milwaukee
		Family income less than 175% of the federal poverty level
		Private schools had to be nonsectarian and in the City of Milwaukee
		No more than 1% of the MPS enrollment could participate
		No more than 49% of a choice school's enrollment could be choice pupils
1993	16	Increased limit to 1.5% of the MPS enrollment could participate
		No more than 65% of a choice school's enrollment could be choice pupils
1995	27	Sectarian schools could now participate
		Increased limit to 15% of the MPS enrollment could participate
		Deleted the percentage limit on the share of choice pupils in a choice school
2005	125	Increased enrollment limit for the program to 22,500 pupils
		Continuing pupils and siblings of pupils were eligible for the program if their family income was under 220% of the federal poverty level
2011	32	Deleted the enrollment limit on the program
		Raised the income threshold to 300% of the federal poverty level
		Deleted the geographic requirement for schools in the program
		Created a process under which a parental choice program could be created in eligible school districts other than MPS
2011	15	Voucher program created for Racine
		Statewide voucher program established. Initially, it would be limited to 500
2013	20	students the first year and 1,000 students every year thereafter.
		Family income less than 185% of the federal poverty level



# APPENDIX #5: GUIDELINES FOR POLICY GRANTS TO SCHOOLS

Several of the legislative priorities identified by the School Administrators Alliance (SAA) contain a policy recommendation for the state to establish a grant program for Wisconsin school districts. The purpose of these grants would be for districts to request short-term funding (perhaps 3-5 years) to pilot innovative, high-quality programs designed to address key issues such as innovation.

We believe that policy grants should be awarded on a competitive basis (in accordance with the guidelines proposed below) and evaluated under rigorous conditions, with key findings and best practices disseminated statewide for modification and scale-up as appropriate. Key guiding principles include the following:

- » Rather than being awarded strictly on either (a) a merit-based or first-come-first-served process (which might encourage high-quality proposals, but could advantage districts that employ or could hire professional grant writers), or (b) a formula-based process based on district size and/or poverty level (which could be more fair, but might wind up funding lower-quality proposals), SAA recommends a hybrid approach featuring components of both models:
  - Grants must meet standards of quality that include a sound theory of action backed by research, an adequate staffing and management plan, a timeline denoting key project activities, and a matching or cost-sharing component aimed at ensuring sustainability
  - Funded grants must either build in funding for their own evaluation OR agree to participate in a state-funded evaluation which will address questions around successful fidelity of implementation, effects on the intended outcomes, and dissemination of lessons learned/ best practices
  - Grants should be available to all Wisconsin public schools, and should be reasonably distributed across factors such as *district size* (large, medium, small), *geography* (urban, suburban, rural), and *student characteristics* (high-poverty vs. lower-poverty)
    - In some cases, it will be reasonable (and desirable) to have student need serve as a determining factor in awarding grants; for example, a school that demonstrates a comparatively high level of need for mental health services would be a good candidate to receive funding
- » Applicants must provide a reasonably detailed budget outlining how funds would be spent, and activities would need to provide standard assurances around IDEA, Title IX, etc.
- » The agency administering the grants (for example, DPI) would develop a rubric for scoring grant applications; this should involve (for example) scores of 1-10 assigned by a panel of reviewers to each core component of the grant (theory of action, staffing/management plan, etc.). The panel would also decide ahead of time whether each core component should be weighted equally or whether some are weighted more than others.
- » Prospective applicants for grant programs would benefit from knowing in advance the dollar range for each program.

# APPENDIX #6: FURTHER READING/ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## **Educator Preparation**

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