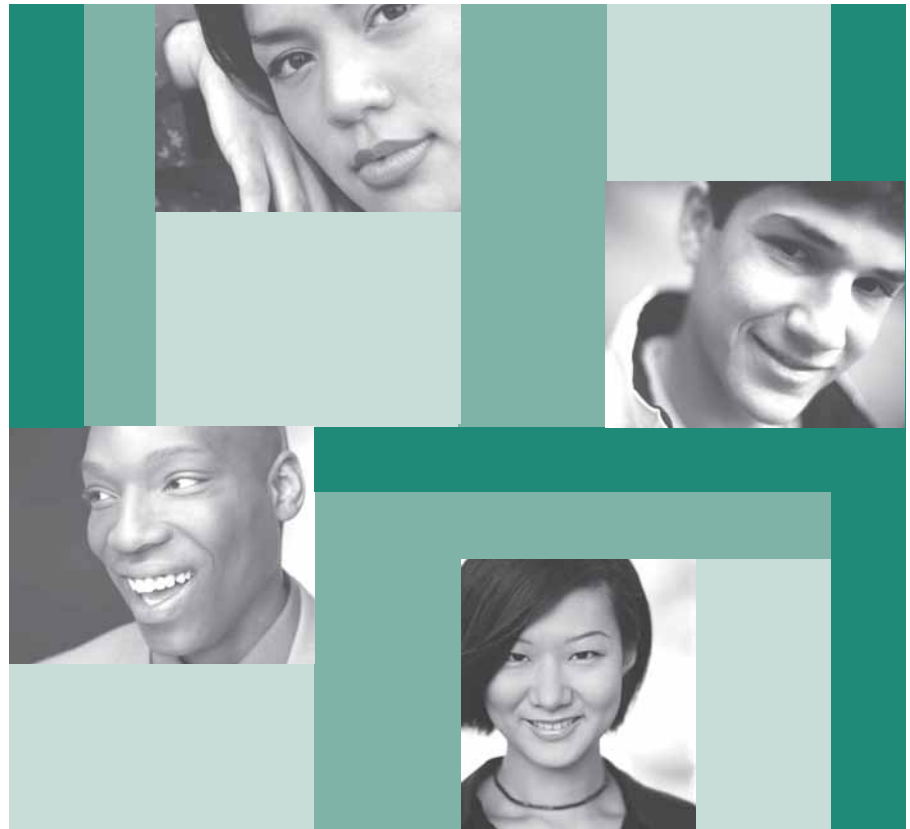


Wisconsin
School
Administrators
Alliance



High School Project Team Report

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

2007

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Background

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been paid to high schools in America. Policy makers, foundations and “think tanks” have presented a wide array of reform proposals.

In December 2005, the Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance High School Project Team was convened to:

- a. review current research on high schools;
- b. review Wisconsin high school data; and,
- c. develop policy recommendations for the local, state and federal levels.

In pursuing this charge, the project team reviewed state high school assessment and graduation data, the Wisconsin 12th grade content standards, and, the following publications related to high school policy issues:

- *Advancing High School Reform in the States: Policies and Programs*, National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
- *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts*, the American Diploma Project
- *Redesigning the American High School*, National Governors Association
- *High Schools for the New Millennium*, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- *Transforming High School for All Youth*, National High School Alliance
- *Projections of 2003-04*, The Urban Institute Education Policy Center

Citing extensive and high quality recommendations for action, at both local and federal levels, the project team focused its work on preparing a short list of recommendations that the State of Wisconsin could implement to improve the learning opportunities for every student.¹

The project team made recommendations in two categories: State standards and assessment and student learning and interventions.

State Standards and Assessment:

What should students know and be able to do, and how do we know if they do?

How Can The State Promote Effective Standards Based Instruction and Assessment at the Local Level?

Every school in Wisconsin should have the tools in place to effectively assess students in order to improve learning. Each school and school district should have tests that provide educators with **timely** access to information they can use for instructional planning and school improvement.

These tests should provide results that can be used to:

- Identify the skills and concepts individual students have learned;
- Diagnose instructional needs;
- Monitor academic growth over time;
- Make data-driven decisions at the classroom, school, and district levels;
- Place new students into appropriate instructional programs.

School districts throughout the state have made strides in developing effective systems of assessment to improve student learning. Districts have used online assessments that provide teachers with immediate student feedback; developed common course assessments; and created systems to better access student achievement data.

However action at the state level should be taken to support and accelerate the development of effective and comprehensive assessment systems in every district.

In order to promote high quality local assessment programs based upon the Wisconsin content standards, the State of Wisconsin should:

1. Promote the development and dissemination of high quality assessment models. The state should establish a grant program that would fund a small number of schools (rural, suburban, urban) that would create

high quality models including common course assessments and effective use of district-wide assessments to improve student learning. The grant would require that these high quality models be shared with other similar Wisconsin schools.

2. Provide resources necessary for high quality local assessment measures. The state should fund a grant program that defrays the implementation costs for districts.

The purpose of both of these programs is to develop the focus and support necessary to enable every district to create and maintain a highly effective system of local assessment for learning state academic standards. Both grant programs would sunset upon the anticipated completion of this goal (e.g. 3-5 years), and would include a specific plan to evaluate their effectiveness.

How Can We Improve State Testing?

Any state test should be used as **one** measure of student achievement NOT the only measure.

Ideally, a state test should be one that:

- Is relevant to students and parents;
- Provides timely and meaningful feedback to improve learning;
- Provides current and longitudinal data for program evaluation purposes;
- Is efficient in terms of the time required and expense of administration (dollars, lost instruction time, local administrative costs, etc.); and,
- Effectively measures student learning and readiness for post-secondary learning opportunities.

Despite its expense in time and resources, the current 10th grade WKCE test is not relevant to either students or parents and does not provide timely information to improve student learning.

Prior to the expiration of the current contract for the 10th grade assessment, the State of Wisconsin should conclude a study that will replace the current test with one that meets the five criteria listed above. The study should examine the following possibilities:

Option #1: Replace Current 10th Grade Test with ACT/WorkKeys in 11th Grade

In order to make the state assessment system more meaningful, relevant and rigorous, the state should examine replacing the current 10th grade test with the ACT/WorkKeys administered in the 11th grade.

Alignment to Wisconsin Standards:

The Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (hereafter Wisconsin document) were compared to ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) in the curricular areas of English (writing), reading, mathematics, and science. ACT's review reveals an excellent match at the performance standards level for reading and literature, writing, and language for grades eight and twelve. The match for mathematics, grades eight and twelve, was very strong as was the science match for the same grades.²

Relevance:

Sixty-eight percent of Wisconsin students already take the ACT. The test would clearly be more relevant to students and their parents than is the current test. In addition, this would save Wisconsin families the out-of-pocket expense for ACT.

Timely and Meaningful Feedback:

Results are delivered to students and schools within a few weeks of administration.

K-16 Approach:

The ACT measures students' readiness for college-level work (trade/technical schools, two-year and four-year institutions). Students and educators can evaluate student progress toward meeting college readiness standards and make required interventions while they are still in high school. ACT scores are accepted by every college and university in the United States.

Promising Results in Other States:

Colorado, Illinois and Michigan use the ACT as part of their state assessment system. Results in Illinois and Colorado show that:

- Participation rates have increased.
- The number of students meeting or exceeding college and workplace readiness benchmarks has increased.
- The tests have identified college-ready students who might otherwise not have considered additional education after high school.
- Educational and career aspirations have increased for minority students.

In addition, the state should consider providing access for every school to use ACT's eighth and tenth grade assessments, EXPLORE and PLAN.

Option #2: Develop a New Test

A second option to be explored would be the possibility of developing a new test that would be relevant to students and parents; provide timely and meaningful feedback to improve learning; provide current and longitudinal data for program evaluation purposes; be efficient in terms of the time required and expense of administration; and, be an effective measure of student learning and readiness for post-secondary learning opportunities.

Option #3: Less Costly Test

Another approach worth examining is to identify whether state and federal accountability requirements could be met by a test that is considerably more efficient. For example, if state and federal accountability requirements could be met by a test that takes one-hour and \$5.00 to administer, perhaps the state would be better off pursuing a scaled down assessment and investing the money saved into supporting quality assessment for learning at the local level.



Student Learning and Intervention:

How do we teach students to meet the standards and what do we do when they do not reach standards?

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004), the literacy skills required for all U.S. occupations are projected to rise by 14% by 2006. However, adolescent literacy experts—and the results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress—indicate that as many as 70% of students struggle with reading and require differentiated instruction. Literacy skills (reading and writing) are the foundation of academic success for every student in every school. The lack of grade-level appropriate and remedial literacy programs across the curriculum in middle and high schools is a significant cause of so many students falling behind in reading comprehension.

—*Advancing High School Reform in the States, NASSP, 2005*

How Can We Positively Impact Adolescent Literacy?

Despite the need to improve adolescent literacy, almost every current state and federal literacy program is focused on the PK-3 student population.³

The State of Wisconsin should implement a program to enable every student to receive effective literacy instruction at every stage of their formal education. This program should consist of two grant programs:

The first would provide all districts with:

- Accurate and affordable methods to assess students' literacy skills;
- A menu of effective reading/writing instructional strategies for the adolescent student; and,
- High-quality and affordable professional development for teachers across the academic content areas.

The second would fund a small number of middle and high schools (rural, suburban and urban) to develop high quality literacy models. The grant would require that these high quality models be shared with other similar Wisconsin schools.

The intent of both of these programs is to develop the focus and support necessary to enable every district to create a highly effective system of adolescent reading instruction. Both grant programs would sunset upon the antici-

pated completion of this goal (e.g. 3-5 years), and would include a specific plan to evaluate their effectiveness.

In addition, the state should work with teacher training institutions to better prepare graduates for content-area reading instruction.

How Can We Enhance Program Flexibility and Interventions?

Alternative Education Program

In 1999, the Legislature enacted the Wisconsin Alternative Education Program to provide financial assistance for school districts to develop new, or to expand existing alternative education programs. Despite the tremendous need to fund alternative programming, funding for these grants has steadily decreased from \$5 million in 2000 to \$800,000 for the 2006-07 school year.

The state should fund this program at its original level of \$5 million.

Current Program Flexibility/Interventions

Wisconsin GED Option #2 Program

The Wisconsin GED Option #2 Program allows authorized school districts to use the GED test battery to measure proficiency, in lieu of high school credit, for students enrolled in an alternative education program and who are at least 17 years of age. A student who passes the GED tests, and completes the other requirements for graduation, is entitled to the traditional high school diploma.⁴

While many school districts are taking advantage of the GED Option #2 Program, many educators are not familiar with the program or aspects of the program. Efforts should be made to make high school officials aware of the flexibility that currently exists in the GED Option #2 program.

Many school leaders are looking for alternative programming options for students younger than seventeen years old. The SAA should explore options with the Department of Public Instruction and other stakeholders and share these options with school leaders across the state.

Attachment A:

Current State and Federal Literacy Programs

Title I

Basic Grants provide federal dollars to help supplement educational opportunities for children who live in high poverty areas who are most at risk of failing to meet the state's challenging content and performance standards. For more information, please visit:

<http://dpi.wi.gov/title1/index.html>

Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSR)

is a federal initiative that promotes whole school reform. The purpose of CSR is to provide financial incentives for schools to develop or adopt, and implement, comprehensive school reform programs based on scientifically-based research and effective practices that are aimed at helping all students reach high academic standards. For more information, please visit: <http://dpi.wi.gov/csr/csrgrants.html>

Early Reading First

is designed to transform existing early education programs into centers of excellence that provide high-quality, early education to young children, especially those from low-income families. The overall purpose of the Early Reading First Program is to prepare young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills to prevent reading difficulties and ensure school success. For more information, please visit: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/earlyreading/index.html>

Even Start Family Literacy Program

provides discretionary funds to partnerships to implement family literacy services. For more information, please visit: http://dpi.wi.gov/title1/esfl_pgrgrminfo.html

Reading First

is designed to assist schools in establishing reading programs for students in kindergarten through grade 3. These programs must be founded on scientifically-based reading research and aid in ensuring every student can read well by the end of third grade. For more information, please visit: <http://dpi.wi.gov/title1/rdngfirst.html>

Title VI Accountability and Assessment

The Adolescent Learning Toolkit is designed to help Wisconsin educators close the achievement gap in reading and mathematics and help students develop the knowledge and skills they need for the 21st century. This toolkit helps teachers find specific strategies to increase learning and engagement in their classrooms; hands-on, practical approaches to instruction at the middle and high school levels; and tools to reflect on their practice and the structures of their schools. For more information, see www.dpi.wilgov/pubsales/index.html.

Striving Readers

is designed to raise the reading achievement levels of middle and high school-aged students in Title I-eligible schools with significant numbers of students reading below grade level. The program supports new comprehensive reading initiatives or expansion of existing initiatives that improve the quality of literacy instruction across the curriculum, provides intensive literacy interventions to struggling adolescent readers, and helps to build a strong, scientific research base for identifying and replicating strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills. For more information, please visit: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/index.html>

IDEA Discretionary Funding

The Responsive Education for All Children (REACH) initiative is a collaborative effort between the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Special Education Team and the Office of Educational Accountability (OEA). REACH is designed to help Wisconsin schools establish and sustain the capacity to make systemic improvement needed to reduce barriers to learning and enable all students to experience success, including students with disabilities. Using a research based framework, REACH provides a foundation for the use of IDEA Early Intervening Services fund and for implementation of the “response to intervention” (RTI) process. IDEA Discretionary, Title I and State Improvement Grant (SIG) funds have been used to establish regional collaborative technical assistance centers, award grants to high need districts, provide quality technical assistance and professional development to schools, and enhance family and community partnerships. For more information, see <http://dpi.wi.gov/reach>.

Read On Wisconsin

First Lady Jessica Doyle sponsors Read On Wisconsin, a statewide book club that encourages students to read and distributes books to Wisconsin schools.

Each month, the First Lady recommends a book for five different age groups—from preschool to high school. She also regularly sponsors Reading Days at the Executive Residence where local students are invited to read with the First Lady and walk away with a new book. For more information, please visit: <http://readon.wi.gov/>

In addition, the First Lady also leads the Community Connections initiative which recognizes programs that use volunteers to work with middle schools to enhance students’ academic skills, such as reading. For more information, please visit: <http://communityconnections.wi.gov>

Source: Jacqueline Karbon, Ph.D., Reading Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Footnotes

- ¹ Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform and NASSP Legislative Recommendations for High School Reform.
- ² Wisconsin Model Academic Standards Compared with ACT's Explore and ACT Assessment, September 9, 2003, ACT, inc.
- ³ Attachment A: Current State and Federal Literacy Programs.
- ⁴ GED Option #2 Frequently Asked Questions, Department of Public Instruction

Questions or Comments?

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