



## New school measurement plan deserves support

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Gov. Scott Walker and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers are busy showing what can be done when people think less about short-term political advantage and more about actual accomplishments. Their recently announced plan to revise school performance measures is a really good idea which deserves to be supported and developed.

What they have is an outline for replacing the No Child Left Behind Act, whose bendable standards, draconian penalties and unrealistic goals have been universally deplored. The new system would be ready by next spring. It would apply to any Wisconsin school receiving public money - voucher and charter schools included - and it would take into account many factors of performance including how students progress over time.

This is an intelligent proposal, especially as we enter an era when public resources for education are likely to be limited. And it may help us see our comfortable assumptions in a new way. Implementing a new Wisconsin performance system will require permission from the federal government, just as Wisconsin's welfare reform efforts did, but at the end of that process is the possibility of producing something useful-perhaps even a national model. But this requires that we eschew the easy path.

We cannot become lost in the old stereotypes that more money automatically produces better results or that teachers are solely responsible for lagging performance. Humans are more complicated. Dismal schools may reflect a community culture which does not value education and thus may require innovative and extensive efforts. A school with great math performance but poor reading performance may need only a reallocation of teacher resources. The emphasis must be on hard thinking to solve our education problem, not assigning blame.

So far the Walker-Evers proposal has generated only skepticism from Democrats. We urge them to join. They may be bruised after the recent charge of Republic elephants, but that's just politics. Those of us in the public prefer real improvements, and improvement will come only if everyone participates in shaping a good idea into a useable program.

One Democrat skeptic complained that the Walker-Evers idea won't work if schools do not have the resources to make changes. That is perfectly true, but it is also a future struggle. First we need a better system. Then we can deal with either finding more resources for schools or changing the allocation of resources we already have. Fighting about a possible future will only distract us from doing what needs to be done in the present.