

Section I

Wisconsin's Approach to Academic Standards

Purpose of the Document

The purpose of this document is to improve Career Readiness education for students and for communities. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has developed standards to assist Wisconsin educators and community members in understanding, developing, and implementing course offerings and curriculum in school districts across Wisconsin.

This publication provides a vision for student success and follows [The Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning \(2011\)](#). In brief, the principles are:

1. Every student has the right to learn.
2. Instruction must be rigorous and relevant.
3. Purposeful assessment drives instruction and affects learning.
4. Learning is a collaborative responsibility.
5. Students bring strengths and experiences to learning.
6. Responsive environments engage learners.

Program leaders will find these standards valuable for making decisions about:

- Program structure and integration
- Curriculum redesign
- Staffing and staff development
- Scheduling and student grouping
- Facility organization
- Learning spaces and materials development
- Resource allocation and accountability
- Collaborative work with other units of the school, district, and community

What Are Academic Standards?

Wisconsin Academic Standards specify what students should know and be able to do. They serve as goals for teaching and learning. Setting high standards enables students, parents, educators, and citizens to know what students should have learned at a given point in time. In Wisconsin, all state standards serve as a model. Locally elected school boards adopt academic standards in each subject area to best serve their local communities. We must ensure that all children have equal access to high-quality educational programs. Clear statements about what students must know and be able to do are essential in making sure our schools offer opportunities to get the knowledge and skills necessary for success beyond the classroom.

Adopting these standards is voluntary. Districts may use the academic standards as guides for developing local grade-by-grade-level curriculum. Implementing standards may require some school districts to upgrade school and district curricula. This may result in changes in instructional methods and materials, local assessments, and professional development opportunities for the teaching and administrative staff.

What is the Difference Between Academic Standards and Curriculum?

Standards are statements about what students should know and be able to do, what they might be asked to do to give evidence of learning, and how well they should be expected to know or do it. Curriculum is the program devised by local school districts to prepare students to meet standards. It consists of activities and lessons at each grade level, instructional materials, and various instructional techniques. In short, standards define what is to be learned at certain points in time, and from a broad perspective, what performances will be accepted as evidence that the learning has occurred. Curriculum specifies the details of the day-to-day schooling at the local level.

Developing the Academic Standards

DPI has a transparent and comprehensive process for reviewing and revising academic standards. The process begins with a notice of intent to review an academic area with a public comment period. The State Superintendent's Academic Standards Review Council examines those comments and may recommend revision or development of standards in that academic area. The state superintendent authorizes whether or not to pursue a revision or development process. Following this, a state writing committee is formed to work on those standards for all grade levels. That draft is then made available for open review to get feedback from the public, key stakeholders, educators, and the legislature with further review by the State Superintendent's Academic Standards Review Council. The state superintendent then determines adoption of the standards.

Aligning for Student Success

To build and sustain schools that support every student in achieving success, educators must work together with caregivers, community members, and business partners to connect the most promising practices in the most meaningful contexts. The release of the Wisconsin Standards for Career Readiness provides a set of important academic standards for school districts to implement. This is connected to a larger vision of engaged learners creating a better Wisconsin together. Academic standards work together with other critical principles and efforts to educate every child to be an engaged learner capable of creating a better Wisconsin together. Here, the vision and Guiding Principles form the foundation for building a supportive process for teaching and learning rigorous and relevant content. The following sections articulate this integrated approach to increasing student success in Wisconsin schools and communities.

Relating the Academic Standards to All Students

Academic standards should allow ALL students to engage, access, and be assessed in ways that fit their strengths, needs, and interests. This applies to students with individualized education plans (IEPs), English learners, and gifted and talented pupils, consistent with all other students. Academic standards serve as a foundation for individualized programming decisions for all students.

Academic standards serve as a valuable basis for establishing concrete, meaningful goals for each student's developmental progress and demonstration of proficiency. Students with IEPs must be provided specially designed instruction that meets their individual needs. It is expected that each individual student with an IEP will require unique services and supports matched to their strengths and needs in order to close achievement gaps in grade-level standards. Alternate standards are only available for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Gifted and talented students may achieve well beyond the academic standards and move into advanced grade levels or into advanced coursework.

Our Vision: Engaged Learners Creating a Better Wisconsin Together

We are committed to ensuring every child graduates from high school academically prepared and socially and emotionally competent. A successful Wisconsin student is proficient in academic content and can apply their knowledge through skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. The successful student will also possess critical habits such as perseverance, responsibility, adaptability, and leadership. This vision for every child as an engaged learner guides our beliefs and approaches to education and to creating a better Wisconsin together.

Guided by Principles

All educational initiatives are guided and impacted by important and often unstated attitudes or principles for teaching and learning. [The Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning \(2011\)](#) were drawn from research and provide the touchstone for practices that truly affect the vision of “Engaged learners creating a better Wisconsin together.” When made transparent, these principles inform what happens in the classroom, direct the implementation and evaluation of programs, and most importantly, remind us of our own beliefs and expectations for students.

Engaging Learners Through Career Readiness

When educators connect students’ learning to future career opportunities, they begin to engage students in a very personal and powerful way. In addition to career readiness as a strategy to engage learners, it is also a conduit through which every student in Wisconsin, including students with an IEP, can graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be successful in their chosen career pathway. Regardless of the postsecondary path that a graduate pursues immediately after their K-12 education, we believe in preparing all students to be lifelong learners and acknowledge that one’s education and career path are inextricably linked.

The Wisconsin Career Readiness Standards (WCRS) provide the framework for educators to integrate career-readiness skills across all content areas and at every grade level from K-12. Because people begin to develop interests and biases at an early age, it is important to start integrating WCRS in the elementary grades. By middle school, students may have already developed beliefs about their abilities related to careers. In addition, they may have formed stereotypes about which careers are appropriate for a particular gender, race, or socioeconomic background. Exposing students to careers and helping them develop skills related to careers when they are young is one way to keep students’ minds open to all possibilities.

Implementing the WCRS may look different for every teacher, every program, every course, and potentially every unit or lesson. These standards were designed to be naturally and intentionally integrated into other content standards.

Ensuring a Process for Student Success

For Wisconsin schools and districts, implementing the [Framework for Equitable Multi-Level Systems of Supports \(2017\)](#) means providing equitable services, practices, and resources to every learner based upon responsiveness to effective instruction and intervention. In this system, high-quality instruction, strategic use of data, and collaboration interact within a continuum of supports to facilitate learner success. Schools provide varying types of supports with differing levels of intensity to proactively

and responsibly adjust to the needs of the whole child. These include the knowledge, skills, and habits learners need for success beyond high school, including developmental, academic, behavioral, social, and emotional skills.

Connecting to Content: Wisconsin Academic Standards

Within this vision for increased student success, rigorous, internationally benchmarked academic standards provide the content for high-quality curriculum and instruction and for a strategic assessment system aligned to those standards. With the adoption of the standards, Wisconsin has the tools to design curriculum, instruction, and assessments to maximize student learning. The standards articulate what we teach so that educators can focus on how instruction can best meet the needs of each student. When implemented within an equitable multi-level system of supports, the standards can help to ensure that every child will graduate prepared for college and career.

