

Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity

in Career and Vocational Education

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction / Herbert J. Grover, State Superintendent



Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity in Career and Vocational Education



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Foreword

Education has many goals and objectives, among them to help make all young people aware of the opportunities and expectations that await them in the adult world. To ensure that all students become aware of these opportunities and expectations, schools need to provide students with unbiased education within an equitable environment. Limited opportunities and differential expectations created by sex bias and role stereotyping rob students of the freedom to choose and pursue an occupation that appeals to them and will allow them to support themselves and others. In addition, such bias and stereotyping produce counterproductive effects on the state's economy and quality of life.

Even though federal and state laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as a number of other characteristics, inequities still remain. The discrimination often is subtle and unintentional, rather than overt. However, the repercussions are still the same—the individual is shortchanged because of something over which he or she has no control.

Whether overt or subtle, intentional or unintentional, discrimination often can be overcome and remedied by providing students with the knowledge and understanding they need to survive and thrive in a changing world.

This is a skill that is needed with increasing urgency. The social and economic climate throughout the nation has changed greatly in the last 25 years. Roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both men and women are evolving at a rapid pace. Truly, many of us have encountered difficulty, frustration, and confusion in adjusting our expectations to accommodate these changes.

Young people increasingly feel the effects of these changes and search for ways to deal with them. Schools can help students adapt by providing an equitable learning environment. This climate would make all students equally aware of the career opportunities available to them and prepare them for the changing roles at home and in the workplace. High school students at grade 10 are now expected to select a postsecondary option and the courses and experiences leading to that option. Whether it is college preparation, technical preparation, or youth apprenticeship, the selected postsecondary option *must* provide an equitable experience for all our young people. However, school personnel often lack the information and skills they need to implement a program to create a truly equitable school environment.

This publication, the *Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity in Career and Vocational Education*, presents a model that provides school district administrators and staff members with the direction they need to develop and implement a career/vocational equity program. The model focuses on student competencies and school actions necessary to achieve equity. It is flexible and designed to accommodate local needs and conditions.

All of us want to see our children live full, happy, productive lives; let us provide them with the opportunities, knowledge, understanding, and self-confidence to allow them to do just that.

Herbert J. Grover
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Members of the Wisconsin Vocational Equity Leadership Cadre

To contact current members of the cadre, call the cooperative educational service agency (CESA) in your area.

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Introduction

The *Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity in Career and Vocational Education* was designed to create a more planned, visible, and systematic approach to achieving sex equity in local schools. The original project goal in July 1985 was to develop new and more contemporary equity assessment tools to assist local schools plan for and address equity in vocational education programs. To understand how the project grew into the development and implementation of a statewide model, it is helpful to know how the very young field of sex equity has evolved.

History

The quest for educational equity has been driven primarily by federal legislation and federal funding. Although many states have passed pupil nondiscrimination statutes, few have provided funding for achieving equity throughout the entire educational system.

The goals, rationale, and methods that sex-equity specialists and other educators use have been developed and have *evolved* during the past 15 to 20 years. As understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of equity issues grew, goals and methods to achieve equity became more sophisticated (see Figure 1).

■ Figure 1

| Evolution of Equity Goals | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Period of Original Appearance | Goals of Equity | Rationale for Equity |
| Mid-1960s to mid-1970s | Equal opportunity, access, and treatment (eliminate discrimination) | Fairness |
| Mid-1970s and on | Move beyond equal access. Eliminate stereotyping, bias, and harassment (need for intervention, affirmative steps, and infusion of equity). | Changing social and economic conditions. Social costs of inequity. |
| Mid-1980s and on | Equal outcomes of educational programs (need to restructure schools and the curriculum, methods and support services that students need to succeed) | Educational excellence |

Focus of Early Sex-Equity Efforts

From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, the two main ways to achieve sex equity were to comply with the letter of the civil rights laws and to conduct inservice workshops and conferences for teaching staff and school administrators. Occasionally, a program to serve specific groups of students—usually female—was used as a sex-equity strategy.

However, most activities were designed for educators. These equity activities were very short term in nature; most lasted only a few hours. The activities often focused on administrative procedures or encouraged educators to address sex-role stereotyping, bias, and discrimination in their schools. While these activities probably helped increase educators' awareness and sensitivity to sex-equity issues, such efforts failed to provide educators with the skills and knowledge they needed to bring about change.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, passed in 1984, provided a 3.5 percent set-aside within the basic state grant for sex-equity purposes. This resource represented the first multiyear appropriation for sex equity and allowed educators to think beyond initial goals and methods to achieve sex equity.

The Purpose of the Wisconsin Project

In 1985, after reviewing the literature and existing resources, the authors determined that no single resource provided a comprehensive set of tools, information, and procedures to allow local educators to establish a sex-equity program. However, such a resource was needed because of the lack of *trained* staff responsible for equity at the university, regional, and local district levels.

In addition, we recognized that even though achieving sex equity was a large task, very little money was available for equity activities. Thus, the authors decided it would be advantageous to make equity connections with other educational programs, activities, and issues.

Desired Outcomes for the Wisconsin Project

Several principles and desired outcomes guided the authors in developing the Wisconsin Model, including

- moving away from one-time, short-term activities toward a more planned, visible, systematic approach to sex equity;
- shifting away from equity needs assessment based on attitudinal surveys or knowledge of the civil rights laws by adults toward expanding the focus of equity awareness and knowledge to include students as well as educators;
- going from the negative approach of “what is wrong” and “what can’t be done” toward a more positive approach of identifying specifically what is needed and desired and how equity can be achieved;
- moving away from the legal rationale for equity activities toward embracing a rationale for sex equity based on educational excellence contributing to the overall improvement of educational achievement;
- building commitment to and understanding for equity through assessment and analysis of *local* information and data rather than state or national data that may seem far removed from the particular school or district;
- clarifying a more sophisticated understanding of equity issues and methods by creating a distinction between the terms “strategy” and “activity” as well as between “beginning” and more “advanced” strategies and activities that are developmental in nature;

- shifting away from “paper compliance” with the laws and enrollment trend measures toward establishing more diverse or new measures of success to assess student and staff equity knowledge and skills; and
- providing analysis criteria or benchmarks to help local educators determine how their local school or district compares to research findings on male/female differences and to state and national data trends as well as to assist them in ascertaining and prioritizing their equity goals.

How Is the Wisconsin Model Unique?

The Wisconsin Model differs from other equity resources in several ways. The model

- is a comprehensive equity program designed to be used at the local level;
- provides educators with the tools and resources they need to implement a local sex-equity program;
- incorporates the use of student equity competencies and focuses on the achievement of equity by students as well as through school actions and personnel;
- allows comparison between student and staff survey data, which often reveals a difference in understanding between the two groups and, in turn, helps educators identify the equity knowledge and skills that need more attention;
- provides analysis guide sheets that establish benchmarks and standards to help local educators interpret assessment findings and information;
- organizes equity activities around seven major strategy areas and provides possible equity actions through advice, ideas, and examples; and
- has been pilot tested, and student and staff surveys have been reviewed and validated by the University of Wisconsin-Extension’s Survey Research Laboratory.

Limitations of the Model

While the Wisconsin Model is innovative in its approach, it has a few limitations and shortcomings. For instance, the model fails to encompass all equity concerns, such as race or handicapping conditions. The authors knew that developing a model that addressed all equity areas would contribute greatly to educational equity. However, given the project’s funding and the prodigious task of developing a model for comprehensive equity, they elected early in the project to focus on sex equity.

In addition, the model lacks a balanced K-12 focus. Even though portions of the model are applicable to the elementary grades, such as some student surveys, it concentrates on the middle/junior high and high school grades. However, while the model emphasizes career and vocational education, it includes other disciplines, especially those that serve as critical filters. Finally, the equity competencies presented in the model are not all-inclusive; educators should feel free to adapt or expand the competencies to fit their district’s needs. The competencies have not been validated in any way nor have curriculum activities been developed to meet all the competencies.

Implementing the Wisconsin Model

To prepare for the task of implementing the Wisconsin Model in local school districts, the state Department of Public Instruction formed, supported, and utilized the Wisconsin Vocational Equity Leadership Cadre, a group of about 60 people from Wisconsin’s 12 cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs) and several school districts. The cadre receives six to eight days of training and supportive meeting time each year.

As of September 1992, 150 of Wisconsin's 427 school districts are participating to some degree in the Wisconsin Model's equity program. It is anticipated that by the conclusion of the 1993-94 school year, all districts accessing funds from the Carl D. Perkins Title IIC monies will adopt the program.

The *Wisconsin Model for Sex Equity in Career and Vocational Education* was designed to be used in school districts throughout the United States. Suggestions for improving the model and comments on how it is being used are encouraged and appreciated. Contact Barbara Schuler at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, (608) 267-9170, or write the DPI at P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841; or Linda Riley, Project Director, Gender Equity Leadership Project, Center for Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education, University of Wisconsin-Stout, 225C Applied Arts Building, Menomonie, WI 54751, (715) 232-1885.