

# Information for Parents on Title I Focus Schools

Wisconsin has raised expectations for all students to ensure they graduate high school ready for college and career. This means that schools need to understand which students perform well, which students need additional support, and what school staff can and must do to meet the needs of all students. In order to improve student outcomes across the state, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) must identify which schools need additional support to ensure that **all** students within the school and across the state meet these new, higher standards.

Therefore, Wisconsin is one of approximately 40 states to develop a new plan to hold schools accountable for student achievement and identify which schools demonstrate a need for intensive support. As part of the plan, the state must identify a new category of Title I schools—Title I Focus Schools.

## ***What is a Title I School?***

The federal government provides funds to states to distribute to schools and districts with high numbers or high percentages of socioeconomically disadvantaged children in order to support services which improve student and school outcomes. Title I funds ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and graduate college and career ready.

## ***What is a Title I Focus School?***

The state has identified ten percent of Title I schools statewide which would benefit from additional training, professional development, and resources designed to improve student outcomes for a portion of their student population. The state identified Focus Schools based on:

- the performance of student subgroups on state math or reading tests or graduation rates compared to student subgroups statewide.
- OR if the school has large achievement gaps among its own student subgroups in math, reading, or graduation rates.

DPI will identify a new group of Title I Focus Schools once every four years, giving school staff time to implement new practices and improve student outcomes.

## ***Does being named a Focus School mean my child's school is failing?***

Being named a Focus School does not mean that the school is performing poorly school-wide. It does mean that the school must focus on, or devote time and effort to, supporting subgroups of students. The subgroups of students may not be performing as well as other students in the school or in the state. Focus Schools may also have high rates of students who graduate and who do well on state math and reading tests. The goal is for Title I Focus Schools to establish building-wide systems of support that help **all** students achieve.

## ***What will school staff do to improve the performance of all students?***

Title I Focus Schools will be asked to take immediate steps to provide all students with high-quality instruction matched to their academic, social, and behavioral needs. These reforms, called Response to Intervention (RtI), have proven successful in many Wisconsin schools. RtI is an effort to measure how well students are doing in math, reading, and behavior, and to provide additional instruction, or interventions, to students who need help, based on their individual needs. RtI is not a program, a

curriculum, or a new way to sort or categorize children. The school may ask families to help develop learning goals and plans for their child.

### ***How will the state help our school improve?***

DPI is committed to providing unprecedented levels of support to help Title I Focus Schools identify areas needing improvement, train staff to make the improvements, and track the progress of student subgroups. Your child's school will partner with the Wisconsin RtI Center to develop a plan to improve student achievement. DPI will begin providing training to Focus School staff during the fall of 2012, and your school will begin reporting student achievement progress in the 2012-13 school year.

### ***How long will schools have a Focus School designation?***

A school will remain a Focus School throughout the four year cohort unless the school meets the exit criteria prior to the end of the four years. If a school has not met the exit criteria at the end of four years, the school will receive greater state assistance. In order to meet the exit criteria, schools must demonstrate that they are on a trajectory to meet their new Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) within six years.

### ***What can parents do?***

- **Encourage your child's learning.** Sign on to your school's online portal and frequently check your child's grades, homework assignments, and attendance. Recent state test scores for your child may also be listed. Limit your child's daily screen time and encourage your child to read and to participate in school groups and activities.
- **Support your child's school.** Ask your school principal how parents can help the school improve. Attend school events such as family learning nights with your child. Volunteer to help at school events or to work one-on-one with children to improve their skills. Join your school's parent group to learn more about school programs and family/community efforts that make the school a better place for all students.
- **Keep in touch with your child's teachers.** Attend parent-teacher conferences, email or phone teachers with your questions and concerns, and make it a point to let teachers know your child's learning strengths and needs. The positive relationship you establish with teachers will let your child know that both adults at home and at school are focused on their learning success.
- **Keep learning.** Let the principal know if you, or parents you know, need help speaking or reading English. Many schools offer resources to help parents improve job skills and computer literacy, earn a high school equivalency diploma, or take college classes. Send a profound message to your child about the importance of learning by continuing to learn yourself.

## ***Message from the Principal:***

Dear Parents,

**(Name of school)** has been named a Title I Focus School. Our staff is working hard to close the achievement gaps in our school and to ensure that all students meet high expectations for learning. While most students are performing well academically, some students may need extra help to be successful learners. Highlights of our plan to help all children succeed include:

- **(List several steps the school and staff are taking to learn new practices, implement practices at the school and classroom levels, and to work with the RtI Center and DPI.)**

We pledge to continue to share information with you as it becomes available about student performance on state tests, the steps our school is taking to improve, and opportunities for parent involvement. We ask for your continued support and involvement in our school and in your child's learning.

Please feel free to contact me or your child's teacher if you have any questions or concerns about his/her progress or about how to help your child be a successful learner. Thank you.

Sincerely,

**(Name of Principal)**