

Information for School Boards 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 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.

How often will the state identify new Title I Focus Schools?

DPI will identify a new group of Title I Focus Schools once every four years—new schools will not be identified during this time. The state recognizes significant instructional change takes time and has committed to giving school staff the time necessary to implement new practices and improve student outcomes. After four years, schools will either exit the Focus Schools list by improving or will receive greater state assistance.

Why will the state not identify new schools during the four years?

The state has committed to providing unprecedented levels of support to identified schools. In order to ensure the level of support to these schools does not diminish, the state will not continue identifying new schools each year. Additionally, the state will use the four years committed to these Focus Schools to identify best practices and determine which Focus Schools can serve as models to neighboring schools facing similar challenges in the future.

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. 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.

Does being named a Title I Focus School mean that a school is failing?

Being named a Title I Focus School does not mean that the school is performing poorly school-wide. Focus Schools may have high rates of students who graduate and who do well on state math and reading tests. 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. The goal is for Title I Focus Schools to establish building-wide systems of support that help **all** students achieve, and the state has committed to supporting schools in this process.

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

Title I Focus Schools will be asked to immediately take 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.

Specifically, school staff may be asked to implement some of the following measures, focusing on efforts that improve reading and math scores and graduation:

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Collaborative staff planning time
- Core instruction and intervention
- Professional development, and
- Early warning systems.

How will the state help our schools improve?

DPI is committed to providing unprecedented levels of support to help Title I Focus Schools identify areas needing improvement. Each Focus School will partner with the Wisconsin RtI Center to develop a plan to improve student achievement. DPI will begin training Focus School staff to implement RtI during the fall of 2012, and schools will begin reporting student achievement progress in the 2012-13 school year.

Specifically, DPI will help Focus Schools:

- Assess where improvements need to be made in the school
- Train staff to immediately address and strengthen those areas
- Provide technical assistance and coaching regarding the implementation process, and
- Use a new online planning tool to monitor and report on student progress.

How will schools pay for these interventions?

Pending the U.S. Department of Education's approval of Wisconsin's waiver application, districts with one or more Focus Schools will have more flexibility in how they use federal education funds to support implementation of required reforms beginning in 2012-13. This flexibility includes:

- The option to transfer up to 100 percent of the district's Title II funds into Title I;
- The option to reserve up to 20 percent of the district's Title I allocation to support Focus School(s); and
- The option to convert the Focus School's Title I program to a schoolwide program, even if the school's poverty rate is under 40 percent.

School districts must determine how to use their Title funds efficiently and effectively to support Focus Schools, as well as other Title I schools in the district. Unlike the sanctions required of schools in NCLB, the waiver request *does not* include any fiscal requirements (such as the flexibilities noted above) or set-asides to support specific interventions.

For more information, please contact your district administrator.