

Welcome

The meeting began with Kurt Kiefer welcoming everyone and describing DPI's goals for the SLDS, emphasizing that the system has increased capability to inform research.

The Wisconsin Idea philosophically guides research efforts at DPI. The work should be translational—how do we transform the results of research into tools and interventions that can be used by teachers to improve their practice and help their students learn? DPI needs to know what practitioners need. It is imperative that the voice of practitioners is consistently represented as WERAC moves forward.

Logistics

Members were asked to complete the required Advisory Committee forms and, if needed, expense reimbursement forms.

Meeting minutes will be created, circulated to members for comment, and then posted to the DPI research webpage (currently under development). In addition, a Google Drive folder will be created and will serve as a central location for meeting materials.

Research at DPI

Currently, research at DPI primarily serves two purposes: 1) supporting policy positions/decisions, and 2) creating data tools to help practitioners focus their attention efficiently (“Help teachers find the needle in the haystack by making the haystack smaller”). DPI's Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) is an example of a tool created for this purpose.

Much of the research at DPI is reactive—driven as a response to a specific question or identified problem. To some extent, this is appropriate. However, there is a desire to move towards more proactive research and this is a major reason why WERAC was formed.

DPI's internal capacity for research was described. There are three (3) full-time research analysts on the Policy and Budget team (responsible for carrying out DPI's research agenda) plus a handful of others who are scattered throughout the agency. The majority of their work consists of rapid-response descriptive analyses and technical calculations. The goal for research at DPI is not to focus on basic research like other institutions in Wisconsin. The goal is to create partnerships to harness the power of research to solve real-world problems of practice and policy.

Karen Wendorf-Heldt commented that, from the CESA's perspective, a lot is known about what works in education. The difficulty is getting practice to reflect what is known from the research. How do we close the “knowing-doing gap”?

WISEdash has given practitioners ample evidence. However, practitioners are not receiving enough advice on the practices that move the data. DPI envisions the WISE suite will move towards this capability.

WERAC Reconstitution

The successes of the previous iteration of WERAC were discussed as well as the rationale for the reconstitution and what lessons were learned from the previous that will be applied to the workings of the new WERAC. Members of the previous committee commented that the charge of the previous group was not well-defined and/or communicated. This may have been related to the absence of an articulated DPI research agenda on which to focus the activities and advice. There also did not seem to be a strong connection to practice and how practice can inform the research that will be conducted. In addition, as time went on, the group became less focused on providing advice.

The structure of the work moving forward may continue to be full-group meetings or smaller, ad-hoc groups dedicated to a particular idea. Some activities/meetings may occur online. It will be important not to lose the practitioner voice within these breakout groups.

The group discussed how WERAC membership could be professionally rewarding for them:

- Advice that the committee provides should be translated into meaningful change.
- Ideas should be followed up on with an eye towards mobilizing the resources needed to follow through (e.g., grant writing help; funding to support research assistants; streamlined data request process, partners identified for grant submissions).
- A future discussion on what districts in WI are evaluating now and what they would like to evaluate in the near and mid-future.
- Focusing on how to disseminate results to multiple audiences

With regards to the second bullet, DPI is moving toward CEDS as a way to [quicken] the data request process. Under this system, the set of available data points will be widely available. It will also help connect research efforts within the state and across states.

Who produces knowledge? This is an existential question that will remain pertinent throughout the course of WERAC. Another key issue to consider is the type(s) of dissemination to focus on. When research projects are identified, these issues should inform study design.

Wisconsin's Landscape of Applied Education Research

Several organizations/initiatives were described as [mechanisms] for research and connection-building: DPI's current SLDS grant and WISE ecosystem, The Network, the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC), REL Midwest and the Midwest Achievement Gap Research Alliance, and the Madison Education Partnership.

The group broke-out to discuss how research currently gets applied in Wisconsin. An empty network map was used to facilitate the conversation.

How research is defined was seen as a barrier to incorporating research results into practice. Research (capital R) is often assumed to be of more value than research (lower-case) and this contributes to the knowing/doing gap. Therefore, WERAC should be careful not to also make this assumption.

Districts have diverse needs for information. There's so much out there, how do you find the most important stuff. There is also a need to distill research so people have just what they need at the point of need. Another important consideration--who can people call when they need help with research? Translational research and information sharing only works if practitioners know how to reach out to researchers, and vice versa.

The breakdown in the knowing-doing cycle appears to occur in the component related to coaching and feedback. This is a fundamental problem. Is it primarily a funding problem? What do you do if there is no space in the school to implement research-based practice?

Things that REL Midwest works on with other states (along with Research in general) often need to be "sold" here in Wisconsin. In other words, they need to be "Wisconsinized" in order to get adopted here.

Moving forward, it is important to keep in mind activities and projects housed at other state agencies (e.g., DHS, DCF). These are opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, doing so will limit duplication of efforts.

It is important that practitioners, and the organizations that work closely with them (the various professional organizations), know how to reach out and to whom when they have a need.

To this end, it was suggested that WERAC attend WASDA? state education meetings (or similar) to publicize the research agenda, etc, to begin to get practitioner input and facilitate some of these connections to WERAC itself, but more importantly to the various initiatives that may help directly.

How do you distill research results into the big ideas and important connections? How do you provide these results at the point of need? Research articles will not succeed at this. Even if teachers have access to academic journals, they don't have the time to read them and articles will likely not contain explicit practical advice.

Relationships among stakeholders vary depending on context and project scope. Establishing relationships is critical to ensuring practitioners are supported. Need to [ensure] clarify who/what is the authoritative source when assistance is needed in any given area.

(On the network map activity) There should be a node representing the state's teacher preparation programs (TPPs). TPPs equip future teachers with research-based practices and therefore, would be a valuable partner in WERAC efforts.

DPI's Research Agenda

The group was provided a handout with the broad topical research areas that will form the basis of an equity-focused 2017 DPI Research Agenda. One goal for WERAC is to refine and operationalize these areas so that they are actionable. It was emphasized to the group that equity is the number one priority for DPI, and for the DPI research agenda.

In addition to creating specific research questions, we should look towards creating communities of practice around research questions—inventorying needs, inventorying who can help (along with other resources), and matching the two. We should also work to create communication plans.

The group broke-out according to which research area was of most interest to them.

Contextual Data for Equity Gaps

To answer many questions related to context, we will need to bring in data from different sources, sources external to DPI. The Institute for Research in Poverty (IRP) can help with this. For example, currently IRP links administrative data to in-home field data gathered through a process of random selection.

Community indicators may be gathered and presented. How to best communicate these data is a critical consideration as is the communication that must occur after people look at their data. This links directly to our goal for translational research. How can educators deal with the social and cultural dynamics impacting their students and schools?

There are those who feel we should be collecting less data, not more—an attitude that may hinder efforts to study contextual factors. Data privacy is also a likely concern.

Analyzing New, ESSA-required Data Reports

No members represented this topic.

Equity in Access to Advanced Courses, Well-rounded Curriculum, and Current Technology

There is a need to define and operationalize key terms in this topic (e.g., well-rounded). What resource-related questions can be answered around these definitions? Also, who will work on them?

A catalogue of what DPI currently knows about this area and the data available to answer questions would be useful.

Currently, DPI is getting good transcript-type data into their system. It has been a process and the quality of the coursework data has changed over time (getting increasingly better each collection year).

In the future, grades may be included in the coursework data. It may or may not be possible to add grades to last year's data. We need to be cautious of using grades because how grades are derived/defined is relative.

Answering questions in this area is likely to require people with expertise in data mining/machine learning. The University of Wisconsin-Madison has a big data-focused internship program, LUCID (<https://lucid.wisc.edu/>), that could serve as a source of expertise.

Equal Opportunity Schools (<http://eoschools.org/>) was provided as an example of work that is currently being done.

Consider issues of placement. Are they related to testing? Teacher-student mismatch for students of color?

How are inequities being constructed? Do unconscious biases play a role? If so, what are they?

Resource Equity

Do current definitions of teacher quality adequately cover how well a teacher adapts to changing circumstances?

One resource identified as currently lacking is advisement from the state university system on college and career readiness. It would be helpful if representatives from universities and tech schools were more connected and shared attributes of successful students with interested districts/high schools. In turn, these attributes should be incorporated into definitions of college readiness.

Can DPI function as a clearinghouse for best practices related to equitable access to resources and culturally-responsive practices? If so, we need to connect practitioners to this resource. There is also a need to connect practitioners to each other. "Who can I learn from their mistakes?"

There is a critical need to support implementation. Understanding the extent to which an identified best practice can be generalized across contexts is critical and practitioners need to be supported in their efforts to adapt. Why is an identified best practice working in District X? "What pieces of what Waukesha is doing can I use in my school?" For implementation, it is crucial that victories and challenges are obvious--how do we make them more apparent?

Data tools should help practitioners identify issues. Provide the specific dashboards that are likely to illustrate a problem so they can be used as a self-analysis tool. Functionality in WISEdash for three-year trend analyses would be helpful.

College Readiness: Remediation

The group identified several possible questions:

What are the differences between students who require remediation and those who do not?

What does remediation look like across the state? How are students placed in remediation?

How can we get institutions of higher-education and preK-12 together to inform each other?

How do we intervene? What can districts do earlier in order to change the trajectory of these kids? Can an early warning system be created? DPI is currently working on the Coursework Completion Early Warning System.

Between DPI and UW-Madison, all the raw materials (i.e., data and expertise) needed to inform these questions are available. Therefore, this area was identified as one where DPI could score an “easy win or two.”

Overall, the group was asked to identify any areas that they felt were not adequately represented by the five topics. Early childhood was identified. Although early childhood could be seen as a contextual factor, the group thought it would be most appropriate for issues of early childhood education to be its own topic area. In addition, social-emotional and mental health should be a focus of the research agenda. DPI is very supportive of researching these topics.

Planning

DPI will come up with some ideas for protocol to determine what gets done and what will be used as evidence that things that are identified by the group are being acted on. These will be presented to the group. DPI’s movement towards CEDS will inform these protocols. Concrete evidence (grant submissions, funding received) would be helpful. As will evidence that DPI policy is informed by knowledge generated by the research.

Moving forward, we will need to maintain a tight connection with the Network. We also need the practitioners in the group to continue to provide their voice. In addition, we need to encourage participation in the process by researchers not on WERAC. Increasing the visibility of DPI’s research agenda will help with this, especially if it is coupled with an easier path to data acquisition for projects aligned to the agenda. Ensuring researchers know exactly what data are available will also help.

DPI action based on the research. Following what the research says. Seeing stuff happen policy-wise based on what the research suggests. Having districts implement research-based approaches and having DPI monitor the progress.

We should work to determine overlap and alignment between our research agenda and the agendas of the other state agencies and organizations. As a process, we will look for funding opportunities for identified projects.

Presenting on WERAC (and reporting out activities) at the annual CESA conference presentation was identified as a way we can increase visibility and be held accountable.

Currently the group is heavily represented by UW-Madison. We should examine what research is happening at the other IHE in the state—they are likely conducting research salient to the schools that surround them. WERAC should look for opportunities to collaborate with these researchers. In addition, we should ask each CESA what activities they have engaged their regional IHE partners.

Moving forward, WERAC will likely meet twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. We are open to other ideas. Ad-hoc groups to achieve certain tasks may develop.