

# Wisconsin Educational Research Advisory Council (WERAC)

August 8, 2023



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF  
**Public Instruction**  
Jill K. Underly, PhD, State Superintendent

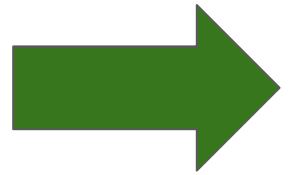
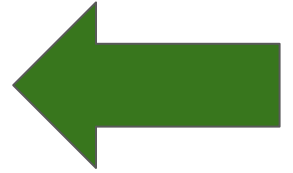
# Member Updates and Check-in

- **Name, pronouns, organization(s) you represent today**
- **What is your relationship with education in Wisconsin?**



# Objectives for Today

1. **Past:** Review the history of WERAC
2. **Present:** Update on current state of WERAC and research at/with DPI
3. **Future:** Provide ideas and feedback about the future direction and structure of WERAC





# History of WERAC



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***Mission: To establish a statewide research agenda for critically important PK-20 educational issues; foster collaboration among stakeholders involved in research; and aid the broad dissemination of research results.***

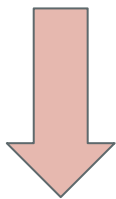
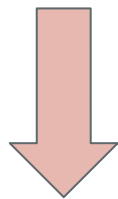
# Recent Meeting Topics

- March 23, 2021 Virtual Meeting
  - Equity Indicator System
  - Focus: Convenings, Rapid Response Research and Research Briefs
  - Positioning Research & Evaluation for Next State Superintendent and Planning for Fall
- April 19, 2019
  - Updated Data Inquiry Journal Overview (DIJ At-a-Glance and DIJ Overview)
  - SLDS: Sustainability
  - Research Agenda 2020-2021

# WERAC and REP Group

Research Evaluation  
Partnership (REP)  
Group

Wisconsin Education  
Research Advisory  
Council (WERAC)



WERAC 2.0?

*“I keep showing up to REP group meetings because it’s a group of smart people doing good work, trying to understand how our work can best be used by practitioners. I like staying connected through this group.”*

# WERAC and Research at DPI Now



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# 2023-2024 Research Agenda

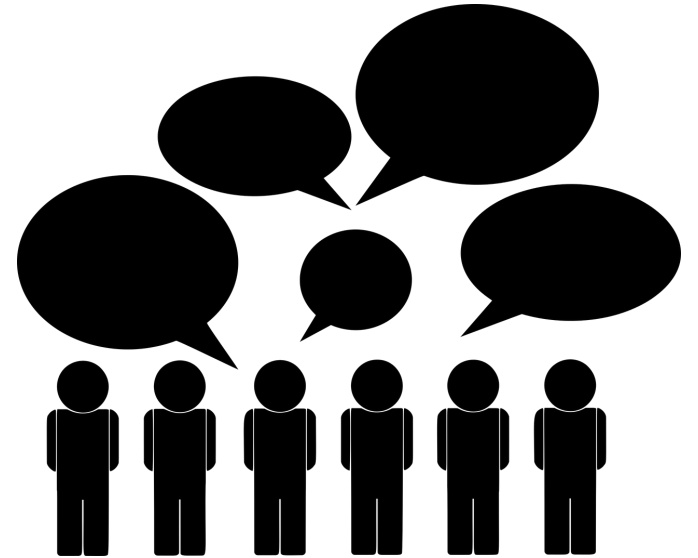
- **Understanding the impact of COVID-19**
  - Shifts in enrollment with a focus on virtual schooling
  - Overcoming interrupted learning
  - Addressing students' physical and mental health
- **Rethinking how we organize schooling**
  - Scaling up promising practices
  - Sustainable and equitable school funding
  - Helping districts, including rural districts, with declining enrollment
- **Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce**
  - Documenting shortages and diversity through the teacher pipeline
  - Identify solutions to recruit and retain high quality, diverse educators

# 2023-2024 Research Agenda continued

- **Navigating Educational Transitions**
  - Illuminate the landscape of early education
  - Easing the transition to Kindergarten
  - Outcomes for Career and technical education (CTE) and dual enrollment students
  - Postsecondary education outcomes
- **Advancing Educational Equity**
  - Develop metrics for educational equity
  - Develop a better understanding of how interactions between public education and other social institutions influence educational equity

# Discussion: Current Research Agenda

- What work is currently being done in these areas?
- Are these topic areas still salient to researchers/K-12 educators?



## Discussion Notes - Current Work

- Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) is studying the impact of LEAs losing emergency funding during COVID-19. There is also a lot of work being done in the early childhood space.
- Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) is involved in several projects related to workforce supply and demand.

# Discussion Notes - Continued Relevance

- Understanding the impact of COVID-19 may be outdated at this point; a lot of work has already been done.
- Student mental health is critically important and could be a separate category.
- Documenting and monitoring educator shortages and diversity is also critically important right now.

# Research Landscape at DPI

- Partnership and collaboration are critical to DPI's research efforts
- Significant data and analytic capacity; Less capacity for internal research projects.
  - Difficult for Research Analysts to prioritize the research agenda.
  - Few funding sources with research as a priority.
    - SLDS ending



# The Future of WERAC and Research at DPI

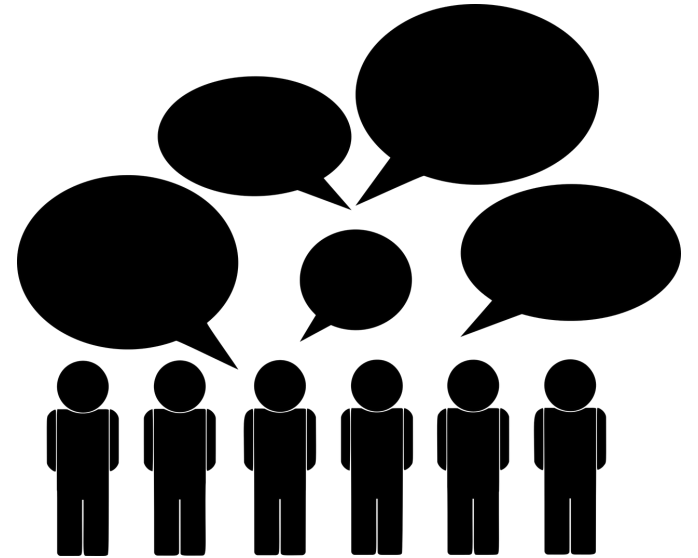


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# Discussion: Improving Capacity for Research

Strengthening and growing  
partnerships with external  
research teams

Grant writing





# Discussion - Building Partnerships

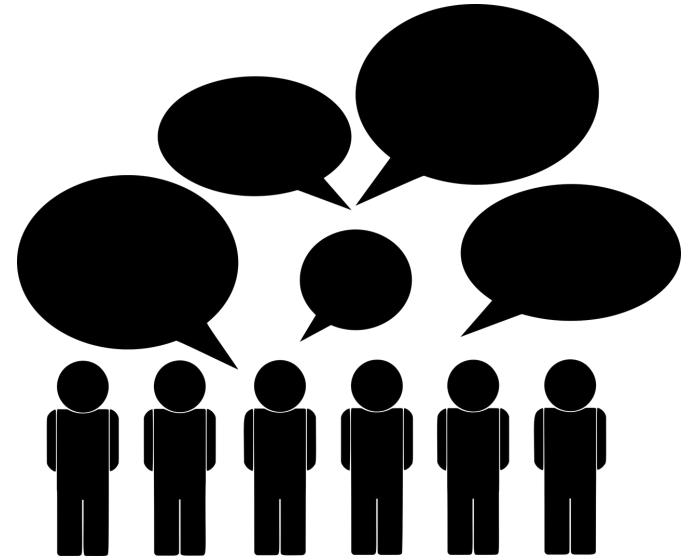
- It would be helpful to have regularly scheduled discussions with research staff and DPI leadership about agency priorities and funding opportunities.
- There should be more opportunities to share learning (e.g., brown bags).
- How can DPI reliably get information about what is important to LEAs without adding another burden to them?
  - Are there existing channels (e.g., monitoring visits)?
- Norms around information sharing need to be conducive to addressing complex questions.

# Discussion - Capacity Building

- An advisory group could be created to support capacity and connections/networks but not necessarily conduct research themselves.
- Rather than focus on producing research, it may make more sense for DPI to work with external researchers to organize, distill and share results in an actionable format with districts and educators.
- Work with multistate groups - other states have similar questions and results from neighboring states may generalize to Wisconsin well.
- Grant opportunities require quick mobilization and quite a bit of staff time. Universities have experienced grant writers in soft money positions available to assist with application development - DPI could explore whether something similar is possible to support applications within the agency.

# Discussion: Research Advisory Structure at DPI (ie WERAC 2.0)

- Objectives
- Structure
- Membership
  - Within DPI
  - External partners



# Discussion - WERAC

- The group could regularly advise on research agenda topics - which have an existing evidence base and which do not? Within topics, what areas need more evidence and what are some remaining questions to answer?
- If the goal of the group is to identify research topics and help secure funding, a theory of action should be developed to guide the work.
- Future WERAC membership should also include:
  - Practicing teachers/principals
  - At least one non-UW System researcher
  - Representative from other state/local agencies that interact with families

# Close-out and Next Steps



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