

Information for School Boards on Title I Priority Schools

Wisconsin is raising expectations for schools to ensure that all students are ready for college or a career when they graduate from high school. This means schools need to understand which students are performing well, which students need extra support, and what school staff can do to close the achievement gaps.

Wisconsin is one of approximately 40 states to develop a new plan to hold schools accountable for student achievement. As part of the plan, the state must identify Title I schools that demonstrate a need for additional support to ensure that all students meet high standards.

What is a Title I Priority School?

A school is named a Priority School if its level of student achievement on statewide standardized tests (currently, WKCE and WSAS) in reading and math falls within the lowest performing five percent of Title I schools for the past three years. Being named a Priority School allows the state to devote more resources and support to improve student achievement in the school. Only schools that receive Title I funds are eligible to become Priority schools.

How long will a school remain in Priority status?

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will identify a new group of Title I Priority Schools once every four years, giving school staff time to implement new practices and improve student achievement. After four years, schools will either exit the Priority Schools list by improving or will receive greater state assistance. Schools may exit priority status prior to the end of the four years if data demonstrates the school is on a trajectory to meet its AMOs within six years.

What must Priority Schools do to improve?

Priority Schools will be asked to take immediate steps to improve achievement for all students now and to continue making reforms over the next four years. First, the school will contract with a state-approved Turnaround Partner to implement whole school reform that results in improved student achievement in reading and math.

The state will approve a list of available Turnaround Partners which demonstrate proven educational expertise and an ability to help schools improve. Districts must hire a partner from this list. The partner will conduct an intensive review of school practices, identify the school's strengths and weaknesses, and then require the school to make changes based on these findings.

Based on the review, the Turnaround Partner will help your school develop a reform plan. The plan must include how the school will provide:

- **Response to Intervention (RtI)**, or how school staff will work together to meet the academic and behavioral needs of students
- **Extended Learning Time**, or how the school will add at least 300 hours of instruction for all students, including before or after-school learning and extending the school year or day

- **Highly Skilled Educators and Leaders**, or how the school will provide continuous professional development for teachers and principals to lead change
- **Positive and Safe Learning Environments**, or how the school will allow pupil services staff (school nurses, psychologists, social workers, and guidance counselors) time to help all students
- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**, or how the school will help all students succeed academically and
- **Family Engagement**, or how the school will invite families to help children learn and progress.

How will schools pay for these interventions?

Priority schools will be eligible to apply for grants from DPI to work with their selected Turnaround Partner. DPI is in the process of determining grant procedures and amounts and more information will be available over the summer.

In addition, 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 effectively and efficiently to support priority Schools, as well as other Title I schools in the district. Unlike the sanctions required of schools in the No Child Left Behind Act, the waiver request *does not* require a 20% set-aside to support the interventions.