

Equity in ESSA Stakeholder Council: Summary Report

October 2017

Deb Gurke, PhD
Nara Nayar

MIDWEST Comprehensive Center

at American Institutes for Research ■

10 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60606-5500
312-288-7600
www.midwest-cc.org

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Equity in ESSA Stakeholder Council Members

Chair

Tony Evers, State Superintendent

Council Members

Michael Anton, President
Wisconsin PTA

John Ashley, Executive Director
Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB)

Jon Bales, Executive Director
Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA)

Jim Bender, President
School Choice Wisconsin (SCW)

Salvador Carranza, Senior Academic Planner
University of Wisconsin System
Latino Education Council of Dane County (Chair and Co-founder)

Kathleen Cullen, Provost and Vice President
Wisconsin Technical College System

Darrienne Driver, Superintendent
Milwaukee Public Schools
Council of Great City Schools (Chair)

Heather DuBois Bourenane, Executive Director
Wisconsin Public Education Network (WPEN)

Fran Finco, President
Wisconsin Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (WASCD)

Sally Flaschberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist
Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW)

Eve Hall, President
Milwaukee Urban League

Jesse Harness, Commissioner
CESA Statewide Network

Mike Haynes, Administrator
Cooperative Educational Service Agency 10

Chris Her-Xiong, Principal
Hmong American Peace Academy, Milwaukee

Ralph Hollmon, President (exited Council after January meeting)
Milwaukee Urban League

Frank Humphrey, President
Wisconsin NAACP, Madison

Brian Jackson, President
Wisconsin Indian Education Association (WIEA)

John Jacobs, Director
Wisconsin eSchool Network (WEN)

Brian Juchems, Senior Director of Education and Policy
Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools, GSAFE

Kim Kohlhaas, President
Wisconsin Federation of Teachers (AFT-Wisconsin)

Stephen Kolison, Associate Vice President for Academic Programs and Educational Innovation
(exited Council after February meeting)
University of Wisconsin System

Jim Lynch, Executive Director
Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA)

Ronald (Duff) Martin, President
Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC)

Jose Martinez, Vice-President
UMOS

Gary Myrah, Executive Director
Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS)

Lisa Pugh, Executive Director
Arc Wisconsin

Sean Roberts, Executive Director (exited council in August)
Milwaukee Charter School Advocates (MCSA)

Rolf Wegenke, President
Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU)

Woodrow Wiedenhoef, Executive Director
Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO)

Elected Officials or Designees

Evan Bradtke, Policy Adviser
Office of the Governor

Rep. Adam Neylon
R-Pewaukee

Sen. Luther Olsen
R-Ripon

Rep. Sody Pope
D-Mount Horeb

Sen. Lena Taylor
D-Milwaukee

Introduction

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed in December 2015 and required states to engage stakeholders and use feedback from these engagement activities to inform their ESSA planning. Over the summer of 2016, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) provided several opportunities for citizens to provide input into the planning process, including listening sessions, virtual meetings, and online forums. DPI used the feedback from engagement activities to inform the frame of the EESA plan. In addition, Wisconsin DPI State Superintendent Tony Evers convened the Equity in ESSA Stakeholder Council (EESC) to ensure the state's plan was developed with an eye toward equity. This group began meeting in August 2016. The final meeting took place on July 12, 2017.

The council is made up of 35 members and included representatives from the state's education professional groups, school districts, legislators, and civil rights groups. Over the course of the meetings, two members exited due to retirement or career changes and several new members were added. When members were unable to attend, most sent a surrogate from their organization. Attendance over the course of the process was robust.

While legislators were included on the EESC, DPI engaged in additional outreach to keep legislators apprised of the work as it progressed.

Before the first meeting, Emilie Amundson, DPI Chief of Staff, and Roxie Hentz, PhD, EESC facilitator, spoke with each council member individually in a 15- to 30-minute phone conversation. The individual conversations provided an opportunity for EESC members to ask questions and gain a better sense of the expectations of their participation. DPI also used these conversations to gain an understanding of issues important to the members and could use that information to inform the design of the meetings. One member stated, "If we're only going to say the stuff that makes everyone feel comfortable, it would be a waste. We need to walk through the discomfort." Others echoed the sentiment that the EESC needed to engage in authentic conversation. This idea remained at the center of the meeting design and facilitation.

Originally, the council was to meet six times: three occasions to learn about ESSA and the Wisconsin education landscape and three others to develop frameworks for the accountability and school improvement sections of the plan. Two additional meetings were added to provide council members an opportunity to provide feedback on the first two drafts of the plan.

Roxie Hentz served as the facilitator for the meetings. Education First and the Midwest Comprehensive Center provided technical support and additional facilitation.

All of the materials that were shared with members at each of the meetings are available at the DPI website: <https://dpi.wi.gov/statesupt/equity-council>.

Understanding the Wisconsin Landscape

The first three meetings were designed to provide members with sufficient background on and understanding of the Wisconsin context as well as the history and current status of the ESSA planning process.

Meeting 1

Wednesday, August 31, 2016, from 9:30–11:30 a.m.
125 S. Webster Street
Madison, Wisconsin
GEF III Building, Conference Room P41

The group spent some time establishing norms for working together. Jennifer Kammerud, Policy Initiatives Advisor, and Jeff Pertl, Senior Policy Advisor, then made two short presentations that helped the group build a collective understanding of the history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act from 1965 through the current iteration, the Every Student Succeeds Act. A presentation on Wisconsin demographics provided members with information regarding the growth of poverty throughout the state and the concentration of students in fewer districts. In particular, rural Wisconsin has fewer students and greater poverty, and gaining districts are located in areas along major highways and are home to two- and four-year university campuses. Together, these characteristics provided these communities with more attractive options for the citizens of Wisconsin, providing them with advantages over more rural areas. Members then had a few minutes to discuss new insights they gained from these presentations. During the share-out, one member from an urban area indicated that he had no idea that he had so much in common with rural Wisconsin. Members then engaged in a conversation about their understanding of the word *equity*. In small groups, participants shared words and phrases that represented the word *equity* to them. After a brief discussion, the words and phrases were collected to create a word cloud that provided a visual reminder of the entire group's nuanced definition of *equity*. Members were presented with a review of the feedback that DPI received during the summer listening sessions. Finally, members generated a list of questions for the group to address as they developed the frameworks for accountability and school improvement. These questions were prioritized and then used by DPI and the facilitators to plan future meetings.

Meeting 2

Tuesday, September 27, 2016, from 9:30–11:30 a.m.
125 S. Webster Street
Madison, Wisconsin
GEF III Building, Conference Room P41

The meeting began with a review of the norms for working together. Members reviewed a consolidated report of their pre-meeting conversations and used these statements to further define and understand the group norms. This conversation informed the creation of a more clearly defined set of norms that were used to guide the remainder of the meetings. Jeff Pertl, presented data on the changing racial demographics of Wisconsin. The presentation illustrated the impact of race on student performance. Data included in the presentation showed that Black and American Indian students who are not economically disadvantaged scored lower on the state

accountability test for eighth-grade mathematics than White students who were economically disadvantaged. For third-grade reading, Black students who were not economically disadvantaged scored lower than White students who were economically disadvantaged. The presentation highlighted that both poverty and race affect student performance; poverty alone does not reveal the whole story.

Jennifer Kammerud then reviewed the timeline for completing the ESSA plan. Laura Pinsonneault, Director, Office of Educational Accountability, talked about the additional indicator of student success that will be included in the accountability system. In addition, she reminded the group that state law outlines the state accountability plan, which may or may not directly align with what the group develops. Members were then organized into small groups to discuss the following topics as potential metrics: college and career readiness, accountability, student and educator engagement, and school climate and safety. Each group discussed ways in which each measure might change behavior as well as the benefits and drawbacks of the measures that might be used for the additional indicator.

Meeting 3

Wednesday, October 26, 2016, from 9:30–11:30 a.m.

Schlitz Park

1555 N. Rivercenter Drive

Bottle House B, Link Conference Room

Because this meeting was held in Milwaukee, EESC members were given the option to call in, and a small group used the opportunity to participate virtually.

After a review of norms for participation, the meeting focused on reviewing special education data from Wisconsin Schools. Jeff Pertl explained that rural and declining enrollment districts tend to have a higher percentage of students with disabilities. In addition, although Wisconsin has a good record of compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Act, progress on closing gaps has been slow. Jonas Zuckerman, Director, Title I and School Improvement, and Barb Van Haren, Director, Special Education, then discussed DPI's intention to shift from a compliance focus to developing the ESSA plan in a collaborative manner, with a focus on both compliance and results. To improve results, DPI has begun to use implementation science, which provides a systematic method of using data to understand the kinds of specific actions that are successful.

EESC members spent some time discussing the strengths of the school improvement efforts presented to them, as well as concerns they had about these efforts. The members also discussed whether they thought equity safeguards were included in the improvement planning process. A need for balance was identified, taking into consideration both local flexibility and state equity goals. Members believed that the state should set targets (the “what” of improvement work) while districts should figure out how best to attain the targets in their local contexts (the “how” of improvement work). Other topics discussed included resources, transparency, collaboration, and community engagement.

Developing the Plan

Meetings 4 through 6 focused on members learning about school improvement and accountability in the Wisconsin context and taking on a more active role in developing the frameworks for the school improvement and accountability components of the ESSA plan. To ensure that the group had sufficient time to address these issues, two subgroups were created and additional time was added to the meetings. Members were given the choice of the group they desired to work in. Each meeting began with a short amount of time spent together as a whole group; for the most part, however, each subgroup worked on their specific area: accountability or school improvement.

Meeting 4

Thursday, January 26, 2017, from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
125 S. Webster Street
Madison, Wisconsin
GEF III Building, Conference Room P41

Meeting 5

Thursday, February 23, 2017, from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
125 S. Webster Street
Madison, Wisconsin
GEF III Building, Conference Room P41

Meeting 6

Thursday, March 23, 2017, from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
125 S. Webster Street
Madison, Wisconsin
GEF III Building, Conference Room P41

At meetings 4 and 5, groups came back together for the last 30 minutes of each meeting. Each group was asked to identify three key takeaway points and three to five unanswered questions to share with the larger group. In meeting 6, groups did not come back together at the end of the meeting, choosing to use the additional time for further subgroup discussion.

Accountability

Meeting 4

The Accountability subgroup was asked to provide input on three questions related to the establishment of federal long-term academic achievement goals. Both before and after the discussion, the members were invited to indicate their first and second choices for each answer. Outcomes changed for two of the three questions after discussion, and it was determined that the whole group should be surveyed to elicit further opinions.

1. *On a continuum from “ambitious” (more rigor) to “achievable” (more realism based on previous years’ data), where should Wisconsin’s goals fall?*
The initial vote clustered right in the middle of the continuum. During the discussion, the group proposed that rigor was a given; thus, the continuum should be between *almost certainly achievable* and *almost certainly unachievable*. This did not change the distribution of votes; although the range increased, the responses continued to indicate that goals should navigate a balance between ambitious and achievable.
2. *How “long term” should goals be?*
Given a range between 5 years and 20 years for the length of the goal, the group clustered at 5 years and slightly more heavily at 10 years. After lively discussion, responses moved to cluster at 5 years, with a few at 7 years and a few at 10 years.
3. *How often should the state measure interim progress on the goals?*
The range provided for responses was yearly to every 5 years. Initial responses clustered around annual measurement, with a handful of “every 3 years.” After discussion, responses were almost evenly distributed among 1-, 2-, and 3-year intervals.

DPI committed to drafting long-term goal options and surveying all workgroup members before the next meeting. EESC members were asked how ambitious and achievable the options were, as well as which option they preferred.

Meeting 5

The full group was updated on the outcomes of the long-term academic achievement goals survey that DPI had conducted between meetings. Fewer than 10 people had responded to the survey, and the group was disappointed with the low response rate. Although DPI planned to move forward on drafting the long-term goals based on existing input, facilitators agreed to reopen the survey in an effort to secure additional responses before the next meeting.

The group was asked to provide input on broad categories of measures and specific measures within the “fifth indicator” of student success and school quality required for federal accountability. Group members were provided with a list of potential indicators and information on their availability, measurement, and evidence base. In small “neighbor groups” of two or three, they discussed how the indicator might best address equity and what category of indicator, if any, should be accorded priority.

After a brief share-out, the group was divided into two smaller groups to discuss specific measures. Members were asked to vote on the indicators after considering the following questions:

- Which specific measures help promote equity? How?
- Should we also ask which measures are likely to improve student outcomes? How?
- Which measures should DPI include in the accountability system in the short term?
- Which measures should DPI include in the accountability system in the long term?

- Which measures should DPI report but not include in the accountability system?
- Are there additional measures DPI should consider?

The groups held a general discussion rather than addressing the questions individually. They felt strongly that chronic absenteeism is an appropriate “fifth indicator” for the federal accountability system. They cited several reasons for this belief, including the following:

- Access poses less of an opportunity barrier for attendance as opposed to other measures.
- Absenteeism is a “leading” rather than a “lagging” indicator for student success.
- Absenteeism functions as a proxy for less measurable factors such as student engagement.

After the members voted, there was a short report out after the groups came back together. DPI committed to creating a proposal for the indicator of student success and school quality based on this input and distributing it to the group before the next meeting.

Meeting 6

The meeting started with a conversation about the long-term goals of the ESSA plan and the results of the survey members were asked to complete before the meeting. Then the Accountability group was provided with a draft model of federal and state accountability systems and divided into small groups to engage in a substantive, thoughtful discussion of the model’s strengths and their concerns. The questions discussed included the following:

- *What are one or two “positives” of the model?*
The groups liked the model, especially the chronic absenteeism and freshman on-track measures, and felt that the simplicity of the measures and ease of implementation would be strengths.
- *What are one or two things you would change?*
The group was particularly concerned that any measure of participation should also include information about access. They also were very clear that communications around chronic absenteeism should frame that measure as a joint responsibility between the district and community.
- *Does the division of federal and state accountability seem appropriate? How so?*
The group members appreciated the flexibilities of the state system but expressed concern about loopholes that the state measures potentially may create. They also noted that it will be critical that DPI explain the different purposes of the two systems when reporting data.
- *What are one or two pieces of data that the group believes should be reported by DPI, even if it is not used to identify or rate schools?*
The group had three concrete suggestions in this area:
 1. A narrative that explains what the school/district is doing to help the lowest performing students and/or the school/district to improve overall, including specific data collected at the school level
 2. Culture and climate surveys to report parent, community, teacher, and student engagement

3. Mobility information for staff and students

School Improvement

Meeting 4

The School Improvement meeting was focused on the roles of the state education agency (SEA) and the local education agency (LEA).

Jonas Zuckerman, began by providing some background from two reports that were provided to members before the meeting: *Roles and Responsibilities of an SEA* published by the Aspen Institute, and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) report on the effectiveness of the school improvement grants that were awarded as part of the American Recovery and Recovery Act of 2009 (Pub. Law 111-5). During the presentation, members asked about the nature of the grants that required schools and districts to implement one of four models determined by the DOE. A number of members expressed concerns that limiting schools to one of four models did not allow for the local context to be addressed in the reform.

After this discussion, members were asked to think about the continuum of local-to-state responsibility. Some members pointed out that the continuum of responsibility includes the community, and that interventions often fail because they do not take local context and values into account. The group determined some principles for thinking about the role of DPI and school districts in developing school improvement plans. The principles include:

- The plan needs to be created at the local level.
- Both DPI and LEAs are to act as supporters, providing resources that included community engagement support, knowledge of successful interventions, and coaching to ensure that the plan adhered to three main principles: equity (non-negotiable), authentic engagement, and the use of implementation science to monitor implementation of the plan.
- DPI was to be “tight” on these principles but “loose” on allowing schools to create the plans that addressed their local context.

There was extended discussion about the term *authentic engagement*. EESC members insisted that all stakeholders be included in the engagement activity—that it was incumbent upon the district to provide opportunities for this kind of engagement—and that the voices of students, families, and community be included.

The group expressed excitement about identifying these principles, and they raised some questions:

- How would state report cards be meaningful if schools had this kind of autonomy?
- Could the principles be seen as vague and abstract?
- What kind of financial resources are available to provide support to schools who will be required to engage in this kind of school improvement?
- Does DPI know what kinds of interventions are most likely to lead to improvement?

- Would this planning requirement apply to all schools in the state?
- How will DPI provide this support given its limited resources?

The meeting ended with Zuckerman assuring the group that he would use the input to inform the development of the school improvement component of the ESSA plan.

Meeting 5

The purpose of this meeting was to provide feedback on a draft of the school improvement section and to define *rigorous intervention*, both the meaning of the term and when in the improvement process it would be applied.

Members reviewed the draft and were asked to respond to three questions:

- What's most important to you in this document?
- What really excites you?
- Where do you have concerns?

Every participant had a chance to reply at least once to each question.

The conversation then shifted to talking about rigorous interventions. Jonas Zuckerman reviewed the readings that were provided to the group before the meeting: *Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments*. Members were asked to review the What Works Clearinghouse website before the meeting to gain an understanding of the federal government's definition of an evidence-based intervention.

Participants were asked to consider the continuum of control from locally driven to DPI, and what needed to be considered at the local and state level as DPI developed the school improvement plan. Then they were asked to brainstorm ideas for the following questions:

- What can the local districts do on their own?
- What can the state do to support districts?
- What can they do together?
- What is the action that the state should take for the lowest performing districts?
- What happens when support is no longer sufficient?

A brief conversation followed to allow members to ask clarifying questions or advocate for a particular idea. Members then voted on their top three preferences for the ideas presented.

Meeting 6

Members were divided into three small groups. Using the World Café Model, the groups made their way around the room to engage in discussion about scenarios for three different school districts and how the school improvement plan might affect each of these districts. Each group

was asked to indicate where the district fell on DPI's model for providing support. Then they were asked to consider the following questions:

- What are the key problems in this district?
- Where do you have concerns?
- Given what we've just discussed, where does this district fall on the model?
- What interventions would be right for this district?
- Is there anything else that this district needs?

After each group responded to each of the scenarios, there was a whole-group debrief that included providing feedback on the model. The session ended with a brief discussion on DPI's role and the balance between support and prescription, along with consideration of next steps for DPI if the support proves to be ineffective.

Reviewing the ESSA Plan

Meeting 7

Thursday, April 17, 2017
Wisconsin Education Association Council
33 Nob Hill Road
Madison, Wisconsin

The group met as a whole during the first part of the meeting. The first agenda item provided a summary of the ESSA plan draft. The information was presented to ensure that everyone could participate in the group discussions in case some members did not have an opportunity to review the draft that had been disseminated before the meeting.

During the second part of the meeting, members were divided into three groups and had an opportunity to provide input on three topics: accountability, equity, and school improvement. Each session lasted 25 minutes, which included time to rotate among the topics.

In the school accountability session, members were asked to consider the criteria for identifying schools for support and how those criteria connect to the school improvement requirements and the statewide system of support.

In the equity session, participants were asked to answer the following question: How do we ensure equity in the implementation of the plan?

In the school improvement session, members were asked to consider how the plan reflected the work group's directive to focus on support rather than prescription. In addition, members were asked to think about exit criteria and to suggest elements of the sustainability criteria to ensure continued, long-term growth.

The group reconvened for the last 20 minutes of the meeting to discuss next steps for the equity council. Participants were asked whether this group might be available to examine other issues, for example, diversifying the teacher pipeline. There was agreement that this group should continue to meet and expand membership to include members from other organizations, such as the Department of Workforce Development, Department of Children and Families, and Department of Health Services.

Meeting 8

Wednesday, July 12, 2017
2:00–3:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

The purpose of this meeting was to provide participants an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the feedback that DPI received from stakeholders about the equity plan, to provide their own feedback on how best to incorporate this information, and to understand the next steps in developing and submitting the state's ESSA plan. Four categories were presented: accountability, school improvement, educator development, and student supports. For each

category, DPI summarized the feedback and how the department proposed to revise the plan in response.

Members were provided with a Google Docs™ file on which to provide feedback and comments.

The meeting ended with a review of next steps, which included the August 1, 2017, release date for a revised version of the ESSA plan, with time for the required 30-day gubernatorial review. The final draft of the ESSA plan will be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017.

The EESC will continue to meet to assist the DPI with its efforts to promote equity for all students across the state.