Promoting Excellence for All

A Report from the State Superintendent's
Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap

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Task Force Members

State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Dr. Tony Evers

Task Force Chair
Dr. Demond Means, Superintendent, Mequon-Thiensville School District

Task Force Members

Rasma Barbee, Teacher, Chegwin Elementary School, Fond du Lac School District

Sam Carter, Principal, Robinson Elementary School, Beloit School District

Kendra Cerniglia, Teacher, Leopold Elementary School, Madison Metropolitan School District

Caitlin Dee, Teacher, Nathan Hale High School, West Allis-West Milwaukee School District

Allison DeGraaf, Principal, Kennedy Elementary School, Janesville School District

Jennifer Doucette, Principal, James Fenimore Cooper School, Milwaukee Public Schools

Julie Erickson, Teacher, Menominee Indian High School, Menominee Indian School District

Stacey Frank, Teacher, Webster Stanley Middle School, Oshkosh Area School District

Dean Hess, Principal, John Muir Middle School, Wausau School District

Erin Hollmann, Teacher, St. Marcus Lutheran School, Milwaukee

James Kalupa, Curriculum Coordinator, Bruce Guadalupe Community School, Milwaukee

Theresa Morateck, Teacher, Jeremiah Curtin Leadership Academy, Milwaukee Public Schools

Fernando Muniz, Teacher, Tenor High School, Milwaukee

Trisha Olander, Teacher, Notre Dame Middle School, Milwaukee

Rebecca Panjan, Teacher, Starbuck Middle School, Racine Unified School District

Jill Schmoldt, Instructional Coach, Westside Elementary School, Sun Prairie Area School District

Kim Spychalla, Principal, MacArthur Elementary School, Green Bay Area Public School District

Foreword

Dear Fellow Wisconsinites:

The education our children receive in elementary and secondary school is critical to both their future success and the economic prosperity of our state. Wisconsin has seen outstanding academic results over the past few decades and is often regarded as one of the highest-achieving states in the country. However, Wisconsin has large and persistent achievement and graduation gaps that impact the future success of too many of our children and our state. In fact, the academic achievement gap in Wisconsin for African American children is the worst in the nation. The education of our students of color, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners requires swift, targeted, and deliberate attention.

These troubling conditions require a strong and dynamic response from our educational community. Thus, the *Promoting Excellence for All: State Superintendent's Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap* was formed to help reverse these trends in our schools.

Together, as state superintendent and chair of the task force, we are honored to fiercely advocate for all of the children in our state, regardless of the type of school they attend, where they reside, or their demographic make-up. However, it is important to note that our deepest concern—and our current focus—is centered on the state's lowest-performing student groups, which have consistently included African American students for the past decade. This is a state concern and not just an issue for a select number of schools and districts in largely urban areas.

Sincerely,

Tony Evers, PhD, State Superintendent
Demond A. Means, Ed.D., Chair

In response, we brought together a group of accomplished and talented educators and leaders, who have demonstrated success in closing the achievement gaps in their schools. They came from all types of schools— traditional public, charter, and private— to share effective strategies. Members of this task force understand that one key to effectively addressing the achievement gap issue starts in the classroom. In their work, they have recommended proven, research-based strategies that any school and school leader may implement immediately. As you read this document, you will find that the task force built an extraordinary collection of strategies to help close the academic gap. This guide will serve as a resource for schools and districts across the state.

Addressing the disparities will require leaders and citizens to explore ways we can improve the lives of all residents. The achievement gap has major implications not only for individual students, but also for our state's social and economic future.

It is not enough for our schools to advance this work, we must come together to seek new ways of ensuring every student can succeed. The children of our state are counting on us.

Introduction

Overview

One of Wisconsin's greatest strengths is the growing diversity of communities, schools, and workplaces. Diversity makes businesses more innovative and competitive, and a more diverse workforce leads to economic growth, opportunities, and progress. The languages and cultures of people in Wisconsin—from the bands of Ojibwe along the shores of Lake Superior to immigrants from Laos, Mexico, and Somalia, from the German and Norwegian immigrants to the Menominee with their origin at the mouth of the Menominee River—create rich and vibrant communities for Wisconsin's children. Wisconsin's diversity is a key asset to its public education system.

For Wisconsin to be innovative in the 21st century, and for communities to remain strong, all students must graduate college and career ready. As Wisconsin's student population becomes increasingly diverse, the persistence of racial disparities in the educational system (as well as in health, housing, and employment) poses real challenges to opportunity and economic progress.

Some Wisconsin schools are demonstrating the skills to address the racial disparities. State Superintendent Tony Evers invited representatives from these schools to participate in Promoting Excellence for All: State Superintendent's Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap (task force). The task force was charged to:

- examine and recommend proactive instructional strategies to close achievement gaps in Wisconsin;
- develop resources for Wisconsin practitioners working to close achievement gaps in their schools and districts; and
- recommend local board policy changes that can support efforts to close the achievement gaps in Wisconsin schools.

The U.S. Department of Education describes the achievement gap as "the difference in academic performance between different ethnic groups."

— Ed Data Express, n.d.

Understanding the Achievement Gap*

Agenda 2017 is State Superintendent Tony Evers' vision for every student to graduate ready for further education and the workplace. *Agenda 2017* includes goals focused on high school graduation and third grade reading and eighth grade mathematics based on research that proficiency in these grades and subjects is critical to college and career readiness. The National Center for Education Statistics (2014) reported Wisconsin's 2012 graduation rate was tied for second in the nation with Nebraska, Texas, and Vermont. Although Wisconsin's graduation rate is one of the highest, there is a noticeable graduation gap between students of color and White students. Results from the 2013-14 Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) showed improvements for most student groups compared to 2008-09 in reading and mathematics, but achievement gaps remain large when comparing students based on race.

In fact, Wisconsin has the widest race-based gaps in the nation (Mulvany, 2013). The results from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the "Nation's Report Card," showed no other state had wider gaps in both of the assessments aligned with *Agenda 2017* (fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics). Further, no other state had wider gaps in fourth-grade mathematics and eighth-grade reading.

* In this report the following terms are interchangeable: achievement gap(s), gap(s), racial achievement gap(s), race-based achievement gap(s), race-based gap(s).

Wisconsin Graduation Rates 2012-2013
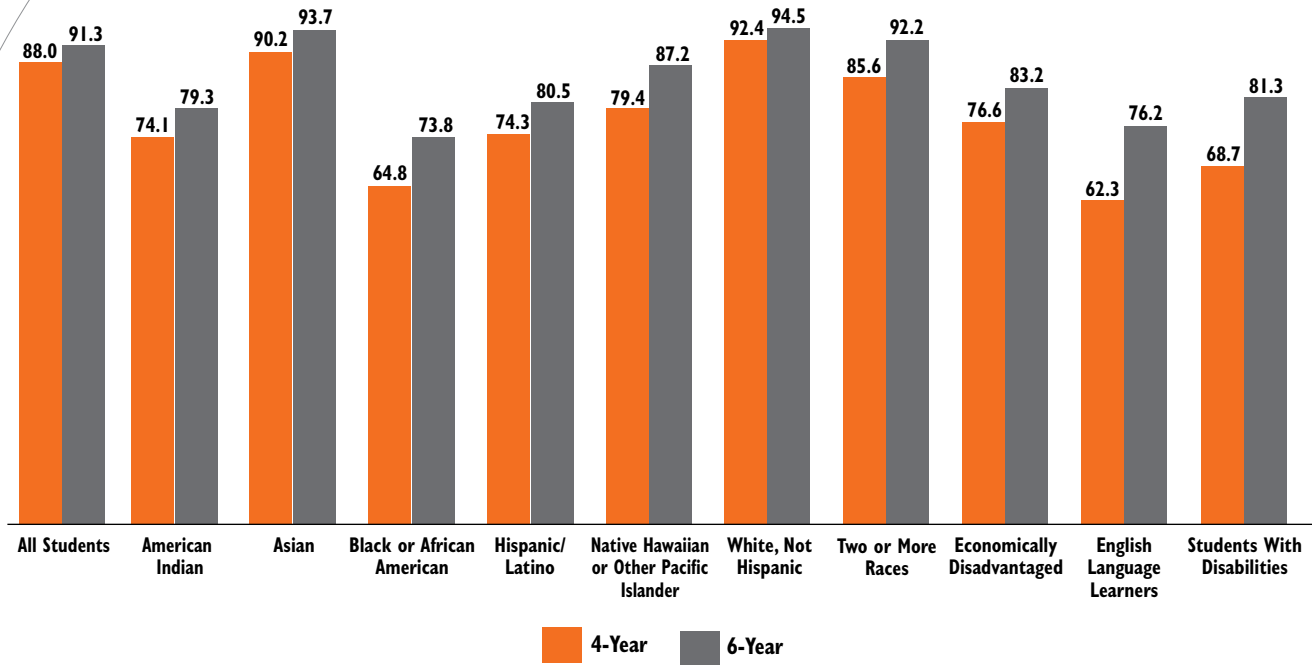
Category	4-Year	6-Year
All Students	88.0	91.3
American Indian	74.1	79.3
Asian	90.2	93.7
Black or African American	64.8	73.8
Hispanic/Latino	74.3	80.5
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	79.4	87.2
White, Not Hispanic	92.4	94.5
Two or More Races	85.6	92.2
Economically Disadvantaged	76.6	83.2
English Language Learners	62.3	76.2
Students With Disabilities	68.7	81.3

■ 4-Year   ■ 6-Year

Notes: *Data is from the Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard by the Department of Public Instruction. (WISEdash Public Portal Certified View) Wisconsin uses the uniform federal four-year adjusted cohort rate to calculate graduation rates. Because the adjusted cohort rate is based on longitudinal data, the DPI also produces a six-year cohort graduation rate. This rate honors the additional effort many students make to complete their high school education as well as obligations under special education law and the Wisconsin Constitution.*

WSAS Performance
Grade 3 Reading
Percent Proficient and Advanced

Group	2009-10	2012-13
All Students (Grade Level)	32.7	34.6
American Indian	19.9	21.7
Asian	27.4	33.7
Black	12.0	14.1
Hispanic	14.0	17.4
White	38.6	41.0
Economically Disadvantaged	18.5	21.0
English Language Learners	9.4	10.8
Students w/ Disabilities	16.0	17.8

Legend: ■ 2009-10 ■ 2012-13

WSAS Performance
Grade 8 Mathematics
Percent Proficient and Advanced
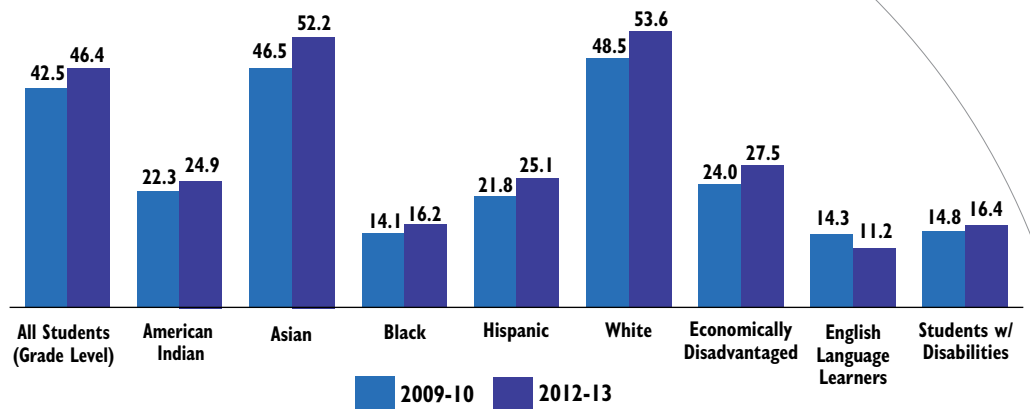
Group	2009-10	2012-13
All Students (Grade Level)	42.5	46.4
American Indian	22.3	24.9
Asian	46.5	52.2
Black	14.1	16.2
Hispanic	21.8	25.1
White	48.5	53.6
Economically Disadvantaged	24.0	27.5
English Language Learners	14.3	11.2
Students w/ Disabilities	14.8	16.4

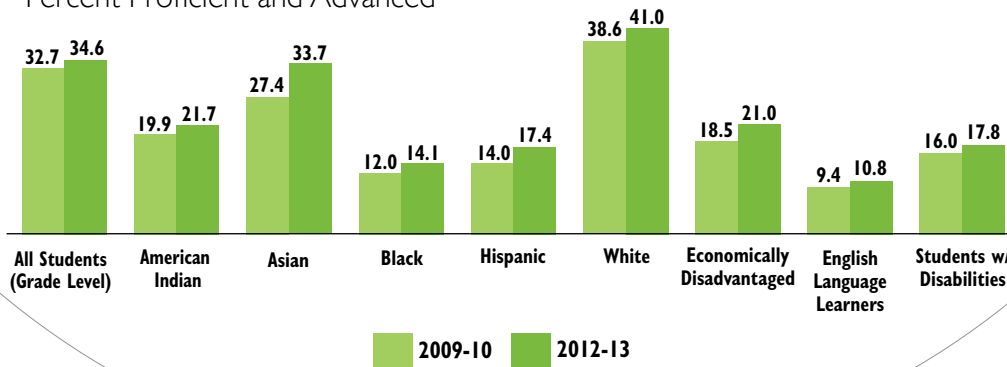Legend: ■ 2009-10 ■ 2012-13

Notes: *Data is from the Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard by the Department of Public Instruction. (WISEdash Public Portal Certified View) Because of race and ethnicity collection and reporting changes, pre- and post- 2010-11 data by race and ethnicity may not be directly comparable.*

2013 NAEP
Grade 4 Reading
Percent at or above Proficient

Nation
White: 45
Black: 17
Gap = 28

Wisconsin
White: 41
Black: 11
Gap = 30

■ White ■ Black

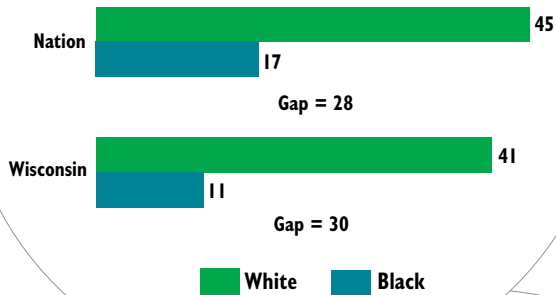## 2013 NAEP
Grade 8 Mathematics
Percent at or above Proficient

Nation
White: 44
Black: 14
Gap = 30

Wisconsin
White: 47
Black: 8
Gap = 39

■ White ■ Black
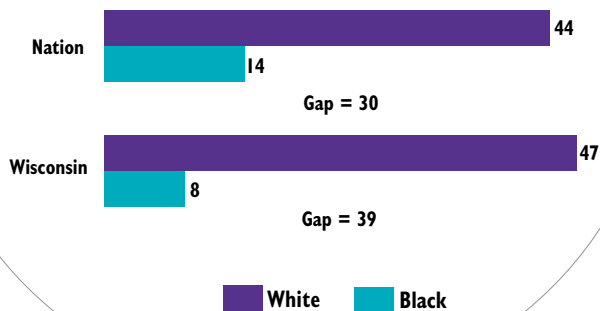
"The work of this task force is extremely important to me because it is directly connected to *Agenda 2017,* my vision for all of Wisconsin's students to graduate college and career ready."

— Dr. Tony Evers
State Superintendent
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Notes: *Data is from the National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), by the U.S. Department of Education. (2013 State Snapshot Reports).*

WSAS Performance 2013
Grade 3 Reading
Students who are not Economically Disadvantaged
Percent Proficient and Advanced

Students who are White
and Economically
Disadvantaged
27.9

American
Indian: 30.2
Asian: 49.2
Black: 26.9
Hispanic: 34.2
White: 47.0
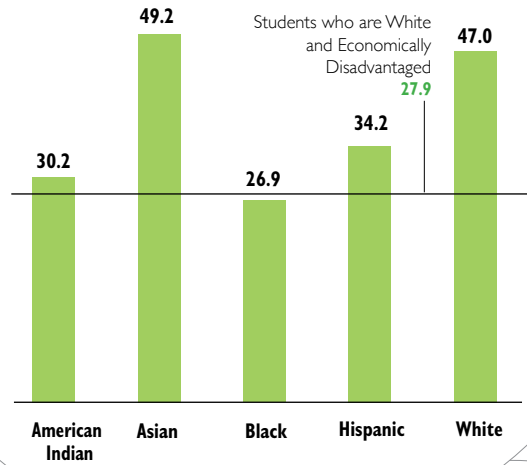
WSAS Performance 2013
Grade 8 Mathematics
Students who are not Economically Disadvantaged
Percent Proficient and Advanced

Students who are White
and Economically
Disadvantaged
35.1

American
Indian: 30.9
Asian: 66.7
Black: 30.3
Hispanic: 40.6
White: 61.1
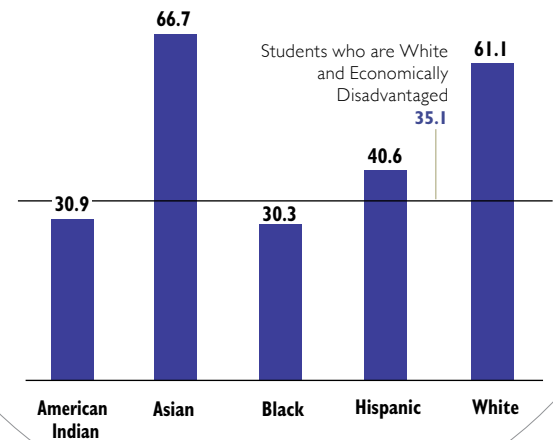
Many have tried to tie achievement gaps solely to poverty. Wisconsin has experienced a decade long increase in childhood poverty based on federal school meal eligibility data. However, achievement gaps for some racial and ethnic groups cannot be explained by poverty alone. For example, third-grade students from Black families with incomes higher than required for free or reduced-price lunch have **lower** proficiency rates on the WSAS reading tests than third grade White students from families with incomes below $44,123 (for a family of four), which qualifies the students for free or reduced-price school meals. On the statewide eighth-grade mathematics assessment, both American Indian and Black students who are not economically disadvantaged have lower proficiency rates than White students whose family income qualifies them for subsidized school meals.

While poverty is not the sole factor in achievement gaps, poverty in combination with race widens race-based gaps. There are wide achievement gaps within racial and ethnic groups between students who are from low-income families and those who are not economically disadvantaged. Additionally, proficiency rates for WSAS reading and mathematics dip very low when students from economically disadvantaged families also have a disability or are learning English.

Notes: *Data is from the Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard by the Department of Public Instruction. (WISEdash Secure, Accessed July 14, 2014). The Wisconsin Statewide Assessment System includes the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations and Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities.*

All Students Can Learn:
Evidence that the Achievement Gap Can be Closed

To close the achievement gap, schools must accelerate learning for their under-performing students. In Wisconsin, schools are coupling high standards with specific strategies that promote learning for all students.

Schools all across the state are closing the achievement gaps. Gaps are closing in rural and urban schools, including schools with different governance structures, student populations, and sizes. Task force members come from different communities and types of schools (see Appendix A for school profiles) but speak with one voice: Wisconsin educators can and must close the achievement gaps.

State Superintendent's Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap

State Superintendent Tony Evers commissioned the task force to bring forward strategies that show promise in closing gaps in their schools and to validate the strategies through research, peer review, and expert review. State Superintendent Tony Evers invited Dr. Demond Means, superintendent of the Mequon-Thiensville School District, to chair the task force. After reviewing school-level data, State Superintendent Tony Evers selected schools in which the achievement gap between students of color and White students

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was closing, and the achievement of students of color was growing at a higher rate than the state average. These schools, in turn, identified strong classroom teachers and educational leaders to participate in the task force.

The task force met five times during the spring of 2014 and participated in a rigorous process to review and validate strategies that show promise in closing achievement gaps. First, the task force members shared and analyzed strategies they use within their schools to close racial achievement gaps. Second, task force members voted on the strategies to include in their ongoing work. Third, experts reviewed the selected strategies and provided analysis and feedback. Dr. Decoteau Irby, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, provided expert analysis related to race, culture, and ethnicity in education, while Dr. Coby Meyers, American Institutes for Research, provided expert analysis related to school improvement efforts. The task force also met with the Wisconsin Teachers of the Year Council and discussed issues of race in the classroom.

School Improvement Strategies Applied with Attention to Race and Culture

The work of the task force was organized within four research-based school improvement focus areas:

- effective instruction,
- student–teacher relationships,
- family and community engagement, and
- school and instructional leadership.

The four focus areas were selected after a careful review of school improvement and achievement gap research from the past two decades.

"Why would you be color mute? Ameliorating the inequalities requires addressing race."

— Dr. Decoteau Irby
Assistant Professor
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

These areas are based on four inputs identified by Dr. Ron Ferguson, Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Harvard Kennedy School, whose research focused on closing achievement gaps (Ferguson, 2008). The focus areas are also based on the five essential supports identified in the work of the Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR). The CCSR's decades of work with Chicago Public Schools targets improving outcomes for all students in high-risk, low-income, traditionally poor-performing school settings.

Within each of the four focus areas, the task force selected approximately 10 strategies that showed promise in closing race-based achievement gaps. The strategies and their descriptions are likely recognizable to educators familiar with the research related to school improvement. The task force recognizes these strategies are powerful tools for individual educators. At the same time, the task force understands the strategies, alone, will not close the gaps—instead, this effort will require a larger, systemic framework designed to measure student outcomes and adjust resources to meet system goals.

What looks different—and what the task force believes to be the key to closing race-based gaps in education—is that these strategies are situated within a belief framework that pays attention to race and values culturally responsive practices. Each of the following four sections begins with "Task Force Beliefs" to describe the commitments to equity, diversity, and justice necessary for the school improvement strategies to make a difference in closing achievement gaps. It was important for the task force to share examples of how these beliefs are translated into practice—and, so, the report contains examples of how to apply the school improvement strategies while paying careful attention to race and culture. These homegrown examples are called "applications" in this report.

Task Force Focus Areas and Strategies

Effective Instruction

Differentiation
Gradual Release of Responsibility
Personalization (Voice/Choice)
Rigorous, Integrated Content
Engagement
Comprehensive Literacy Instruction
Grouping Decisions Based on Data
Explicit Instruction
Formative Assessment
Soft Skills

Student–Teacher Relationships

Angel List
Celebrate Success
Classroom Culture
Cultural Competency
Extended Time
Honor Students as Individuals
Reclaim Unstructured Time
Acknowledge Students for Accomplishments
Talent Management
Mentor Students
School-wide Behavior System

Family and Community Engagement

Consider Families and Communities as Experts on their Children
Family Engagement
Welcoming Environment
Community Schools
Community Partnerships
Focused Events
Communication with Families

School and Instructional Leadership

All Staff Responsible for All Students
Capacity Building
Comprehensive Leadership Process
Data Analysis
Intentional Design of Systems (IDOS)
Math and Reading Interventions
Relationship Building
School and District Common Planning
Shared Vision and Leadership
Instructional Coaches
Professional Learning Communities

Effective Instruction

"I often get asked why I teach at this school. I tell them it is because I feel that it is the best way to give back to the community; it's the reason why I became an educator in the first place."

— Kendra Cerniglia
Teacher
Leopold Elementary School
(Madison)

Task Force Beliefs

We honor cultural backgrounds, acknowledge similarities, and provide diverse perspectives and multiple modalities for learning. We are critically aware of our own cultural identity and the ways it permeates our world views. We draw from the students' cultural backgrounds and experiences to connect to the curriculum.

In our culturally responsive learning environments, students of color are valued, respected, and accepted as individuals. Students of color are provided equal access to a rigorous curriculum. The classroom environment empowers students to take risks.

Support from the Research

Individual teachers can and do have profound influence on student learning.

(Darling-Hammond, 2000; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2000; Rockoff, 2004; Rowan, Correnti & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997)

Effective educators create learner-centered classrooms with ongoing low-stakes checks of student knowledge and skills, and they continually adjust instruction to meet individual needs through a class- or school-based differentiation process.

(Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, Burns, 2010; Tomlinson, 2001, 2003)

There is a rich research base for the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies such as those identified in: *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, Pickering are, & Pollock, 2001), and the *Educational Research Service's Handbook of Research on Improving Student Achievement* (Cawelti, 2004).

Educator Insight

Theresa Morateck, Teacher, Jeremiah Curtin Leadership Academy (Milwaukee), shares her story on becoming a culturally responsive, effective educator at:

http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall/audio

Task Force Recommended Strategies for
Effective Instruction

Strategy
Differentiation

Description

Teachers provide a variety of instructional techniques that engage students toward shared ownership of their proficiency. Responsive instruction, through progress monitoring, provides students what they need in a timely manner and incorporates best practices to meet the needs of individual students. Individualized learning plans are used to meet unique student nuances, reflect different levels of competency and learning styles, and apply differentiated strategies.

Application

Leopold Elementary School teachers use *Thinking Maps* to differentiate instruction for all of their students. *Thinking Maps* are used to record a student's thinking and assist in metacognition activities. All students use *Thinking Maps.* Teachers draw on students' cultural backgrounds as they use *Thinking Maps* to answer key questions, such as "Why is this important?" and "What does this mean?"

Strategy

Gradual Release of Responsibility

Description

Students acquire knowledge through structured teaching that highlights learning together with other students. Sometimes called "The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model/Optimal Learning Model," this instructional strategy is based on **I do, we do, you do together, you do alone** *(modeling, feedback, peer support, and intentional practice). The emphasis of this strategy is on a clear and explicit focus and collaborative learning. The goal is to encourage the development of self-regulated learners.*

Application

At **Tenor High School**, teachers use choice boards to assess students' mastery and have students review content. Teachers offer students four choices and require students to complete two of them. The goal of the experience is eventually to have students create their own way to show mastery of concepts. Providing students with choices honors some cultures' values related to autonomy and allows students to select culturally congruent options.

Personalization (Voice/Choice)

Description

Teachers ask for demonstration of student knowledge created, chosen, or personalized by students throughout or after instruction. This instructional approach leads to an increase of student engagement in their learning, as the teacher is less prescriptive. This gradual release of responsibility allows students to choose how to demonstrate their learning.

Application

Menominee Indian High School students are primarily American Indian students. In their English courses, students are encouraged to be actively involved in their education and are given a broad range of choices, which is responsive to a cultural value of autonomy and allows students to draw on their cultural backgrounds for success when doing large projects. Students may select from many choices allowing them to complete a project in ways in which they feel most confident.

Strategy

Rigorous, Integrated Content

Description

Teachers base instructional content on Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English Language Arts. As much as possible, concepts are integrated between all academic areas. Teachers purposefully create and facilitate connections between academic content strands with high expectations for each student. Teachers meet students where they are and bridge them to where they need to be.

Application

Teachers at **Jeremiah Curtin Leadership Academy** and **Kennedy Elementary School** integrate reading and writing with science and social studies standards. Struggling students have multiple opportunities to be exposed to the content, academic vocabulary, and various points of view.

Strategy

Engagement

Description

Teachers facilitate student-centered and student-driven opportunities that promote active participation in meaningful and higher-level learning activities.

Application

Leopold Elementary School implements culturally and linguistically responsive teaching techniques including: *turn and talk, numbered heads together, circle the sage, think-pair-share,* and *raise a righteous hand.* These techniques validate and affirm culturally and linguistically diverse students, encourage each student to be successful, and allow students to take small risks before they take a larger risk.

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Strategy

Comprehensive Literacy Instruction

Description

Teachers use an explicit, purposeful, integrated approach to literacy (including evidence-based, high-quality instructional practices) that engages students in all major components of the complex literacy process. The process includes reading (and reading foundational skills), writing, speaking, listening, and language across all disciplines to comprehend and create text for effective communication with others in a variety of contexts.

Application

Kennedy Elementary School teachers provide students with high-quality literacy instruction, which allows struggling students multiple opportunities to listen, read, write, and discuss literature on a daily basis. Teachers may begin a lesson by conducting a read-aloud. During the read-aloud, teachers may model a strategy students can use to better understand text. After teachers model the strategy, students are given an opportunity to practice the strategy either independently or in small groups. Next, students may demonstrate their understanding of the strategy and text through a formative written assessment.

Strategy

Grouping Decisions Based on Data

Description

Teachers use a variety of data and multiple data points from balanced assessment and classroom observation and knowledge to move students along and create flexible groupings.

Application

Tenor High School teachers use multiple data sources (i.e., Measures of Academic Progress scores, Multiple Intelligence, student interests) to group students. This grouping strategy ensures all students are members of groups that are appropriate for them, will meet their needs, accommodate different ability levels, and build classroom community.

Strategy
Explicit Instruction

Description

Teachers use a cycle of teaching and learning defined by clear modeling, independent practice, continuous feedback, and group share. This process can be applied to any grade level or content area.

Application

Jeremiah Curtin Leadership Academy teachers use explicit, guided instruction during their literacy block. Students' reading improves through learning specific skills, such as word attack and comprehension. In addition, students read the text multiple times, which improves fluency.
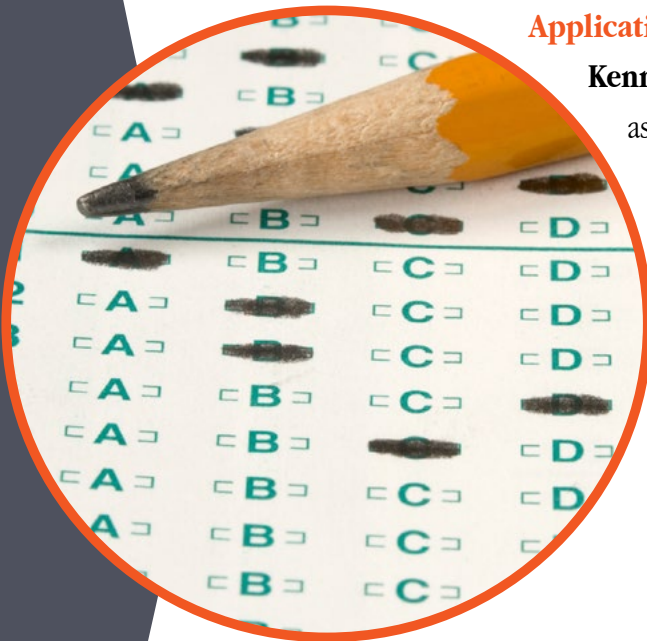
Strategy

Formative Assessment

Description

Teachers use common formative assessments to adjust instruction. There is an on-going awareness of student performance and outcomes. Teachers and instructional coaches collaborate to develop and align formative and benchmark assessments. Staff routinely collaborates to analyze data that drives instructional practices.

Application

Kennedy Elementary School teachers use formative assessments to effectively monitor all students' progress. Teachers analyze data to identify students who need additional support and on which areas teachers and students need to focus. In a classroom, teachers can specifically identify the needs of a group of students, plan a specific lesson(s) focused on that need, and work with students to improve their achievement.

Strategy
Soft Skills

Description

Students learn to interact appropriately in a given academic or social setting. Teachers instruct and model how to be successful socially and within the community. Soft skills are critical to being college and career ready.

Application

Tenor High School explicitly teaches soft skills to students. Using these skills, the school has developed a set of criteria, descriptors, and grading system for soft skills (i.e., respect, responsibility, citizenship). Students are given a score from one to four on their report cards for each criterion.

Student—Teacher Relationships

"We are expected to challenge children, but it is okay for us to be challenged by them too."

— Trisha Olander
Teacher
Notre Dame Middle School
(Milwaukee)

Task Force Beliefs

> *We believe positive student–teacher relationships start with a safe, trusting, culturally responsive environment in which both students and teachers are empowered to have open conversations, share personal information, and create authentic connections to foster long-term relationships beyond the classroom. Open conversations about race, ethnicity, disabilities, and culture should be intentional, and other modes of cultural competence should be infused into the classroom. We create a safe space to hear students' experiences and voices and that builds trust.*

Support from the Research

The classroom of a caring teacher can function as a space where it is safe for students to take risks, feel comfortable when those risks do not always work out, and feel nurtured by the adult who leads the classroom community.
(Perkins, 2010; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005)

Students use positive relationships with their teachers as a secure base from which to take on academic challenges and advance their social–emotional development.
(Hamre & Pianta, 2001)

At-risk students of color and students in low-income schools show particular benefit from positive relationships with teachers.
(Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2006; Green, Rhodes, Hirsch, Suarez-Orozco, & Camic, 2008; Murray & Malmgren, 2005)

Positive teacher–student relationships support students' adjustment to school, development of social skills, and resiliency in academic performance.
(Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2009) found students who feel connected to the school and an adult within the school are more likely to attend school regularly, stay in school, and graduate.

Educator Insight

Jill Schmoldt, Instructional Coach, Westside Elementary School (Sun Prairie), shares her story on honoring culturally and linguistically diverse students at:

http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall/audio

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Task Force Recommended Strategies for
Student–Teacher Relationships

Strategy
Angel List

Description

The Angel List is a yearlong teacher–student match of students identified by teachers as having no connections or relationships to a teacher in the school. At the beginning of the year, staff identify students who do not appear to have relationships with adults at the school. Staff are paired with these students and work throughout the year intentionally to establish connections.

Application

Robinson Elementary School wants every student to have a positive relationship with adults in the school. Teachers post pictures of all students on the wall and silently place dots next to each student with whom they already have a relationship. Students with two dots have established relationships with teachers in the school and therefore are not included in the list. However, students with one dot are discussed, and those with no dots are assigned to the Angel List. Teachers then become an individual student's angel. Students do not know that they have been selected.

Strategy

Celebrate Success

Description

A culture of celebration focuses on structural practices and supports that place an emphasis on the positive climate of the school. Students, families, and staff are expected to celebrate and focus on success at all levels and to hold each other accountable to meet these expectations. The goal is to inspire positive action rather than communicate punitive responses. Students internalize expectations when a variety of achievements are recognized.

Application

Webster Stanley Middle School rewards individual students for improving their behavior. Acknowledgment of struggling students who have changed their behavior fosters a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie for students who in turn encourage their peers to be successful.

Strategy

Classroom Culture

Description

Teachers establish the classroom as a safe community where learning and relationships are important. The classroom belongs to everyone and explicitly includes the students. Learners can take risks in a positive way because students have a responsibility to respect and value each other. Tasks and activities are differentiated so all students can—and are expected to—participate and grow. Students are represented (their pictures and work are on the wall). The room is structured for varied groupings—large group, small group, partners—and communal books and resources are available and visible. Teachers teach classroom routines and protocols for answering questions and interacting with other students.

Application

St. Marcus Lutheran School builds a positive classroom culture and strong relationships with students in various ways. Teachers greet students each day with a smile and a handshake. Teachers get to know students during this time by asking them questions about what they've been doing. Teachers build classroom culture through class chants and having students interview each other to find out more about their peers and identify similarities they may have.

Strategy

Cultural Competency

Description

Teachers and staff reflect on relationships established in the classroom and how student identities are honored. Self-reflective activities allow staff to examine their professional practices and biases to ensure that diversity is respected and celebrated. Teachers build their capacity to recognize cultural understandings, strengths, and language to differentiate and accelerate student learning.

Application

MacArthur Elementary School teachers honor and celebrate the diversity of all of their students using various strategies. One strategy, *Culture Toss*, allows students and staff the opportunity to share their personal values regarding race or ethnicity, language, vocation, religion or spirituality, life values, and possessions (something you own). Students and staff discuss differences in their thinking. *Culture Toss* brings awareness of the diverse thinking of students and staff and helps to understand different people's frame of reference.

Strategy

Extended Time

Description

Schools schedule programming of academic or enrichment activities outside of standard instructional time (e.g. during lunch, study hall, before or after school, year-round, and summer school). This additional time is student-driven and is based on individual student needs and interests.

Application

Notre Dame Middle School's after-school program provides students with an opportunity to get the extra support they need and engage in enrichment activities four days a week. Students combine activities like newspaper club, math club, music, drama, and dance with a one-hour study hall.

Strategy

Honor Students as Individuals

Description

Teachers intentionally get to know each student on a personal level and find the "spark" in every student. Teachers integrate routines and activities that build a connection with students as individuals. For some students, teachers recognize that it takes additional time to connect. Honoring a student differs from "getting to know" students. Honoring recognizes that student experiences and feelings may be very different than a teacher's experience, and the teacher chooses language that identifies student strengths.

Application

Bruce Guadalupe Community School recognizes the importance of honoring students and understands how students and teachers can build relationships because they form a positive connection with common interests. Teachers are aware of student interests outside of school and talk with students about their interests. Teachers show interest in their students by attending students' events when possible.

Strategy

Reclaim Unstructured Time

Description

Schools review and revise unstructured time within and outside the formal school day to improve academic, social, and emotional success.

Application

Jeremiah Curtin Leadership Academy partners with a national, nonprofit organization called *Playworks* to focus on positive language and problem-solving techniques students can use during recess. Overall, *Playworks* has created a positive, safe play environment in the school. Students are taking on leadership roles as they are becoming "Junior Coaches." The students transfer problem-solving strategies they have learned from *Playworks* into the classroom.

Strategy

Acknowledge Students for Accomplishments

Description

Individual student academic and non-academic achievements are acknowledged to ingrain positive reinforcement into the school culture. Overall, this process is intended to improve student morale and self-efficacy.

Application

Bruce Guadalupe Community School acknowledges their students for being good citizens, showing positive attitudes, being helpful in the classroom, or being good friends. The students of the month have their photos and a paragraph written about them hung next to a huge star in the cafeteria.

Strategy

Talent Management

Description

Schools and districts attract, retain, and develop a high-quality, diverse, creative, and innovative workforce of leaders. Competent and caring teachers are in every classroom and connect with and inspire students and families as they also collaborate with colleagues. All staff members must embrace higher expectations for all students (failure is not an option). Inspiring teachers possess head and heart and the "It" factor.

Application

MacArthur Elementary School leaders are strategic in hiring teachers to teach in their school. During teacher interviews, staff are looking for individuals who are culturally responsive and who value differences among students. Staff looks for ways prospective teachers have or will incorporate diversity into their classroom instruction. Staff believes teachers who possess these qualities will likely be successful in building positive, constructive, student–teacher relationships.

Strategy
Mentor Students

Description
All students are connected with an adult in the school or community to provide academic, social, and emotional support through building positive relationships.

Application
Nathan Hale High School has created a structure so that staff and students build relationships while students are in high school. Classroom teachers advise grade-level cohorts. Teachers stay with their cohort for all four years. Advising teachers meet with each student every two weeks and discuss academic goals, progress, and other issues important to the student. This ensures students of color build a connection with an adult whom they will see every day of their high school career.

Strategy

School-wide Behavior System

Description

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a school-wide behavior management framework to explicitly teach behavioral expectations to staff, students, and families. PBIS provides a common language and structure. The system focuses on recognition and celebration of positive behaviors.

Application

Starbuck Middle School staff and students are accountable for implementing PBIS. Staff believes that positive relationships can be built through PBIS and promotes PBIS in various ways. The school has made videos in which students are modeling good behaviors, and teachers discuss what behaviors should not be seen. When teachers observe students behaving appropriately, they hand out a positive incentive that students can use in the school store.

"After my first year, I could see the difference.
I went from thinking 'why am I here?' to feeling
like I was part of a new family."

— Rebecca Panjan
Teacher,
Starbuck Middle School
(Racine)

Task Force Beliefs

> *We believe new and different ways of engaging families based on mutual trust and respect are required because our schools belong to all. When we engage culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities, we feel we are making a difference because we are actively seeking out diverse families as partners who have valuable contributions to make toward the success of their children. Our schools are strengthened by a diverse community in which to live, work, and grow—we choose diverse schools.*

Support from the Research

Student learning and overall school improvement occurs when districts and schools engage in consistent, comprehensive, and sustained outreach programs to families and communities. (Blank, Berg, & Melaville, 2006; Bryk et al., 2010; Marschall, 2006)

This engagement has a positive impact across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005)

Student achievement, credit completion, better attendance, higher graduation rates, and decreased incidences of discipline have all been correlated to family involvement. (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Child Trends, 2013; Hill et al., 2004; Simon, 2004) Schools that create culturally sensitive welcoming environments have higher levels of family engagement. (Bryk et al., 2010; Henderson & Mapp 2002)

Engagement with the wider community also can have strong positive outcomes for students. Students who regularly attend after-school programs that follow evidence-based practices can have improved academic achievement, reduced risk-taking behaviors, improved social skills, and positive health and wellness gains. (Durlak & Weissberg, 2013; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008)

Early research on community schools (one-stop for academic, health, social services, and community development) shows multiple potential positive outcomes including student achievement, attendance, and graduation. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009; Coalition for Community Schools, 2009; Public Education Network, 2012)

Educator Insight

Sam Carter, Principal, Robinson Elementary School (Beloit), shares his story on engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities at: http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall/audio

Task Force Recommended Strategies for
Family & Community Engagement

Strategy

Consider Families and Communities as Experts on their Children

Description

Educators honor the family as an expert on their child to create a sense of partnership and shared responsibility between the teacher and family. This starts with a positive initial contact. Staff is purposeful in empowering the community by supporting local business, hosting culturally responsive events, and building up the community's culture.

Application

Leopold Elementary School staff has created a welcoming environment for all families by holding *Ready, Set, Go (RSG)* conferences. *RSG* conferences are held prior to the beginning of the school year to establish positive, proactive partnerships between home and school. Teachers listen to parents' hopes and expectations and value their expertise on their child. Through *RSG*, teachers gather information that will help guide academic and social instruction throughout the year.

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Strategy
Family Engagement

Description

School effort is concentrated and conducted with cultural competency to connect families with the school in order to highlight the importance of academic success. Involving families in school-based activities also fosters positive engagement with educators and increases family awareness of student progress.

Application

Starbuck Middle School staff implements the *Violence Free Zone* initiative. Advisors come from the students' neighborhoods and share similar ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. They become mentors to help students cope with problems and keep them in the classroom.

"If parents do not know me and trust me, then it doesn't work."

— Sam Carter
Principal
Robinson Elementary School
(Beloit)

Strategy
Welcoming Environment

Description
Educators are customer-service friendly and make sure that everyone feels respected and welcomed at all times. Policies and practices reflect this. Staff provides service for all customers that entails greeting, high expectations, visibility, public pride, and private problem solving.

Application
Notre Dame Middle School is 99 percent Hispanic, and the majority of students are English Language Learners. Visitors are greeted by students who welcome them to their classroom.

Strategy
Community Schools

Description

The school is used as a host location to build a network of resources and systems to ensure every student's needs are met (i.e., dental services, medical access, fitness programs, restaurant on campus, etc.). School facilities need to be accessible to families beyond the school day.

Application

Bruce Guadalupe Community School is one part of a campus, which serves a majority Hispanic population. Other services available on the campus include adult day care, drug rehabilitation, and real estate counseling.

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Strategy

Community Partnerships

Description

Educators engage with community members and leaders to support holistic, future-focused activities and events for students and their families.

Application

James Fennimore Cooper School has established a "teaching school" partnership with UW–Milwaukee to reduce class size (by decreasing teacher–student ratio) and to foster and nurture additional diverse role models, support, and levels of expertise.

Strategy

Focused Events

Description

Educators plan purposeful events that target specific cultural and ethnic groups to involve, inform, and strengthen partnerships in the school community.

Application

Chegwin Elementary School

staff is intentional when they host a parent or family event. For example, the school designed a special night for families and parents that included a Hmong dance performance. The school coordinated the performance with the "I Love to Read Family Night." Hmong grandparents could see firsthand how their dances are being honored and passed on to others.

Strategy

Communication with Families

Description

Schools establish timely, two-way communication systems with parents, develop strategies to involve parents and community in the learning process, and allow parents and community some voice in key school decisions. Educators document ongoing positive family communication on a consistent basis. Schools establish systems to contact families with concerns and information about specific interventions. Staff and families meet when students are referred for interventions (Tier 2 and 3) to discuss students' strengths and areas of concern.

Application

At Notre Dame Middle School, all correspondence is bilingual. All parents meetings are translated into Spanish.

School & Instructional Leadership

"It's about making sure you have strength in all your teams to model and to lead."

— Allison DeGraaf
Principal
Kennedy Elementary School
(Janesville)

Task Force Beliefs

"*We believe that highly effective school and instructional leaders close race-based achievement gaps by empowering students of color to become actively engaged in their own learning. Students, staff, and families, who are supported and motivated by one another, form a community that embraces cultural differences and allows members to express themselves openly. This school community sets high expectations for all students, fosters a sense of belonging, infuses instruction with culturally relevant practices, and celebrates individual as well as group achievements.*"

Support from the Research

School leaders impact overall student achievement and growth. (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003)

One consistent finding in the research is the importance of well-structured opportunities for collaboration that allow school leaders to work in closer partnership with their teachers and students to establish sustained, continuous improvement systems rooted in ongoing data analysis. (Chenoweth, 2009)

Highly effective leadership also provides clarity of purpose and strategic planning, leads collective inquiry into best practice and current reality, is action orientated, focuses on results, and builds strong leaders who empower others. (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karnahek, 2006)

Change is often met with resistance, and good leaders know how to manage the adversity, conflict, and anxiety that often accompanies change. (Dweck, 2006; Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002)

Many strong leaders know how to have "courageous conversations" about race and culture as they lead to close the achievement gaps. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Schumann, Zaki, & Dweck, in press; Singleton & Linton, 2005)

Educator Insight

Dr. Demond Means, Superintendent, Mequon-Thiensville School District, shares his leadership story at: http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall/audio

"You put a caring administrator in every school and a caring teacher in every classroom, you'll close achievement gaps."

– Dean Hess
Principal
John Muir Middle School
(Wausau)

Task Force Recommended Strategies for
School & Instructional Leadership

Strategy
All Staff Responsible for all Students

Description
Staff develops an "all hands on deck" philosophy where every single staff member has a professional and personal responsibility for every single student attending school.

Application
St. Marcus Lutheran School has a "boot camp" at the beginning of the school year in which common and consistent expectations are identified for all staff and students. All teachers are then able to hold all students accountable for their choices.

Strategy

Capacity Building

Description

Staff utilizes best resources and expertise in the district or school to build the capacity of individual teachers, which will result in increased best practices in the classroom. Teachers are empowered to share their strengths with colleagues through explicit, embedded structures or practices during regular dedicated time. Data supports the needs and practices shared among staff members, and staff is supported and held accountable for implementing the new expertise and strategies.

Application

John Muir Middle School focuses on building the capacity of its teachers as a way to close the achievement gap. Through the Core + More initiative, teachers use data to identify students with learning gaps and schedule them into additional programming. For example, students who need extra support for learning mathematics are scheduled in a specialized math section to build foundational knowledge (focused on filling the gaps) and then a second section of core math.

Comprehensive Leadership Process

Description
Shared leadership at the school with a fully representative team establishes a collaborative process. All staff members give input into the school improvement process and develop short- and long-term goals that are measurable. Staff brainstorms professional development needs and plans, identifies required resources to effectively execute the action plans, and identifies structural and cultural "road-blocks" to the action plan.

Application
At **Notre Dame Middle School**, the leadership team focuses on the needs of English Language Learner students. Professional development is used to understand data and revise curriculum based on the data. The leadership team collaborates to make changes in the curriculum to meet the students' needs.

Strategy
Data Analysis

Description

Staff uses data to drive school-wide advancement and instruction; a centralized database for accessibility of student data informs lesson planning and instruction. This database is a compliment to student learner profiles, which should be incorporated.
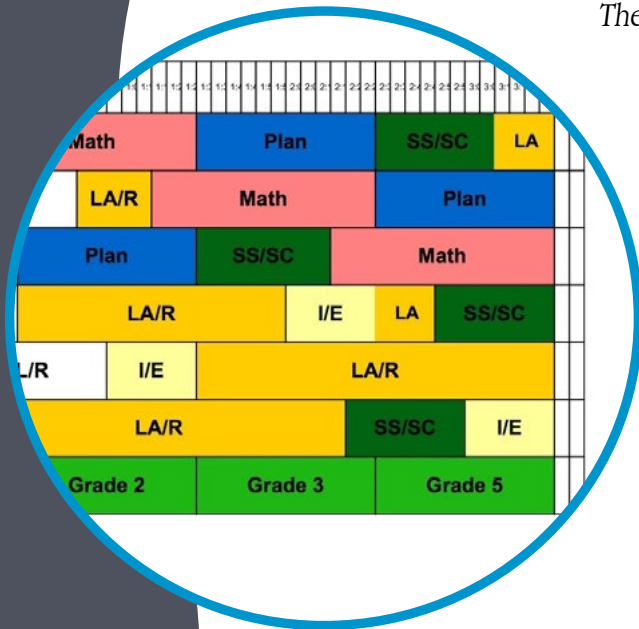
Application

Tenor High School uses data boards as a central location for data on students. Data includes Measures of Academic Progress scores, Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations, behavior referrals, and attendance. This data is used to differentiate instruction and to monitor students' progress more closely.

Intentional Design of Systems (IDOS)

Description

The purpose of IDOS is to streamline systems for both efficiency and fidelity. The school identifies systems that are and are not in place. The leadership team takes steps to design new systems and identify steps needed to ensure they are implemented with fidelity, oriented toward closing the achievement gap, and targeted toward under-served populations.

Application

Westside Elementary School has focused on one major system—the master schedule. Staff studied data and then aligned instructional blocks of time to ensure the school day was used efficiently. Staff created common blocks of the day where grade levels taught literacy, math, etc. In addition, staff aligned specials (i.e., gym, music, and art) to provide classroom teachers with common planning time.

Strategy

Math and Reading Interventions

Description

Students receive a variety of interventions, based on data, and the frequency and intensity of the interventions are based on student needs. Teacher recommendation should accompany assessment results when planning interventions. Fidelity to the intervention is key and must be results-driven with constant monitoring of the intervention.

Application

St. Marcus Lutheran School provides interventions to students by creating a consistent schedule across grade levels. For example, every second-grade class has reading and math at the same time. This allows staff to implement a 30-minute reading intervention time and a 30-minute math intervention time. Exit tickets and assessment data are used to form groups to either enrich or intervene.

Relationship Building

Description

Staff recognizes and places emphasis on the power and importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of all members of the school community. They create an environment of respect and rapport utilizing resources such as the Domain 2 of the Danielson framework to maximize student learning in a positive, safe, and healthy school environment.

Application

Menominee Indian High School teachers build a positive classroom culture and build relationships with students by using culturally responsive techniques and attending local community cultural events. Teachers recognize and celebrate students' cultures, which helps to build positive student–teacher relationships.

School and District Common Planning

Description

Schools schedule planning time that occurs within a school and includes core classes, teams, grade-level, or department-wide planning. This approach also can include district-wide planning, depending on the size of the district. Teams use common planning time to problem solve, share best practices, analyze student data, and make curricular decisions collaboratively.

Application

Starbuck Middle School uses team planning for many purposes (analyzing data, writing assessments, professional development, etc.) and focuses on student success and collaborative planning to support struggling students. Staff also uses common planning time as a time to meet with parents.

Strategy

Shared Vision and Leadership

Description

The vision is that all students will learn and grow with resources aligned to accelerate growth for students behind grade level. School-based leadership is intentional, shared, strategic, and inclusive. Building leaders drive and monitor the goals to align with school vision. Permanent visuals (data walls, Google docs) provide real-time feedback on student proficiency.

Application

Robinson Elementary School developed a shared vision by engaging all stakeholders, and they use this process to make shared decisions to address their achievement gaps.

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Strategy

Instructional Coaches

Description

Instructional coaches and interventionists build teacher capacity and are used strategically to improve universal instruction rather than working exclusively with small numbers of students.

Application

Westside Elementary School uses instructional coaches to help guide fellow teachers in studying and implementing best practices in teaching. An instructional coach works with a classroom teacher and an English Language Learner specialist to develop and support the teacher's capacity for teaching reading.

"You have to have approaches that encourage all students to engage with one another."

– Jill Schmoldt
Instructional Coach
Westside Elementary School
(Sun Prairie)

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Strategy
Professional Learning Communities

Description

Professional learning communities allow educators a collaborative format to examine subgroup data and specifically target learning deficits in students. Professional learning communities allow teachers to learn from each other by studying best practices and sharing their own expertise in order to create optimal learning environments that will ensure learning among these subgroups.

Application

James Fenimore Cooper School has focused on vocabulary development, which was a need for many of their students. Teachers reviewed the current research on vocabulary and created and shared a vocabulary station.

Achievement Gap Web Resource: statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall

Next Steps for Educators

As they worked, the task force stood on the shoulders of Wisconsin scholars, educators, and community leaders who have long raised concerns and proposed solutions to close the troubling gaps between students of color—American Indian, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students—and their White peers.

The task force recognizes that a coherent approach to these strategies is essential, and that a unified commitment within a district or school has an additive effect. The task force recommends that schools and districts commit to closing achievement gaps through strategic planning, bold vision, and effective leadership.

The task force believes that individual classroom teachers can and should implement strategies with attention to race and culture in their spheres of influence. The task force encourages classroom teachers to reflect on their own practices, increase their cultural proficiency, and close the gaps for children in their classroom.

The focus of the task force was on the classroom and school, and the strategies in the report reflect this focus. Schools committed to excellence for all students must honor the families and involve the community as experts in the change process.

Based on the task force's work, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction will launch in fall 2014 an interactive website with tools, resources, and research on closing the gaps. The department is using the task force's framework to organize the interactive resources and to provide tools for educators to reflect on their practice. Going forward, the website will serve as the interactive clearinghouse on closing the gaps, and the task force suggests that districts link to **statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall.**

Following in the footsteps of those who have come before, the task force hopes that through sharing their stories, they inspire their fellow educators to commit to closing the achievement gaps and *promoting excellence for all children.*

> "We learned it was us who needed to change."
>
> — Dean Hess
> Principal
> John Muir Middle School
> (Wausau)

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School Profiles (2013-14 School Year)

School	Enrollment	% Economically Disadvantaged	% ELL/ LEP	% Students w/ Disabilities	% American Indian	% Asian	% Black	% Hispanic	% Pacific Islander	% White	% 2 +
Bruce Guadalupe Community School (Milwaukee)	1027	76.8	19.1	8.3	0.0	0.1	0.1	97.2	–	2.6	–
Chegwin Elementary (Fond du Lac)	363	67.2	19.8	22.9	0.6	6.3	4.7	25.9	–	57.0	5.5
James Fenimore Cooper School (MPS)	430	57.9	2.3	25.1	0.7	7.2	9.1	30.9	–	51.9	0.2
Jeremiah Curtin Leadership Academy (MPS)	336	81.5	5.4	14.0	1.8	6.5	17.3	51.8	0.3	21.7	0.6
John Muir Middle (Wausau)	945	48.4	12.3	12.1	1.3	19.0	2.1	4.0	–	69.7	3.8
Kennedy Elementary (Janesville)	384	45.3	8.6	10.7	0.5	1.6	3.9	11.5	–	77.3	5.2
Leopold Elementary (Madison)	713	73.8	38.1	11.4	0.7	2.4	29.2	37.7	–	23.1	6.9
MacArthur Elementary (Green Bay)	291	57.4	5.5	11.7	13.7	2.4	4.5	9.6	0.3	59.1	10.3
Menominee Indian High (Menominee Indian)	252	73.8	–	31.7	92.5	–	–	4.0	–	–	3.6
Nathan Hale High (West Allis-West Milwaukee)	1625	42.0	2.0	9.6	1.6	3.4	7.1	15.8	0.2	70.0	2.0
Notre Dame Middle (Milwaukee)	263	data not available									
Robinson Elementary (Beloit)	445	79.8	17.8	10.3	1.3	1.1	23.8	31.2	–	36.0	6.5
Saint Marcus Lutheran School (Milwaukee)	711	data not available									
Starbuck Middle (Racine)	765	75.3	15.4	20.8	0.7	0.8	32.2	28.1	–	36.1	2.2
Tenor High School (Milwaukee)	223	83.0	3.6	9.9	1.3	2.2	33.6	45.7	–	17.0	–
Webster Stanley Middle (Oshkosh)	364	61.3	3.8	18.1	0.5	7.1	6.3	5.8	0.3	77.7	2.2
Westside Elementary (Sun Prairie)	411	57.2	13.1	15.1	0.2	4.9	18.2	16.5	–	48.7	11.4

Sources: The Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard by the Department of Public Instruction (WISEdash Public Portal Certified View) and the Private (non-public) Enrollment Master by the Department of Public Instruction.

For More Information...

For more information on *Promoting Excellence for All:*
A Report from the State Superintendent's Task Force on
Wisconsin's Achievement Gap please contact:

Scott Jones, PhD
Special Assistant
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster Street
Madison, WI 53707
(608) 267-9269
scott.jones@dpi.wi.gov

http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall