

Transforming Public Education: A Regional Call to Action

March 2010

Seeing the possibilities through the eyes of our children

CESA #1



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The mission of schools is *shifting*

Introduction

Public education in Wisconsin is at a crossroads. The current system is too expensive to sustain, given the financial crisis and changing economic structure in the state. Yet the need to prepare students to be competitive workers and responsible citizens is greater than ever. Ensuring the success of all students will require hard work, innovation and systemic transformation. To this end, the CESA #1 superintendents participated in a regional learning community initiative in the fall of 2009 to examine the current state of education, create a vision for the future, and develop a set of policy recommendations and implementation strategies. The goal is to prepare our next generations to meet the challenges and expectations presented to them by a rapidly changing society and at the same time to ensure that school systems are more financially sustainable in the future.

The work identifies:

- The problem we need to solve
- The nature of the challenges schools face if they are to be successful in the 21st century
- The history of public education and current reality in which schools exist
- The fiscal challenges facing schools and the State of Wisconsin
- The core purposes of education and the benefits of focusing on the whole child when educating students
- The nature of the transformation needed to create the schools our society needs
- The variety of conditions, traditions and restrictions—real and perceived—that stand in the way of making transformation a reality
- A set of policy recommendations necessary to achieve the enduring vision of what schools can and need to become

The Problem

Schools were designed to accomplish a mission different from what they are charged to accomplish today. In fact, there are significant questions regarding whether the current system is capable of accomplishing its new mission, regardless of the amount of funding it receives. Many argue that there is not enough funding available to adequately support school systems as they are currently designed and functioning. In fact, substantial new funds need to be infused into the current system just to maintain stability. As a result, it is unlikely that increased funding will generate any significant new innovation and improvement.

America's public schools were designed at a time when assembly line manufacturing was the predominant career destination of youth. The workplace occupied by their parents looked much like the schools in which students were learning. The economy did not require that most students go to college or even finish high school. Schools were charged with preparing most students to work in an environment not unlike what they experienced in school: highly structured, without the need for high-level, independent thinking or complex behavior. Those students who were going on to college presumably would gain the skills they would need in advanced high school courses and post-high school educational studies and experiences.



Today, the needs and expectations of our society are much greater. Global competition, rapid and complex change, and the need to constantly innovate demand that virtually all students gain an education that equals or exceeds the level of the highest-performing students a generation ago. Yet today's schools, for the most part, are still structured to respond to a traditional manufacturing-based economy where high levels of education were neither required nor highly valued for all students. The workplaces of a large and growing number of adults look very little like today's school environments, and the skills adults are expected to employ far exceed what they developed during their formal education.

Wisconsin's manufacturing-based economy is under great pressure as a result of the current economic downturn. Unfortunately, our national economy will recover slowly and Wisconsin's recovery will be even slower. In fact, our economy will look different than even a few years ago by the time full recovery is achieved.

Meanwhile, simply spending more to increase the performance of today's schools is not enough. The fiscal pressure under which schools are operating means that any new funding available will be allocated to stabilize current operations and address growing legacy costs. Consequently, new investments will not necessarily result in improved outcomes. Even when these immediate and pressing needs are met, additional investments aimed at increasing innovation and performance predictably will fall short if they are not accompanied by extensive restructuring of the educational system. Our schools are perfectly designed to serve the needs of society 75 years ago, but the design is significantly misaligned with the needs and expectations of today's society. Serious efforts have been made to respond by adjusting and flexing within the current structure, but a variety of conditions, traditions and restrictions undermine the capacity and impact of these efforts and make them difficult and expensive to sustain. Sadly, each new infusion of funds in the current structure will realize a steadily diminished proportional return in improved results.

The Challenge

Preparing students for yesterday's, or even today's, economy and society is not good enough. We must look forward and transform our educational system to prepare students for a different and rapidly changing world. This challenge is greater and more complex than at any time in history, and we face great risk if we are unable to meet this challenge. It is urgent and unavoidable. Failure to respond not only places public education at risk, it also places the health and well being of our society in jeopardy. We must focus on the learning needs of students and what will ensure their life and work success in the future. We need to find paths to accomplish this task in an affordable way.

Customization, Competition, Collaboration and Creativity

The scale of change must reach the level of transformation. We must question and challenge our basic assumptions about how education is organized and delivered. Customization must play a much more central role in how we organize and deliver learning opportunities. In the end, the quality, flexibility and long-term usefulness of the education students receive will be judged by whether it prepares them for a lifetime of learning, changing and renewing their skills and knowledge.

We must look as far as we can into the future and discern what students likely will need as parents, workers, leaders, and citizens and provide as many tools, skills and experiences as we can to prepare them for success. Further, because of the population and size inequity between the United States and rapidly developing world powers such as China and India, we must prepare all, or virtually all, of our students to be productive, competitive contributors to the nation's and the world's economy.



The world's economy is rapidly changing from national and regional interdependence to completely global. Technical support for everything from computer glitches to tax preparation already occurs at a global level. Other aspects of the economy quickly will follow as jobs hopscotch to where low-wage workforces exist and high level, complex skills reside. Many predict that those who possess the ability to innovate, create, and quickly move new ideas and products to market will be the winners in the uncertain world of work.

The era of hiring employees with the basic skills of dependability, punctuality and responsibility to meet workplace needs has passed. While these skills remain important, they are inadequate to meet today's and tomorrow's workplace needs. Self-management, initiative, critical thinking, flexibility and independent learning skills are growing in importance and will become core entry-level skills of tomorrow.

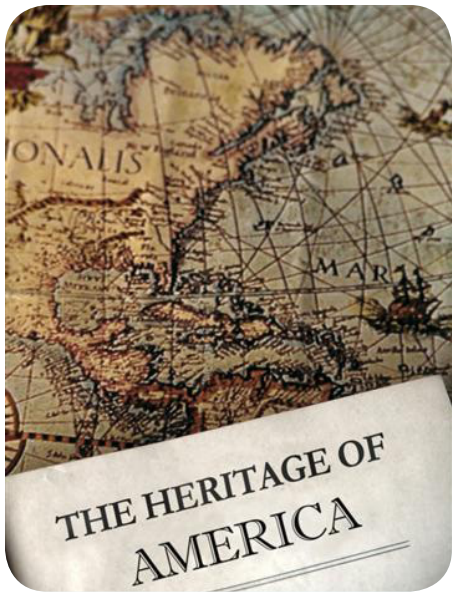
One thing is certain in the complex and changing economy and world, no one person will be able to know all that is necessary to solve tomorrow's problems and deal with the complexity of the challenges we will face. Collaboration skills will not be a premium for workers; they will be an entry-level expectation. These skills include, but are not limited to, face-to-face negotiation, problem solving, and idea generation. They extend to the use of technology to stimulate new ideas, nurture new concepts, and solve problems remotely. Inherent in this process will be the requirement to collaborate and communicate across cultures, languages and locations.

The cycle of moving new ideas, products or services to market, making improvements, increasing access to them, and their ultimate obsolescence, is shortening each year. Today's innovation quickly becomes a matter of common access tomorrow. Improvements happen quickly and are followed by yet another cycle of innovation and improvement. A differentiating skill for workers will be the ability to combine existing, but seemingly unrelated, ideas, concepts and products across disciplines to create new and better products, services and opportunities for society.

Students and workers must become informed and competent users of technology. The skills required in this area go well beyond the preparation offered in most schools today. This expectation will require new strategies, new approaches, and constantly improved and expanded learning. In response to this reality, technology needs to become a key vehicle for learning, not a side tool to simply improve or speed up what students already are doing. Educators will need to change their fundamental view of students use of personal technology in the classroom to take advantage of the power and flexibility it can offer to transform and accelerate student learning. Meeting this challenge will require a dramatic shift in the ability of educators to understand, use and effectively apply rapidly changing technology to their teaching.

The History and Current Reality of Public Education

A review of the historical and current function of schools in society reveals that schools play at least four identifiable roles: **educational, custodial, community building/ enrichment, and economic**. Looking to the future, these roles must be examined in light of necessity, affordability and relationship to priority expectations. It may be that the focus of schools must shift to better align with the highest priorities of our communities and greatest benefits to society.



Surprisingly, there is no reference to schools and education of the citizenry in the Constitution of the United States. Yet with the creation of the United States following the American Revolution, every new state asserted in its own constitution that public education was essential to the republic. In colonial times, the home and church provided for the education of most children. However, as the nation grew it became apparent that a common approach to education was needed to prepare citizens to participate in and preserve the new democracy. Several American leaders believed that the new republic could only survive if they had a virtuous citizenry, willing to place public good ahead of self-interest. Since the constitution was also silent on matters of citizenship, or specifically defining the requirements of citizenship, leaders turned their attention to the role of public education in developing citizens.

In the late 1800s, John Dewey noted that schools were the training ground of democracy. Horace Mann called schools "the great equalizer, a way to bring together children of varied backgrounds, teaching them literacy, moral values, and the patriotism necessary for informed citizenship." The history of citizenship in the United States is closely intertwined with education. Americans have looked to schools to foster unity and a sense of identity with our nation.

As key aspects of citizenship have been defined and redefined, the expectations of schools have changed as well. Education has been seen as both a public good with a collective economic and civic benefit, and a private good with benefits to individuals. In the 1800s, the focus of schools was on democracy and citizenship for a growing nation. By the 1900s, immigrants poured into America, families left their farms to work in industrialized cities, and child labor laws pushed youth out of the workplace and into schools as compulsory school attendance became the norm. The focus of schools expanded to include preparation for a vocation. In the 1950s, access to schools became the focus of desegregation efforts and laws, and later this effort expanded further to include provisions for students with disabilities. In the late 1950s, the race to conquer outer space and international competition brought on by Sputnik turned the focus to math and science and national preparedness. In the decades of the 1960s and 70s, schools focused on enrichment. The 1980s featured accountability in the aftermath of the "Nation at Risk" report. The focus for schools in the first decade of the 21st century was on closing the achievement gap and "not leaving any child behind."

Today's schools play four identifiable roles: educational, custodial, community building/enrichment, and economic.



Certainly the needs of our nation and its citizenry have been woven into the history of American public schools. Discussions about priorities for schools and education will most likely continue as long as public education remains a part of the political landscape. However, it seems important to recognize that schools today have become multi-functional institutions in our society, charged with roles and responsibilities ranging from education and child custodial services to entertainment and economic sufficiency.

The Educational role of schools: Imparting knowledge and developing skills remains the central expectation for schools. According to a 2005 Annenburg Public Policy study, Americans, for the most part, believe that schools should teach reading, writing, math, computer literacy, the difference between right and wrong, and universal values such as freedom and democracy. They also believe that schools should foster active citizenship and prepare students for careers. They further believe that schools should give students an understanding of history and the ideas that join Americans together. Providing an education for all remains the primary responsibility of public schools.

The Custodial role of schools: Americans also expect their schools to be custodial or care-giving institutions for children and youth. As other institutions such as the family, church and community have undergone changes and often have retreated from historic roles, the role of schools in our society has expanded. Schools have become increasingly responsible for imparting knowledge and skills in areas such as interpersonal relationships, health and hygiene, career education, and anything that falls under the broad umbrella of educating the whole child. Schools also have been charged with providing nutrition programs, counseling and human services, pre-school education, health and nursing, before- and after-school care, and drug and alcohol counseling, just to name a few. Meanwhile, economic pressure on families, the growth in both parents working outside of the home, and growth in the number of single-parent families have made the availability of schools as childcare providers a key piece of the economic puzzle for families. Increasingly, our society has taken for granted the role of schools as custodial as well as educational institutions.






Community Building and Enrichment roles of schools: Schools play a key role in many communities as a source of community pride and a place for public gathering. While each community may determine the activities they consider to be most important, sports and the arts often are high on the list of community expectations. In addition to developing attributes of teamwork and citizenship for students, these activities often bring together the community at large. Throughout our history, schools have been described as the center of communities, often because of the facilities, enrichment, and activities they provide. While this role is common in the United States, it extends well beyond what is expected and experienced in many other parts of the world, including many of the countries with whom we increasingly compete.

The Economic role of schools: While the primary responsibility of public schools is to provide education, schools also play a role in local, regional and state economies. The economic impact of public schools can be viewed from several perspectives. First, like any business or institution, the education system creates jobs and has an economic impact resulting from spending by the schools, their staff and visitors. Economic impact studies for businesses, facilities, stadiums and other community projects commonly demonstrate the connection between those entities and businesses on Main Street in local communities. The same economic relationship exists between schools and the communities they serve.

Second, like any business or institution, the staff of public schools and their families generate additional economic impact through their spending, entrepreneurial activities, and the value of their volunteer service. And third, unlike most organizations and businesses, public schools have a human capital economic impact because they increase the potential earning capacity of their graduates. In a global, competitive economy, a highly educated and well-trained workforce is directly related to a higher per capita income in a region. The economic impact of schools is substantially a result of the cumulative contributions of each of these factors.

Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of public schools have expanded throughout history as local communities, states and the federal government have realized the efficiency and accessibility of schools to deliver an ever-widening array of services and assume ever-growing responsibilities. While the fulfillment of those responsibilities may often present challenges, we must remember and celebrate the historic success of American public education. Today, more students attend school, for more days throughout the year, and for a longer period of time than at any other time in history. Without a doubt, education opens paths to success for people and those paths keep our democracy strong. No other nation in the world has been able to do what American public education does for all children.

The Financial Imperative

A highly-educated workforce is essential to the overall future and economic vitality of the State of Wisconsin. This key resource to fuel our economic engine requires a high level of commitment and ongoing financial investment. Unfortunately, there is a growing gap between the level of financial resources currently provided and what is needed to develop a competitive, highly-educated workforce within Wisconsin.

Education Level	Median Income
High School	$30,316
Bachelor's Degree	$48,724
Master's Degree	$58,708
Doctorate	$72,500

In 2007, the Southeastern Wisconsin School Alliance commissioned a study by NorthStar Economics, Inc. entitled "Brain Power, Public Schools and the Economic Future of Southeastern Wisconsin." In the study, NorthStar reviewed the economic impact of educational attainment on an individual person's earning power and the cumulative impact of educational attainment on the state's workforce and its economy. Utilizing U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2005, NorthStar showed that the median yearly earnings of a high school graduate was $30,316, while the median yearly earnings of an individual with a bachelor's degree was $48,724. With a master's degree, earnings were $58,708, and with a doctorate or professional degree, earnings jumped to $72,500. Over a lifetime, for a person working to age 67, NorthStar projected an individual with a bachelor's degree vs. a high school diploma would earn $1,102,500 more, and the lifetime earnings gap for an individual with a doctorate or professional degree vs. a high school diploma was $2,224,824. In addition, a state's economy was shown to be directly affected by the educational attainment of its workforce.

State	Educational Attainment Rank	Average Individual Income	National Economic Rank
Minnesota	11	$37,322	10
Illinois	15	$36,264	14
Wisconsin	33	$33,252	22

The average Minnesota resident earned $4,070 more per year (12.24 percent) than the average Wisconsin resident. If these numbers were to remain constant over a 40-year period, the average Minnesota resident would earn $162,800 more during his or her working years than a Wisconsin resident. If just a million Wisconsin residents earned an additional $4,070 per year, the increased earning power of the state would grow by $4.07 billion dollars in just one year!

Beyond the financial benefit that an education brings to an individual and the cumulative impact a highly educated workforce has on a state's economy, the NorthStar study highlighted that the quality of life for residents within a state or region with an educated workforce was also greatly improved. The study pointed out that educated people tend to be more productive, live longer, be healthier, and contribute more to their communities, while areas with a less-educated workforce tend to have higher health, safety and welfare costs. When a business looks to an area to locate or relocate, a readily available supply of an educated workforce and a range of quality-of-life factors are consistently identified as contributing factors in choosing one location over another.

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So how well is Wisconsin doing in terms of the investment needed to develop a highly-educated workforce that will attract business now and in the future? To answer this question, one needs to take a look at how K-12 schools are funded within the State of Wisconsin through a combination of local, state and federal resources. Since 1993, education funding has been a major component of the state budget, with approximately 40 percent of the overall budget being allocated for K-12 education. For the past 17 years, financial planning in school districts has been guided by a set of basic principles instituted by the state legislature that guide how schools are funded. These principles include Revenue Limits, two-thirds state funding support for schools, and until recently, a Qualified Economic Offer to control compensation for educational staff. These principles have exerted substantial influence on the financial resources available to local school districts.

Funding of public education in Wisconsin has generally been based on the concept of taxpayer equity. The underlying principal has been that equal taxpayer effort should yield generally equal educational opportunities within the public education system. While the system has generally achieved the goal of taxpayer equity, there remain significant variations in what local school districts can offer to their students as a result of the current funding system. In addition, the current funding system and the constellation of rules, regulations and other limitations on how funding is allocated and deployed in local school districts have resulted in significant inequities, barriers to innovation, and growing legacy costs that compete with annual operating priorities. In addition, funding provided by the state has failed to keep up with the cost of education confronting local school districts, often as a result of rules, regulations and legislative mandates imposed by the state legislature.

A Focus on the Whole Child

The continued success of our society depends, in large measure, on the education of our youth. Over the years, American public schools have assumed the additional responsibility of preparing youth for the world of work, first in their local communities or states and now across the globe. Yet schools cannot abandon their traditional role of guiding students to become responsible citizens. According to Charles Haynes, our job is to make sure that youth have the knowledge, the courage, and the habits of heart to rise to a meaningful cause. A cause that enhances public service and democratic ideas, a cause that develops the whole child, and a cause that prepares all youth for work with a toolkit of modern skills and learning strategies that leads to a meaningful life in an increasingly global, interdependent society.



To prepare students to be ethical, engaged citizens, Wisconsin communities and schools must give them meaningful ways to practice autonomy and responsibility in an environment that values the development of the whole child and nurtures an appreciation for the global nature of issues and challenges. The learning environment must also offer a comprehensive curriculum that supports the development of creative, adaptable, curious, self-motivated critical thinkers with a sense of responsibility for themselves, their families, their community and their nation.

The Whole Child Initiative of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) provides a framework to maintain our focus on learning while accounting for the needs of children. The recent direction in educational practice and policy has focused overwhelmingly on academic achievement. Certainly, academic achievement is one element of student learning and development, but only a part of a complete system of educational accountability. A comprehensive approach to learning must recognize that successful young people are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, motivated, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond their local experience.



In the early 2000s, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills identified the importance of critical thinking and problem solving, including understanding information and opinions presented in the media. The Partnership also noted the importance of developing knowledge of the economic system and global awareness. It recognized the importance of activities associated with good citizenship and the skills to work well with others, including the ability to clearly express opinions, collaborate in groups, and work in culturally diverse teams.

Preparing students for responsible citizenship and their role in a global society will require collaboration among educators—teachers, principals, and support staff—and the active involvement of community members to transmit appropriate values, traditions, skills and cultural norms to the next generation.

We must prepare our youth to become fully developed citizens who have the level of education and training needed for meaningful work, while promoting democratic principles. John Dewey, as a philosopher in the school of pragmatism, noted the connection between education and social action in a democracy. We also know that schools must meet the social, emotional and intellectual needs of children, an observation that connects our efforts to the well-being of the whole child as well as the needs of society. Each of these aspects of education support an understanding of democracy as more than a form of government. It is also a mode of associated living that moves beyond the barriers of class and race and leads to an understanding of the importance and influence of civic action.

Preparing students for responsible citizenship and their role in a global society will require collaboration among educators and the active involvement of community members.

We recognize that, like millions of their peers across the nation, many Wisconsin youth lack sufficient support and opportunities for the development of civic engagement; the development of cultural literacy; and the ability to adequately practice their creativity, adaptability, self-motivation, and critical-thinking skills. Achieving this outcome will require highly skilled teaching and interactive learning environments where teachers and students respect, explore and appreciate multiple perspectives surrounding social issues, including cultural, ethnic and racial diversity.

Our vision for teaching and learning in the future is a collaborative product of research and practice that identifies distinct elements connected to the enduring purposes of public education. We are confident that if these elements are pursued collectively, they can provide Wisconsin policymakers, educators and citizens with a common framework for dramatic improvement in alignment with the enduring purposes of public education.

Enduring Core Purposes of Public Education

- Develop the whole child academically, intellectually, socially and physically
- Nurture ethical citizens and leaders who contribute to and thrive in a global society
- Promote cultural literacy
- Foster creative, collaborative, adaptable, curious, self-motivated critical thinkers
- Develop skills to enable economic self-sufficiency
- Instill the democratic values, principles and beliefs on which our society rests

Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out that each new generation is a new people that must acquire the knowledge, learn the skills, and develop the dispositions to maintain and improve a constitutional democracy. We take this responsibility seriously and understand the challenge it represents for public education in our state with each successive generation.

Promising Practices

Simply changing schools will not be enough to build the capacity and create the learning outcomes demanded by the 21st century. Nothing short of transformation will be enough to meet the challenges ahead. We know that high-quality instruction and rich, deep learning will continue to remain at the core of high-performing educational environments. There is much we still need to learn if we hope to meet this challenge. However, there are a number of characteristics and components of transformational learning environments that current research appears to support.

We know that high quality instruction and rich, deep meaningful learning will continue to remain at the core of high-performing educational environments.

As discussed earlier, schools today play a number of roles—educational, custodial, community building/enrichment, and economic. The characteristics and practices presented below can support each of these roles as they offer flexibility and support for learning, regardless of specific applications.

Following are several examples of how school and educational practices can and need to be transformed to take advantage of what we know about quality learning and technology and other innovations that hold promise to improve our work:

Typical Current Practices	Examples of Transformative Practices
Age-based cohorts	Learning/progress-based grouping
Classrooms with randomly assigned age mates	Small, collaborative, flexible learning groups
Standardized solutions	Customized learning plans and processes
Indirect measures of learning	Direct measures of learning
Inefficient, partially productive systems	Focused, aligned, efficient learning organizations
Largely face-to-face teacher-directed instruction	Electronic, digitally-blended instructional approaches
Patchwork of standards and parameters driving educational organization and processes	Coherent, flexible, research-based, innovation-focused, teaching and learning processes
Largely print-based instructional materials and textbooks	Electronic/digital, highly customizable textbooks and on-line instructional and learning resources
Highly structured, traditional staffing models	Student-centered, relational staffing, featuring professional partnerships with experts, certified staff, community resource people, and mentors
Technology-assisted teaching and learning	Technology integrated and delivered learning options
Educational progress measured by seat time and credits	Progress toward graduation measured by authentic learning, using direct measures
Traditional annual school calendar and schedule	Instruction and learning delivered anytime, anywhere, 24/7 when students are ready to learn
Learning almost exclusively based in schools	Learning occurring where students are, with schools as the base from which students and teachers work

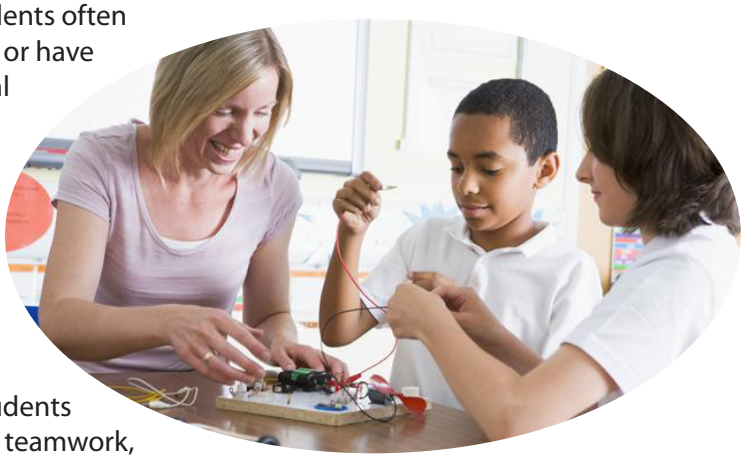
Relationships and Learning

We know that the single greatest factor affecting student learning is the quality of the teacher. The relationship teachers develop with their students serve as the foundation for learning, and the instruction and assessment practices utilized by teachers are keys to promoting the success of all students. To promote high academic standards, teachers need to create supportive but rigorous learning environments and develop positive, influential relationships with students. One of the best predictors of student effort and engagement in school is the relationship they have with their teachers, particularly for students who struggle in school. At-risk students who stay in school and succeed typically cite meaningful relationships with adults who encouraged, nurtured, and even pushed them as key factors in their success. Research has documented that strong teacher/pupil relationships and high teacher expectations have an impact three times as great for African American students and children in poverty as for Caucasian, middle-class students. Effective learning relationships feature high expectations for performance while holding students accountable and providing the support they need to succeed. Research also shows that effective teachers can generate as much as six times the learning gains produced by less effective teachers.

Transformation holds the potential to increase the sustainability of our public education system and meet the educational needs of the next generation of American learners.

Student Engagement

Meaningful, active engagement is a critical element in student learning. Research has documented that classrooms in which students are highly engaged feature active participation around relevant tasks. Students work harder and learn more when learning activities are personally and culturally relevant. Teachers can also nurture engagement by presenting tasks that emphasize higher-order thinking and are challenging but achievable. Students often become more engaged when they are asked why or have to explain their conclusions. In addition, individual accountability combined with opportunities for collaboration around rigorous content are powerful facilitators of student engagement.



Integrated, Active Learning

In today's and tomorrow's high-performance classroom, activities must be research driven and designed around the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy: synthesis, analysis and evaluation. Students must be able to work collaboratively and develop teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills. The curriculum must be connected to students' interests, experiences and talents within a real-world context.

Conditions, Traditions and Restrictions to Overcome

According to school superintendents in Southeastern Wisconsin, K-12 school districts face several challenges—real and perceived—that stand between where they are today and where they need and would like to be. The list of conditions, traditions and restrictions to overcome certainly varies depending on individual perspectives and experiences. However, there are several commonly identified challenges to overcome: structure, traditions, tools for change, and legislative requirements and restrictions.

Superintendents note that some aspects of the ***current structure*** of schools present challenges to the pursuit of transformation. For example, today's schools still operate on an agrarian calendar that leaves many students facing more than two consecutive months each summer without formal learning opportunities. This puts them at risk of losing much of what they learned in the previous school year. Students are still largely taught in age-based cohorts despite ample evidence that children and youth develop and learn at different rates within the wide array of skill and content areas in which they are expected to learn. We also know that students benefit most from instruction that is closely aligned with their development and readiness to learn.

In addition, time, rather than learning, is still the primary standard of measurement in most schools. Progress is measured by "seat time" and Carnegie units more than 70 years after they were originally introduced. Yet, learning is the central task of schools and should be the key standard for measuring student progress and determining readiness for promotion and graduation. Another challenge is pay structures for teaching staff that remain locked as they were 40 or more years ago. Meanwhile, considerable research and experimentation with new approaches in the private sector and other institutions similar to education have proven to be more responsive to the complex, creative, interpersonal context that constitutes the work environment in which professional educators serve. These and other structural aspects of today's schools and school systems must be addressed if we are to transform schools to perform at the levels expected and needed by our society.

Wisconsin school districts face several challenges—real and perceived—that stand between where they are today and where they need and would like to be.

The superintendents identified a number of ***traditions*** that stand in the way of transforming education. Most adults experienced schools in their childhood that were much like schools are today. As a result, they often cling to the status quo while idealizing schools of the past. Consequently, they tend to resist changes that are necessary to meet the challenges of an increasingly global society. Similarly, schools typically are seen as physical places, rather than as performing a function with roles, responsibilities, activities and outcomes for which accountability is assigned. As a result, radical changes that require thinking of schools as an organizing concept, rather than a place, can be difficult to accept. Staff, too, can be reluctant to let go of tradition and engage in transformation, fearing the overwhelming task of maintaining current practices and accountabilities while engaging in unfamiliar tasks in a radically changed environment that requires new and expanded instructional and organizational skills.



Availability of crucial ***tools*** to support transformation efforts also represents a challenge identified by the superintendents. Too often, measurement tools and systems to gauge and articulate the learning growth of students in real time, especially in core purpose areas such as citizenship, fall short. Tools needed to track, document and support the progress of educators and organizations throughout the transformation process often are not available. Another challenge relates to the struggle schools face in attracting and retaining the "best and brightest" to teach, nurture and guide students. Low status and compensation are among the sources of this struggle, but challenging working conditions, as well as feelings of lack of support and appreciation, also play roles in this challenge.

A fourth area in which challenges and barriers were identified relates to ***legislative requirements, administrative rules and other restrictions*** that stand in the way of transformation. The list in this area is long and varied. Yet changes in this area also represent the potential to create new options and the flexibility necessary to engage in and sustain real transformation. Following are the most frequently cited legislative and administrative rule-related barriers the superintendents noted as needing to be addressed:

- Inflexibility in requirements for days, hours and minutes of instruction
- Compulsory school attendance requirements that do not respond to the development and needs of individual students
- Credit-based progress and graduation requirements (4 credits of English, etc.)
- Standards that focus on inputs rather than outcomes and often are too narrow to encompass the range of learning required of students now and in the future
- Teacher licensing system that is inflexible and unresponsive to the changing needs of schools
- Under-funded, ineffective, prescriptive, out-of-date state and federal accountability systems that stifle innovation
- Over-regulated, inflexible, out-of-balance collective bargaining process
- Out-of-date and often counter-productive teacher tenure system
- Lack of flexibility for regular public schools to operate like private and charter schools that also receive public funds
- Artificial boundaries that define local school district structure and funding

Recommendations for Policy and Legislative Changes

Even high-performing schools and districts must move beyond the organizational and operational systems created in the early 20th century. Meeting this challenge will require increased flexibility, support and innovation. Yet, performance and operational accountability must be maintained and even strengthened to guide new approaches and transformational practices. We are ready to address this challenge. Indeed, we believe that there is no choice but to innovate and transform today's schools if we are to meet the expectations society holds for the education of Wisconsin youth.

In light of this reality and recognizing the promise that transformation of our schools can offer, we present the following policy recommendations:

- ***Develop*** or adopt learning standards for the State of Wisconsin that are future-focused, rigorous, comprehensive and reflect the needs of next generation learners
- ***Develop*** a comprehensive state assessment system that, to the extent practical, directly measures accepted next generation skills and competencies
- ***Ensure*** that the voices and engagement of teachers, students and parents are part of the transformation process
- ***Establish*** Innovation Zones throughout the state to encourage and support innovation by offering opportunities to implement what is known from current and emerging research to significantly improve education, support accelerated learning, and develop models that can be tested and documented for replication, growth to scale over time, and long-term sustainability
- ***Provide*** flexibility and targeted incentives to school districts within the Innovation Zones to design and implement transformative teaching and learning approaches:
    - Permit individual learning plans to serve as alternatives to state graduation credit/course requirements
    - Provide proficiency-based diploma options
    - Allow competency-based graduation requirements as an alternative to traditional credit requirements
    - Provide incentives for flexible learning environments that combine blended experiences (e.g. classroom face-to-face and e-learning)
    - Provide flexibility for school districts to modify and move beyond current requirements governing days, hours and minutes of instruction to allow learning to be a 24/7 activity
    - Provide flexibility in educator certification requirements
    - Establish a clearinghouse of information regarding student performance outcomes, organizational structures, and business plans of transformative schools and make them accessible to the public

- ***Support*** the expansion of transformative practices by:
  - Allowing full funding for public school choice students (Open Enrollment) accepted in Innovation Zone schools
  - Creating legislation to allow districts to build comprehensive, flexible compensation plans for staff that align with state-of-the-art, research-based, and proven models
  - Requiring Wisconsin educator preparation institutions to provide training in next generation learning, including effective strategies and interventions to meet the needs of all learners
  - Requiring educator preparation institutions to have a scholar/practitioner in residence to promote collaboration and communication with K-12 educational institutions in support of educator training and best practices
  - Creating more and better bridges from secondary to post-secondary education for students who accelerate their learning and graduate from high school early. Examples might include expanded internships and apprenticeships, varied early entrance options to technical and community colleges, and increased flexibility for early high school graduates to participate in four-year college programs without adding to the financial burden of K-12 institutions
  - Evaluating current rules and regulations governing the operation of schools relative to their usefulness in light of the unique and changing needs of learners, communities and our society

We are convinced that by transforming today's schools we can increase their efficiency by reducing the need for remediation of content and skills, increasing graduation rates and, in some cases, reducing ongoing costs for personnel and other learning support elements. These recommendations will enable us to prepare our next generations to meet the challenges and expectations presented to them by a rapidly changing society and at the same time to ensure that school systems are more financially sustainable in the future. We believe this is a vision worth supporting and funding.

Implementation Plan



A plan to implement this vision is being developed with broad-based input from key stakeholders and will be released as a separate document.

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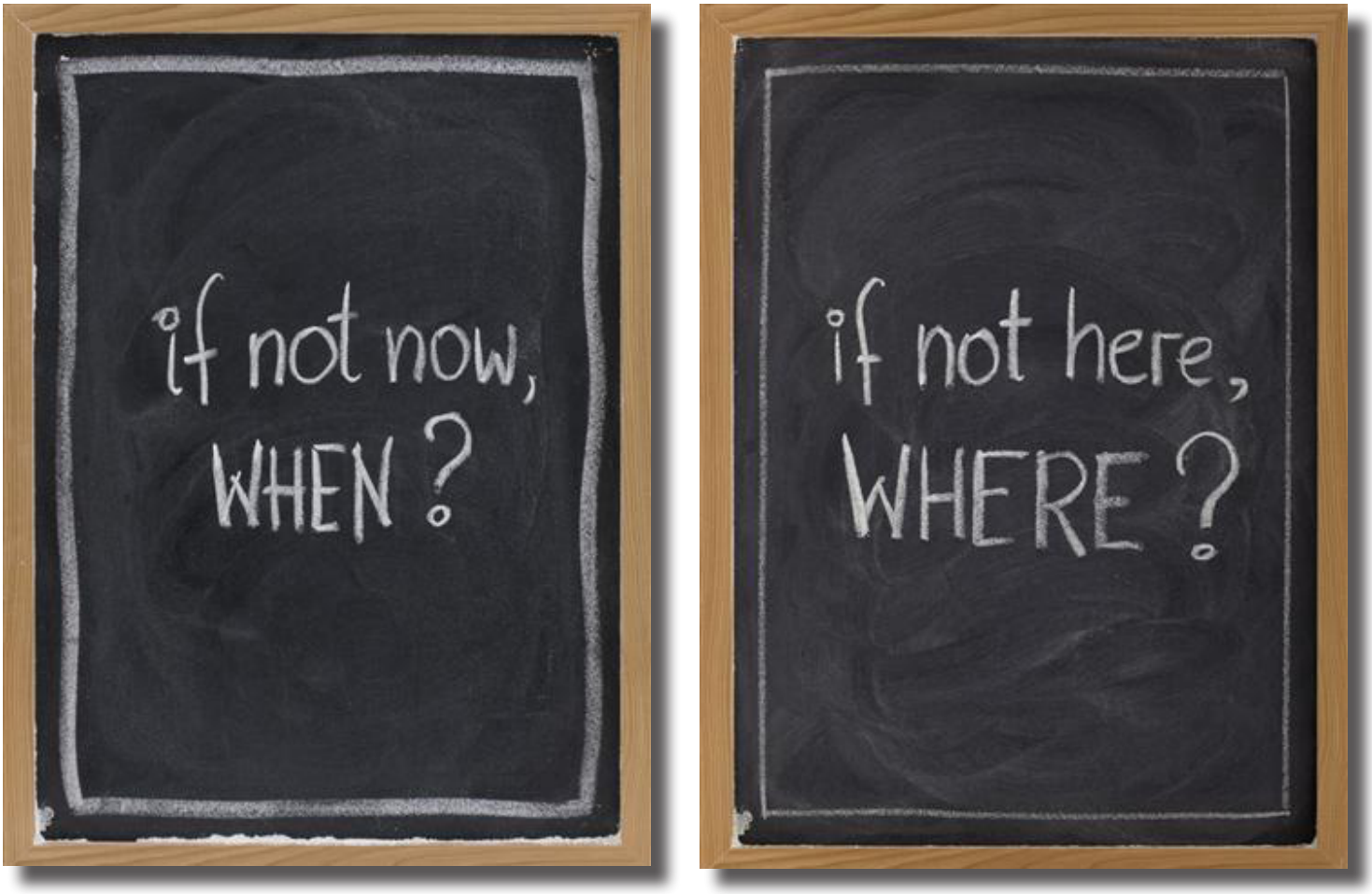
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