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ABSTRACT

Recommendations and an action plan for improving Wisconsin public schools' focus on teaching and learning, rather than on changes such as vouchers and privatization. Positive strategies designed to promote achievement are favored over punitive strategies or remedial actions. The action plan includes financial help to implement the recommendations. The major recommendations are: (1) class size reduction to 15 students per teacher through grade 5 and for core subjects through grade 8; (2) coordination of services with schools open until late evening hosting a variety of programs; (3) curriculum reform for academic achievement and preparation for life; and (4) staff development and accountability initiatives. These strategies are recommended for every school, but emphasis should be placed on schools in low-income or disadvantaged areas. Provisions are made for program evaluation and funding. (SLD)

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Urban Initiative Task Force

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN



Improving the Achievement of Wisconsin's Students

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

MC3C 37.5

Improving the Achievement of Wisconsin's Students

Urban Initiative Task Force Recommendations and Action Plan

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Foreword

Since the establishment of the Urban Initiative Task Force in January, task force members have generously contributed many hours of their time attending meetings, preparing for meetings, and organizing and participating in public forums. This kind of public service for our children represents a wonderful Wisconsin tradition.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these task force members who all have other commitments. Special thanks are also due to the nearly one thousand individuals who took time to participate in one of the forums held in Kenosha, Racine, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Madison, Beloit, Janesville, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Stevens Point, and Superior. These forums, including a student forum at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, were made possible because of the contributions of task force members, their staffs and employers; our own Department of Public Instruction staff; and private contributors.

Among others whose support we gratefully acknowledge are the following:

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
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Wisconsin Education Association Council
Association of Wisconsin School Administrators
The Milwaukee Journal
The Marcus Corporation
Schreiber Foods, Green Bay
M&I First National Bank of Superior
Wisconsin Power & Light Foundation
Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce Foundation
Wisconsin School Public Relations Association

Let us continue to work for the children, for a good education is still the single best ticket to the American Dream.

John T. Benson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Urban Initiative

Executive Summary

Urban Initiative Task Force Recommendations

July 1994

The Goal

Promote student academic achievement.

The Means

A contract between the Department of Public Instruction and school districts participating in this program to guarantee the achievement of students.

The Package

Class Size Reductions

Reduce class size to 15 students per teacher in kindergarten and first grade beginning in the 1996-1997 school year. Each subsequent year add a grade level to the class size reduction program to reach the 15:1 ratio through grade 5 and for the core subjects in grades 6 through 8.

Coordination of Services

Establish "lighted schoolhouses" open from early in the morning until late in the evening. These schools would house a variety of programs for children, families, and other community members. These programs would be offered by the school in collaboration with other government and community agencies.

Curriculum Reform

Develop rigorous curricula intended to promote student academic achievement and prepare children for the diverse civic and employment environment in which they will live and work.

Staff Development and Professional Accountability

Create a system of professional accountability that focuses on student achievement. The system will establish professional performance plans to promote student achievement; provide the resources and training necessary to ensure that professional staff have the skills required to teach students with diverse backgrounds; and provide for the removal from the schools of professionals unable to achieve agreed-upon results.

The Schools and Students Affected

Which children will be served?

The task force recommends these reform strategies for every school in the state. However, because the gap in student achievement is often a reflection of the gap between poverty and adequate income, any school that has an enrollment of 30 percent or more of students below the poverty line will be eligible for funds to implement this systemic reform package. School districts applying for funding will have to agree to

implement all four recommended reforms in the eligible schools targeted and sign an achievement guarantee contract with the Department of Public Instruction in order to receive aid.

How many schools will be eligible for aid?

Approximately 454 schools in 127 districts will be eligible when the program is fully implemented.

The Cost

How much will the program cost?

Preliminary estimates suggest that the cost of reducing class size in kindergarten and first grade in all eligible schools in the 1996-97 academic year will be approximately \$28.6 million for additional teachers. The other three reforms proposed do not have the same financial impact as reducing class size and can largely be achieved through changes in the law, administrative requirements, or school district policy. One reform, coordination of services, has the potential to provide more service for the same amount of money by eliminating overlap and duplication.

From where will the money come?

The first two years of the program (1996-97 and 1997-98) will be funded, with legislative approval, by reallocating grant and aid funds currently administered by the Department of Public Instruction. Beginning with the 1998-99 school year, the legislature will be asked to appropriate additional funding. Capital expenses associated with the plan will vary from district to district. Legislative action may be required to provide some districts with funds for new classroom space.

The Results

How will success be measured?

School districts funded under this program will enter into an achievement guarantee contract with the Department of Public Instruction. Each year the implementation of the program and its success in promoting student achievement will be assessed by the Department of Public Instruction and reviewed by an implementation and evaluation committee of citizens appointed by the governor and the state superintendent. There will also be a ten-year longitudinal study of the program's effectiveness.

Background

After listening to people across the state express their hopes and concerns about the education that Wisconsin's children receive, our task force determined that it is time for comprehensive change. Our state needs an educational system that can and will guarantee every student the opportunity for a high level of academic achievement.

Although our charge was to find ways to help students attending urban schools succeed academically, all of us on the task force quickly discovered that the conditions many people associate only with urban areas now appear in communities throughout Wisconsin. We learned that poverty—aggravated by lack of opportunity, systemic unemployment, racism and the like—holds in place many of the problems associated with cities including the failure of large numbers of children to succeed in school. We also learned that poverty is not just an urban problem. Poverty has become an unwelcome guest in many Wisconsin communities—even beyond the borders of our cities. Of the 14 counties with childhood poverty rates above 20 percent, all but one, Milwaukee County, are rural. All told, approximately 184,000 Wisconsin children now live below the poverty level.

We have read the research, listened to our fellow citizens, and deliberated for over six months. All of us have seen communities where the heavy hand of poverty is all too evident. All of us know families that have disintegrated; we have heard stories describing pervasive physical and psychological violence, or seen its effects firsthand. We believe that there is a direct correlation between violence and lack of academic achievement because violence causes a disruption of the learning process and is one factor that causes students to drop out. These issues are complicated and are not limited to urban schools. Citizens from all parts of the state expressed similar concerns. People are

- worried about youth violence;
- frustrated by the lack of coordinated services for children;
- concerned that school building hours do not accommodate the needs of today's families and communities; and
- interested in making sure students interact with school administrators, staff, and teachers who come from diverse backgrounds and are sensitive to the cultures of the children they teach.

We concluded that the best way to ensure that the expectations Wisconsin citizens have for public education in our state are met is to make recommendations that will help children succeed academically, regardless of where they might live.

The Role of the School

Schools should be places where students want to be, where they feel safe, and where they can succeed academically. Indeed, our discussion was framed in large part by our agreement that student attendance, safety, and most of all, improved achievement, were key results to be attained. It is our belief that improving the frequency and quality of the contacts between adults and children in the school setting will go far toward achieving these results. Our recommendations also reflect our commitment to long-term solutions.

In poor communities a lack of jobs, racism, and scarce resources often undermine the network of adult support so necessary for the healthy development of children. In these communities the school represents a focal point for building and maintaining a network of positive adult relationships around every child. School buildings can also serve as learning centers and recreational facilities for families as well as children. They can serve as a central location for community services

designed to support families and help them deal with the stresses that often lead to violence and abuse.

We realize that schools cannot, by themselves, do all that is necessary to ensure that Wisconsin children develop into productive adults. We know schools alone cannot solve societal problems such as family breakup, unemployment, racism or other forms of discrimination, either directly or immediately. The responsibility for changing the current educational state of affairs rests with those inside and outside of schools. Families and indeed the entire community share this responsibility. However, schools have a significant role. They have the potential to stabilize communities and encourage parents to be actively involved in the education of their children. And schools can promote the academic achievement of all their students.

We believe that state and local policies can and should ensure that teachers have the time and resources to get to know their students and parents and to give each child sufficient attention, ensuring academic achievement at the highest possible level. We believe that it is important to fully prepare children for the diverse civic and employment environment where they will live and work. And we believe it is time to free educators to educate, holding both teachers and *all other people* who hold a stake in the schools—administrators, board members, parents, and students—accountable for results.

Our recommendations focus on the process of teaching and learning rather than on changes such as voucher initiatives and privatization plans. We emphasize positive strategies designed to improve achievement rather than propose punitive or remedial actions. School finance was not part of our charge; however, we believe a more equitable system of school finance would amplify the power of our proposals. We have chosen not to address issues such as youth violence specifically, because other groups are currently addressing these issues.

Our recommendations are crafted into a package intended to accomplish the single purpose of guaranteeing that all Wisconsin children have the opportunity for high levels of academic achievement. We have taken care to advance recommendations that acknowledge what schools should do in cooperation with others to help create a network of support for student achievement, as well as what schools can do by themselves to promote student success. We realize each of our recommendations may have, at one time or another, been proposed before in some form. However, at no time have the actions we are proposing been combined in a single comprehensive package intended to promote student achievement and linked to a performance guarantee.

Focus on Achievement

We recognize that change is difficult because institutional forces typically work to maintain the status quo. Yet we are confident that our package of recommendations represents the kind of change needed to improve student attendance, help promote a safe environment for students and staff, and improve academic performance in any school that adopts them. We intend, however, that the state focus its financial resources where they are needed the most: on improving the academic achievement of poor children. Therefore, our action plan includes financial help to implement our recommendations for schools that enroll large numbers of children who live in poverty. If schools successfully help these children achieve and succeed academically the schools will contribute to breaking a cycle of poverty that has the potential to undermine the economic vitality of our state, weaken our democratic institutions, and threaten the well-being of every citizen of Wisconsin.

Improving the Achievement of Wisconsin's Students

Task Force Recommendations

- Reduce class size to 15 students to one teacher in all classrooms in kindergarten through fifth grade and 15 students to one teacher in core subjects in grades 6-8.
- Coordinate health and social service programs intended to serve children and their families with educational and recreational programs and student services offered through the schools in order to make every school building a "lighted school-house," open from early in the morning until late in the day to serve students, their families, and other community members.
- Develop rigorous academic curriculum that accurately reflects the contributions of the diverse population of the United States to our history, culture, and society.
- Create a system of professional education, training, and accountability that provides the resources necessary to ensure that the professional staffs of schools have the skills required to teach students with diverse backgrounds and provides for the removal from the schools of professionals unable to achieve agreed-upon results.

Action Plan

We recommend that the following achievement improvement package be adopted by every school in the state. However, we specifically propose the creation of a voluntary program to provide an incentive for the implementation of the package in schools serving the children most in need. Districts with schools having an enrollment of 30 percent or more students below the poverty line may apply for additional funds to enable the eligible schools to take the proposed actions. We recommend that schools awarded funds for taking part in this program be required to take all of the actions detailed in the achievement improvement package.

Achievement Improvement Package

Class Size Reductions

In participating schools, the school district must agree to

- reduce class size to 1:15 in kindergarten and grades 1-5 and reduce class size to 1:15 in mathematics, English, science, and social studies in grades 6-8.

To support these school district actions, the state will

- pay for the cost of salary and fringe benefits for each additional teacher necessary to achieve the required class size reductions.
- allow any district that the Department of Public Instruction certifies that does not have the space to make the required reductions in class size to "recapture" (add to their base under the revenue cap) any levy authority they had but did not fully use in the years since the revenue cap has been in place. Funds "recaptured" may only be used to pay for the space necessary to meet the class-size reduction requirements of this program.

Coordination of Education and Human Services

In participating schools, the school district must agree to

- keep the school buildings open from early in the morning until late in the evening.
- work in collaboration with community organizations and other service providers to make expanded educational and recreational opportunities as well as a variety of community and social services available in the school building to children, families, and other community members.

To support these school district actions, the state will

- appoint a task force to identify obstacles to the sharing of data among service providers and make recommendations for changes in the law necessary to remove those obstacles.
- reorganize existing programs and funding categories to bring about better coordination of existing health, educational, and social services intended to serve children and their families. Under this reorganization the following should occur:
 - The legislature, based on the recommendations of an independent review panel and with the advice of the chief executive of each affected state agency, will consolidate existing aid programs to create fund pools to pay for the services that local communities determine are the most effective ways of helping children and their families and promoting student achievement.
 - The legislature will direct each county to establish or identify a family/student commission to solicit, review, and recommend approval of proposals to be funded out of this statewide funding pool. This commission will include representatives of the major providers of public, private, and nonprofit health and human services, as well as parent groups.
 - Proposals will be reviewed by county family/student commissions to ensure that administrative costs are held to a minimum and that services are not duplicated.
 - Collaborative projects will be given preference for funding by county family/student commissions. Collaborative proposals from schools and service providers which contribute to school facilities being open from early in the day until late in the evening and/or being open throughout the year will receive the highest priority.

Rigorous Academic Curriculum That Incorporates Diversity

In participating schools, the school district must agree to

- guarantee to provide a rigorous academic curriculum intended to promote student academic achievement and prepare children for the diverse civic and employment environment where they will live and work.
- review the school's current curriculum in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction and with the participation of the school's teachers, administrators, and community members, to determine how well it promotes student achievement and prepares students for life and work.
- establish a developmental plan that indicates the extent to which the school's curriculum currently includes the contributions of women and minority group members, outlines any changes that may be necessary to make the curriculum more accurate and relevant, and provides a timeline for accomplishing those changes.
- require that teachers and administrators participate in a training process about multicultural education; first to learn it themselves, and second to infuse it into their curricula to help promote student achievement.

To support these school district actions, the Department of Public Instruction will

- provide technical assistance to participating schools to help them develop rigorous academic curricula that accurately reflect the contributions of the diverse population of the world to the history, culture, and society of the United States.
- offer workshops and training seminars to help the professional staff of participating schools effectively implement their curriculum.

Staff Development and Professional Accountability

In participating schools, the school district must agree to

- develop a program for all new teachers, support staff, and administrators that helps them make the transition from the university or their previous school to their current assignment. This program must last at least a year and draw upon current knowledge from successful programs.

- provide time for school teachers, administrators, and support staff to collaborate and plan.
- require that each teacher, administrator, and support staff member submit a professional development plan, focusing on how the staff member will help promote student achievement. The plan must include a method by which the staff member will receive feedback about the success of his or her efforts from a variety of sources, such as peers, parents, and students.
- regularly review staff development plans and processes to determine if they are effective in helping to improve student achievement.
- provide an evaluation process for professional staff members that contains the following elements:
 - identification of individual strengths and weaknesses.
 - a clear description of areas in need of improvement.
 - a support plan that provides opportunities to learn and improve.
 - systematic documentation of performance in accordance with the plan.
- ensure that the staff evaluation process allows affected parties to comment on and contribute to revisions in the evaluation process.
- dismiss staff members whose failure to learn and improve has been documented over a two-year period.

To support these school district actions, the Department of Public Instruction will

- develop a system to integrate the credit/clock hour requirements for teacher recertification with the (school district) staff development plans of participating schools.
- facilitate the collaboration of school districts, colleges, and universities and the larger community in planning and implementing staff development programs.
- convene a working group to develop an urban certification program for teachers and administrators. The group will include teachers, administrators, parents, and community members as well as representatives of universities and the Department of Public Instruction.
- identify and work to remove barriers that impede the entry of people of color into the teaching profession.
- review the process of alternative certification for those people already holding degrees with the goal of speeding their entry into the teaching profession.

Performance Guarantee

The people of Wisconsin have a right to know whether the actions taken pursuant to these recommendations are effectively promoting the academic achievement of Wisconsin's children. Therefore, we recommend the following three accountability measures.

An Achievement Guarantee

School districts will sign a contract with the Department of Public Instruction for each school seeking funding. The contract will describe how the affected school will implement each of the elements of the achievement improvement package. The contract also will establish the improvements in student achievement that the schools expect and detail how those results will be measured. The Department of Public Instruction will assess each school's performance annually. Any school that repeatedly fails to meet the terms of its contract will have the additional funding it has received to implement the achievement improvement package withdrawn by the Department of Public Instruction.

A Longitudinal Study

The legislature will fund and direct the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to conduct a ten-year longitudinal study to establish the effect of implementing task force recommendations on student achievement. The State Superintendent will issue yearly progress reports on the research.

A Citizen Implementation and Evaluation Committee

The legislature will fund, and the governor and the state superintendent will jointly appoint, a citizens' implementation and evaluation committee to review progress in implementing the achievement improvement package and assess the overall success of the program. This committee will issue a yearly report to the state superintendent, the governor, and the legislature containing its findings and recommendations. The implementation and evaluation committee will be appointed by July 1, 1996, and will have a ten-year life span.

Implementation

Class-size reductions will be phased in over an eight-year period. In the first year (1996-97), districts applying for aid must agree to reduce student teacher ratios for kindergarten and first grade in the eligible schools. A grade per year will be added to the program until it is fully operational in all grades K-5 and in all core subjects in grades 6 through 8. All other elements of the reform package must be fully implemented in participating schools in the first year of the program. In cases where existing law prevents the implementation of these recommendations we recommend the laws be changed so as to allow for implementation.

Funding

During the first two years of operation, the state will provide the money to hire the additional teachers necessary to reduce class size at participating schools by reallocating grant and aid funds currently administered by the Department of Public Instruction. The legislature will need to allocate additional funds beginning with the 1998-99 school year.

Districts will be expected to use their own resources for costs related to collaboration, curriculum revision, and staff development. To free up existing resources to pay for program requirements, participating schools will be allowed to request an exemption from state laws administered by the Department of Public Instruction. Schools could, for example, receive waivers from requirements such as the number of observance days and the 20 standards. They could not, however, receive waivers for laws related to nondiscrimination, confidentiality of pupil records, state assessments, reporting and data collection or accounting, or from contract or collective bargaining laws, licensing requirements, or employee rights or benefits unless the achievement guarantee contract requesting the exemption was signed by a representative of every affected group of employees.

Urban Initiative Task Force

Appointed January 1994 by State Superintendent John T. Benson

Alex Molnar, Chief of Staff

Mr. Molnar is a professor in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). Prior to joining UWM in 1970, he taught high school social studies in the Chicago area. Mr. Molnar is a member of the Urban Education Advisory Council of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and has written extensively on educational policy and practice. He hosts, "Alex Molnar on Education" on Wisconsin Public Radio.

Sheila Dianne Cochran, Co-chair

Ms. Cochran is recording secretary, UAW Local 438, and works as production group leader in circuit board assembly at Delco Electronics in Milwaukee. She is president of the Fair Lending Coalition in Milwaukee and serves as a commissioner of the City of Milwaukee's Fair Housing and Employment Commission. Ms. Cochran is an elected delegate to the Milwaukee County Labor Council and an active member and official representative of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Milwaukee Chapter.

Rita Tenorio, Co-chair

Ms. Tenorio is the program implementor at La Escuela Fratney, a Milwaukee public school. She has played a major role in establishing the innovative program at La Escuela Fratney, the only school in Wisconsin with a dual immersion, or two-way bilingual program. Wisconsin's 1990 Elementary State Teacher of the Year, Ms. Tenorio was a kindergarten teacher for 20 years and served as vice president of the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association. She is co-editor of the educational journal, *Rethinking Schools*.

Charles F. Wright, Co-chair

Mr. Wright is the chairman and CEO of the Fall River Group, Inc., Mequon. He is also vice chair of Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin and vice president of Second Harvest Food Bank of Wisconsin. Mr. Wright is a trustee of the University School of Milwaukee.

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