

News Release

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Evers delivers statewide school accountability

State's NCLB waiver request holds all schools receiving public funds accountable for student outcomes

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers submitted Wisconsin's application for a waiver from portions of federal education law to create a better and more comprehensive accountability system that calls for increased rigor that will result in better outcomes for all students.

"Wisconsin is headed in a new direction," Evers said. "Our waiver request is a broad package of educational reforms that we need to prepare our students for college and careers. Our new accountability system is better than what we have been able to do under current federal education law; it focuses on results and reflects the work of the School and District Accountability Design Team."

The state's waiver request calls for all schools receiving public funds — both Title I and non-Title I public schools, charter schools, and parental choice program schools — to be held accountable for outcomes in four priority areas: student achievement, student growth, closing achievement gaps, and on-track to graduation and postsecondary readiness. Cut scores will be established for these outcomes along the zero to 100 accountability index, placing schools in one of six performance categories.

"This waiver request keeps my promise to hold all schools accountable," Evers said. "I am eagerly awaiting legislation that also keeps this promise."

As part of the waiver request process, the U.S. Department of Education asked Wisconsin to provide a list of the lowest performing schools in the state based on currently available reading and mathematics achievement data. This list is preliminary and will be updated in 2013 when three years of assessment data will be available for all schools.

Evers laid the groundwork for Wisconsin's reform efforts when he adopted the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics in June 2010. Those internationally benchmarked standards are the foundation for changes in teacher training and professional development, classroom instruction, and new assessments that will be field tested in the 2013-14 school year. Student proficiency in the Common Core State

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Standards will be measured through assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Common Core Essential Elements will be assessed through the Dynamic Learning Maps Assessment, which will replace the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities. Assessments will be conducted in spring in grades three through eight and grade 11, starting in the 2014-15 school year.

The waiver request also includes provisions for teacher and principal evaluations. Multiple measures of educator practice and student outcomes will be used in the evaluations, which will be tied to each educator's professional development plan. The intention is to develop a fair, valid, and reliable process that supports continuous improvement of educator practice.

The state superintendent is recommending increased graduation standards to reflect 21st century expectations. Currently, Wisconsin state law requires 13 credits for graduation, the lowest number of credits in the nation. Starting in the 2016-17 school year, graduates would need three credits in mathematics and science, an increase from two, and an additional six and one-half elective credits for total 21.5 required credits. The addition of elective credits reflects wide public and teacher comments to honor the value of art, music, world language, and technical courses as part of a robust high school education. The state superintendent is also advocating for increased competency-based and dual enrollment opportunities for students.

"Most of our school districts already require more math and more elective credits for their graduates. We need state law to match current practice and bring Wisconsin up to the national average for graduation requirements," Evers said. "In these economic times, districts must collaborate to provide multiple pathways for students to access rigorous coursework."

Other highlights from Wisconsin's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Request include

- Using proficiency levels based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as an interim standard for the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations until new assessments are implemented in the 2014-15 school year.
- Recommending the use of and requesting funding for ACT assessments (EXPLORE, PLAN, ACT, and WorkKeys) to track progress toward college- and career-readiness at the high school level.
- Personalizing learning through technology and Universal Design for Learning principles for planning and development of resources for standards implementation, assessments, and instructional practices.
- Using a cell size of 20 for subgroups of students as requested by disability advocacy groups and, if necessary, combining subgroups to ensure that English-language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students receive the close monitoring that these traditionally high-needs groups require.

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- Requiring schools to meet performance expectations for test participation (95 percent), dropout rates (less than 6 percent), and student absenteeism (less than 13 percent) as part of statewide accountability.
- Waiving the Supplemental Educational Services (SES) requirement for Schools Identified for Improvement. Instead, schools would plan extended learning opportunities identified at the local level with input from parents and approved by the Department of Public Instruction.
- Expanding the capacity of Wisconsin’s Response to Intervention (RtI) Center to ensure a high-quality system of support that is based on research-based practices and provides additional intervention and support for students with disabilities and English-language learners.
- Establishing one statewide system of support for all schools, replacing the current system of supporting only the lowest-performing Title I schools.
- Recognizing top performing schools: Title I schools that are in the top quartile for poverty and show high achievement, schools that significantly exceed expectations, and schools that show the most growth on an annual basis.
- Implementing a statewide student information system for collecting and reporting data, including school and district report cards that will replace the required School Performance Report.

“Our waiver request is ambitious,” Evers said. “It brings together a number of initiatives that will help Wisconsin ensure that every child is a graduate ready for college and careers.”

Wisconsin is among 28 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico that said they intend to seek ESEA flexibility from specific requirements in federal education law, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Eleven states submitted NCLB waiver requests in November and have received approval from the U.S. Department of Education through a peer review process. The DPI will submit its waiver on Feb. 22.

To receive waivers, all states must demonstrate how they will use flexibility from NCLB requirements to address four principles: college- and career-ready expectations for students; state-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; support for effective instruction and leadership; and reduced duplication and unnecessary burden. The DPI posted a draft request online on Jan. 23 and received more than 700 survey responses during a two-week public review period. The agency also conducted outreach to thousands of educators and education stakeholders to refine its waiver request.

“Recommendations that went into our waiver request came from the collaborative efforts of many educators, policymakers, parents, and citizens of our state,” Evers said. “The request respects the intent of these working groups and our shared vision for improving education in Wisconsin.”

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NOTES: Wisconsin’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Request, along with appendices and a summary of the waiver request, is posted online at <http://dpi.wi.gov/esea/index.html>. The list of identified schools can be found in the appendices (Attachment 9). This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2012_35.pdf.