

## Abstract

In July 2021, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will be under new leadership. The new head of Wisconsin's state education agency and their leadership team will inherit an education system that has and continues to endure unprecedented and longstanding challenges. It is crucial that the next state superintendent is provided with relevant information that will enable them to make the best decisions on behalf of Wisconsin's students and families, especially those traditionally underserved. This Initiative Inventory Summary is intended to support the incoming administration's understanding of an agency-wide project undertaken during 2019-2020 to strengthen and improve efforts to address the persistent gaps in equity, opportunity, and access present throughout Wisconsin's education system. This summary includes: background about the initiative inventory, a process and timeline overview, key data findings and limitations, lessons learned, and recommendations for consideration by the new administration. Also included are links to pertinent supporting documentation used during this process.

## Background

The National Implementation Research Network asserts that initiative inventories are typically conducted to guide an organization's review of past and current initiatives to produce a clear picture of existing initiatives, mandates, and resource commitments. Information and data collected can be used to explore the fit of additional initiatives with current work, guide decision-making to make room for new work, and assist with alignment of efforts (NIRN, 2020).

Seeking to guarantee every student has what they need to learn when they need it, DPI engaged two technical assistance partners - the Wisconsin-Minnesota Comprehensive Center for Region 10 (WMCC10) and the State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence Based Practices (SISEP) - to conduct an agency-wide initiative inventory. DPI's Cabinet conducted their initiative inventory during 2019-2020 for the strategic purpose of identifying potential areas of alignment, gaps, and overlaps across divisions relative to the agency's five focus areas:



- **Effective Instruction:** *Each student is taught by teachers using high-quality, standards-aligned, culturally responsive materials and practices*
- **School and Instructional Leadership:** *Each student's needs are met in schools led by high quality and effective educators*
- **Family and Community Engagement:** *Each student attends a school that authentically engages with families, communities, and libraries*

- **Safe and Supported Students:** *Each student learns in an environment that promotes social, emotional, and physical well-being and removes barriers to learning*
- **Meaningful Relationships with Students:** *Each student has meaningful connections with at least one adult in their school*

Specifically, the intended outcomes of the initiative inventory included:

- Identify current DPI initiatives and their alignment to the five priority areas using a common tool to collect data;
- Develop collective capacity and a consistent process to use inventory data that supports strategic decision making;
- Identify strengths and gaps in current initiatives; and
- Understand where alignment and integration efforts would improve implementation and equitable outcomes for all students.

## Process & Timeline Overview

The initiative inventory process, including protocols for data collection and use, as well as the survey questions administered using [Qualtrics](#), was developed through a collaboration between DPI implementation specialists, SISEP coaches, and WMCC10 leadership and staff. From February to July 2020, DPI Cabinet, directors, and their colleagues, participated in the initiative inventory process according to the general timeline of activities below:

Table 1: February to July 2020 Initiative Inventory Process & Timeline Overview

Date	Who	Activity
Early Feb 2020	DPI staff, SISEP, WMCC10	Develop initiative inventory survey questions and protocol
Mid-Feb 2020	Cabinet leaders and their directors	Complete Qualtrics survey
	DPI staff, WMCC10	Conduct data analysis and develop protocol for facilitating review/reflection with Cabinet leadership
	Cabinet leadership	Engage in facilitated data review/reflection to determine next steps for additional data reflection/review
Early Mar 2020	DPI staff, WMCC10	Develop review/reflection protocol and plan for facilitation with each DPI division
Mar-May 2020	Each DPI division executive leader with their directors	Engage in facilitated review/reflection of inventory data to further clarify initial data gathered, and leverage key criteria resulting in prioritization of high leverage strategies aligned to Cabinet’s five focus areas ( <i>see Criteria Consideration #1/Table 2 below</i> )

May-June 2020	WMCC10, SISEP	Further clean and sort data according to initiative and evidence criteria (see <i>Criteria Consideration #2 below</i> )
July 2020	WMCC10	<p>Presented data to Cabinet (see <i>Key Findings &amp; Limitations/Table 3 below</i>) in order to support their next steps to accomplish the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine division and cross-agency priorities related to the five focus areas, giving close attention to potential impact and improving equitable outcomes for all students</li> <li>• Identify opportunities for cross-agency alignment of priority initiatives and efforts</li> <li>• Make 2020-21 division/team budget decisions that reflect priorities and identify potential considerations for 2021-22 budgets</li> <li>• Approve a common tool and protocol to evaluate initiatives connected to priorities</li> </ul>

### Criteria Considerations

As data were generated and used within the process outlined above, two critical needs emerged that prompted further refinement and analysis: 1) articulation of key initiative terms through a rubric; and 2) criteria to determine what qualified as an initiative and which initiatives were supported by evidence. We briefly elaborate on each below.

- 1) Facilitated review/reflection of data with division leaders and their directors surfaced the need to develop a rubric that was then used by those teams to promote consistent examination of initiative data relative to key implementation components, including equity, evidence, capacity building, and data use for continuous improvement.

*Table 2: Initiative Implementation Rubric*

Component	4	3	2	1
Equity impact	This initiative has high potential to eliminate opportunity gaps if appropriately resourced.	This initiative has moderate potential to eliminate opportunity gaps if appropriately resourced.	This initiative has limited potential to eliminate opportunity gaps if appropriately resourced.	This initiative is not intended to directly eliminate opportunity gaps.
Evidence base	Strong evidence base exists for this initiative (Randomized control study data provides evidence base.)	Some evidence base exists for this initiative. (Quasi-experimental study provides data evidence base)	Little evidence base exists for this initiative. (Correlational study data provides evidence base.)	No evidence base exists for initiative, but there is a well-defined logic model.
Training and coaching	Consistent approach for training AND coaching is used to support the initiative.	Consistent approach to training OR coaching is used to support this initiative.	Inconsistent approach to training OR coaching is used to support this initiative.	No training or coaching is used to support this initiative.
Data use for continuous improvement	Variety of data (adult practice and student outcome) are consistently used to measure and evaluate implementation of initiative.	Variety of data (adult practice or student outcome) are inconsistently used to measure and evaluate implementation of initiative	Student outcome data are the only data used to measure and evaluate initiative.	Data are not used to measure and evaluate implementation of initiative.

- 2) The SISEP and WMCC10 team developed two additional criteria after division level review/reflection to analyze which entries qualified as initiatives and to determine what counted as an initiative's evidence base:
- a) Initiative Criteria: Based on NIRN's Active Implementation Frameworks ("[Usable Innovation](#)" and "[Exploration Stage](#)"), the following categories were used by SISEP to determine whether items included in the inventory could be deemed "Initiatives:"
    - **Yes:** Initiative has at least one usable innovation developed and that is used for training, coaching, assessment of effort and impact within the initiative, project, or strategy
    - **Maybe:** Initiative has a usable innovation selected with core components defined, or is a collection of ideas, one-time training, or dissemination
    - **No:** Initiative is not a usable innovation, but rather functions as a funding stream, assessment, or governance.
  - b) Evidence Criteria: WMCC10 developed a process to determine the criteria for evidence entries. Evidence statements related to each initiative's impact on student outcomes and adult practices were analyzed in order to categorize the claims and determine if there was enough information to rate evidence quality. Initiatives were sorted based on evidence presented for student and adult outcomes, then claims were assessed to see if data were reported relevant to expected outcomes and/or if there were specific studies referenced.

We next summarize key findings from the analysis using these initiative and evidence criteria.

## Key Findings & Limitations

Responses from the survey were analyzed using an Excel file. The file helped facilitate cabinet discussions about initiative prioritization. Several tabs were added to dissect the data into groups of initiatives that met, partially met, or did not meet the initiative or evidence standards.

Using the initiative criteria, 25 entries were identified as "Yes," 24 entries were rated as "Maybe" and 56 were rated as "No." Based on the evidence criteria (summarized [here](#)), more than half of the initiatives **did not include** evidence for either adult or student practices. Of those initiatives with some degree of evidence, about one quarter of them presented evidence with a measurable outcome and referenced data used to monitor progress.

# Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

## Initiative Inventory Summary



Table 3 summarizes entries rated using the evidence and initiative criteria.

Table 3: Initiatives and related evidence summary

Evidence determination	Met Initiative Standard (Yes)	Partially Met Initiative Standard (Maybe)	Does not meet Initiative Criteria
Met Evidence Standard (Yes)	4	6	
Partial Evidence ( <i>meets adult or student criteria</i> )	7	6	
Insufficient Evidence	5	4	
No Evidence Claim ( <i>answered No</i> )	9	8	
Totals	25	24	56

Of the 105 initiatives identified through the survey process, four were found to meet both the initiative and evidence standards. Among the entries identified as meeting both evidence standards and either meeting or partially meeting the initiative standards, four were in the Effective Educator focus area, three in School and Instructional Leadership, one in Family and Community Engagement, two in Safe and Supported Students, and none for Meaningful Relationships with Students.

These and other findings informed Cabinet discussions about what the agency considers as initiatives, gaps exposed in key agency priority areas, overlapping areas or redundancies, and evaluation criteria the agency uses to determine whether initiatives are implemented with fidelity and are having the intended impact.

While the initiative inventory process provided useful information for Cabinet discussions, there are some notable limitations in the data and criteria used to analyze results. First, the process was initially intended to be completed by Cabinet members who received guidance and were involved in introductory discussions regarding the process. However, due to time constraints and other factors, many delegated the task of completing the inventory to directors or assistant directors within their divisions. Since directors completing the inventory did not participate in the introductory discussions, this delegation may have yielded different approaches and determinations of what to enter. Second, respondents completed entries before initiative and evidence criteria were established and key terms provided using the rubric. Third, to expedite the process, the initial data entry was not facilitated. Finally, while two research teams worked to rate the initiative and evidence criteria, the ratings involved subjective judgements. These factors may have contributed to entry inconsistencies or missed information that would have changed the

evidence and initiative ratings, which suggests caution in applying the current results as the primary factor for major decisions (e.g., budget or programmatic termination).

## Questions for New Administration to Consider and Recommendations Based on Lessons Learned

Even with the noted limitations, the initiative inventory process yielded useful data about core agency priorities and generated productive cabinet discussions about the strategic direction of the agency. Key findings and related reflection questions are listed below for the incoming administration to consider as it begins the task of identifying its own priorities and ways to strategically support them. With improvements identified through this first experience, the initiative inventory process and learning reinforced the opportunity to:

### 1. Extend the learning.

*Finding:* There is an opportunity to extend the learning that began with the initiative inventory process to create greater alignment across initiatives, improve coherence, and identify opportunities to strengthen priority areas.

*Reflection:* How can this work help with understanding the previous and incoming administrations' strategic priorities?

### 2. Improve understanding of what works.

*Finding:* The initiative inventory revealed an opportunity to develop consistent and coherent evaluation and monitoring protocols and decision guides that would help to determine:

- a. Data/information gathering and use to support monitoring and evaluation
- b. Which programs will be formally evaluated externally and/or internally
- c. Consistent decision making processes based on results

*Reflection:* As strategic priorities are identified and enacted, how will they be monitored for implementation fidelity? evaluated for improvement? considered within the broader scope of enterprise decision-making (i.e., whether to continue/discontinue or revise)?

### 3. Address gaps.

*Finding:* One of the main priority areas, Family and Community Engagement, stood out among the five priority areas as having no identified initiatives with either student or adult practice data. The information gathered showed some duplication

and overlap in other efforts across the agency. Re-allocating some of these resources to Family and Community Engagement efforts is one possible way to use the initiative inventory information.

*Reflection:* Do the identified priority areas help the agency with a strategic focus on this priority? How might the information gathered promote a coherent, agency-wide approach to meaningfully engage families?

#### 4. Build staff capacity.

*Finding:* WI DPI has a diverse, dedicated staff working to meet the needs of the districts and schools they serve. The initiative inventory process demonstrated that a critical need exists to build staff capacity that ensures the use of more consistent approaches to selecting and strengthening initiatives that match an identified need aligned with Cabinet's priorities, and then effectively implementing and monitoring them.

*Reflection:* How can WI DPI build greater coherence across the work of the Department?

#### 5. Increase policy and budget coherence.

*Finding:* With improvements identified through this first experience, the initiative inventory process and learning reinforced the opportunity to:

- a. Narrow the focus of agency work to key, clearly defined priorities
- b. Use consistent processes to communicate about program decisions
- c. Use data and information to develop budget and policy guidance

*Reflection:* How can the information gathered through the initiative inventory process increase policy coherence?

After reviewing this summary and the accompanying links, WMCC10 and DPI implementation specialists are available to support the new administration with determining next right steps based on the questions and recommendations above.

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