

+



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

Please direct inquiries to:

John Forester, 608-242-1370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 19, 2014

School Administrators Alliance Presents Vision for Wisconsin Educational Policy

Organization of 3,000 educational leaders focuses on evidence for policymaking, not ideology

MADISON — Members of the School Administrators Alliance (SAA) have released a vision for Wisconsin educational policy, titled “Wisconsin’s PK-12 Pathway to World-Class Student Success.”

The SAA, an organization that represents more than 3,000 educational leaders in more than 2,200 schools across Wisconsin, has developed the vision as a way to use evidence to improve the state’s already strong public school districts, and thus moves away from ideology that too often pervades educational policy development.

A working group, which has convened regularly since last spring, has formulated the policy agenda to identify key policy issues, review relevant research and formulate specific policy recommendations. The group’s top goal is to realize the organization’s vision of allowing all Wisconsin students to graduate college- and career-ready. The focus of this work is on continuing to raise the academic bar for all students, while also closing gaps for lower-performing groups.

“In releasing this document, the 3,000-plus members of the School Administrators Alliance are seeking to improve our children’s educational opportunities by focusing on evidence rather than ideology, and raising the level of dialogue on educational policy in Wisconsin,” said John Forester, executive director of the SAA. “We hope this document will start a conversation about the impact of state educational policy on educational opportunity. When students, parents and business and community leaders explore the possibilities of how smart and pragmatic state policy can dramatically improve student learning, evidence-based policy will increasingly become the expectation.”

This policy agenda holds that:

- Education is among the most important determinants of success and prosperity in life, from health and lifetime earning potential to meaningful participation in civic life. Now, perhaps more than ever, the quality of education we provide our children determines not only their individual futures, but also the collective social and economic wellbeing of the entire state.
- Wisconsin adopted its constitution in 1848 mandating a uniform system of public schools throughout the state. Since that time, we have invested in a public education system that is among the nation’s leaders in graduation rates and academic achievement.

- Today that system is challenged to both raise the academic bar for all students to meet the increasingly rigorous standards of today's global society and to close persistent learning gaps for lower-performing groups of students to provide equal opportunity to all of our citizens. Whether the Badger State rises to that challenge will be among the most important factors to our future economic and civic growth.
- Wisconsin can and will meet this challenge, but only if the state's policymakers commit to evidence-based policies that are proven to drive whole-system improvement at the school, district and state levels.

The SAA's policy recommendations are organized around six key areas: students ready to learn, excellence in teaching and learning, innovation, finance, climate and culture, standards, assessment and accountability. The SAA provides specific recommendations to legislators to ensure that:

- Students are ready to learn by committing to a comprehensive preschool policy and meeting children's mental health need
- All students are served by effective educators by investing in proven strategies to support teaching excellence
- Wisconsin schools continually evolve in a rapidly changing world by developing a PK-12 innovation strategy
- We meet our constitutional standard for uniform educational opportunities by providing adequate and equitable funding for all students

The SAA also identifies state policy barriers to progress:

- Wisconsin will not meet the challenge before it if educational policy is based more on ideology or emotion than evidence.
- There is real cause for concern that policymaking, at the state level, is moving down the wrong path. In national rankings of PK-12 per-pupil spending, for example, Wisconsin has plummeted from the 12th-highest state in 2003-04 to 21st in 2011-12. Although evidence continues to support the importance of investment in early childhood development, educator preparation and educational innovation, these issues are often overlooked in the state legislature in favor of less research-based and more ideology-driven policies such as expanding vouchers or politicizing academic content standards.
- For every dollar the state of Wisconsin spends on an ineffective program, such as vouchers, it loses the opportunity to invest in programs that are effective in improving teaching and learning for all students.

"Wisconsin is truly at a crossroads," said Forester. "By prioritizing education and evidence-based policy, legislators can provide the pathway to world-class student success. However, if legislators don't prioritize education and allow ideology and emotion to trump evidence, the state will fall into settling for second-rate educational opportunities."

About the “Pathway” document: The SAA’s policy agenda stems from a working group that has convened regularly since spring 2014 to identify key policy issues, review relevant research and formulate specific policy recommendations. Researchers from the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison prepared research briefs that informed the group’s work.

About the School Administrators Alliance: The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) is an organization of more than 3,000 members, representing principals through the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA), superintendents through the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA), school business officials through the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO) and directors of special education and pupil services through the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS). SAA members represent each of Wisconsin’s 424 public school districts and more than 2,200 Wisconsin public schools.

As the combined government relations arm of the four associations, the SAA represents the interests of Wisconsin school children and public schools before the state legislature, the Office of the Governor and diverse state agencies.

###

A copy of the document, “Wisconsin’s PK-12 Pathway to World-Class Student Success,” can be downloaded here:

http://wsaa.org/saainfo/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SSA_Draft31.pdf