SAA Evidence-Based Policy Agenda & Local Advocacy Model Design

John Forester

Director of Government Relations

School Administrators Alliance

The Rationale for This Policy Agenda

- We see a tipping point inside the Capitol on education policy development

- Political environment for public education is deteriorating
  - Diminishing numbers of pro-public education legislators
  - Increasingly, education policy development based on ideology, not evidence

- Imperative we raise the academic bar for all students & close achievement gaps

- WI policymakers must commit to evidence-based policies proven to drive improvement

Evidence-Based Policy Agenda – Process

- SAA Policy Research & Development Team

- Partnership with Wisconsin Center for Education Research

- Policy Framework – Fullan: Right drivers for whole system education reform

- R&D Team met several times beginning in April 2014

- Surveyed SAA membership for input August 2014

- SAA Legislative Committee adopts legislative agenda, October 2014

Evidence-Based Policy Agenda – Overview

- Students Ready to Learn

- Supporting Excellence in Teaching & Leading

- Innovation

- Finance & Stewardship

- Climate & Culture

- Standards, Assessment & Accountability

Students Ready to Learn - Early Learning Opportunities

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - Adults who had preschool as children have higher earnings, commit fewer crimes, are more likely to graduate from HS and hold a job
  - Quality preschool programming can help reduce achievement gaps
  - Wisconsin's 4K and YoungStar programs are the foundation for providing high-quality early learning opportunities for all Wisconsin school children

- *SAA Recommendations:*
  - Wisconsin must commit to a comprehensive preschool policy
  - Provide universal access to 4K
  - Strengthen funding for quality care incentives, WI Shares program

Students Ready to Learn - Children's Mental Health

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - Too many WI children have unmet mental health needs leading to negative consequences for those children, their families and their communities
  - Why? Systemic shortcomings in how services are provided to our children
  - Minnesota's support for school-linked mental health services is having success

- *SAA Recommendation:*
  - Adopt a School-Linked Mental Health Grant Program modeled after Minnesota to provide grant funds for start-up, services for uninsured kids, agency coordination

Supporting Excellence in Teaching & Leading - Educator Preparation

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - There is a conflict between two key factors
  - While more rigorous, selective educator prep = improved student outcomes
  - Current incentives do not entice "best & brightest" to enter, remain in education

- *SAA Recommendation:*
  - Commission to focus on recruitment/retention & educator training programs

Supporting Excellence in Teaching & Leading - Educator Effectiveness

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - Teaching quality is the most important school factor influencing achievement
  - School leaders will need additional support to meet the new EE demands

- *SAA Recommendations:*
  - Continue state funding for implementation
  - Address capacity issues while maintaining quality, fidelity
  - Monitor emerging research from other states

Supporting Excellence in Teaching & Leading - Instructional Technology

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - According to a 2014 national survey, more than 80% of school districts indicated that current E-rate funding levels are not meeting their needs.
  - Only 9% of districts have adequate bandwidth to fully meet demands for online assessments and digital content anticipated over the next 18 months
  - Many WI school districts face significant connectivity and affordability gaps

Supporting Excellence in Teaching & Leading - Instructional Technology

- *SAA Recommendation:*
  - TEACH 2.0 Consortium Proposal – Funding in Four Key Areas
  - Available, Affordable Broadband
  - Hardware & Infrastructure
  - Access to Digital Learning
  - Educator Training & Re-training
  - Focus on Block Grants, Competitive Grants, Flexibility

Innovation

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - Overall, US Spends 3% of Total Expenditures on R&D
  - However, Education Spends Just 0.2% on R&D

- *SAA Recommendations:*
  - WI Must Develop a PK-12 Educational Innovation Strategy
  - Five-year Grants for Districts to Pilot Promising Innovations Related to:
    - Personalized Learning
    - Evidence-Based School Calendars
    - Other Promising Innovations Based on Sound Theory of Action

Finance & Stewardship

- *Evidence Demonstrates:*
  - High spending does not necessarily correlate to high achievement
  - However, you can't pretend that adequate funding doesn't matter either
  - Funding inequities restrict the ability of high poverty districts to provide an adequate education for all students
  - WI Ranking in Per Pupil Spending – From 12th in 2003-04 to 21st in 2011-12
  - K-12 School Aids as % of State Budget is at a 20-Year Low – 32.4%

Finance & Stewardship

- *SAA Recommendations:*
  - Perfect School Finance System Is "Elusive" . . . No "Magic Bullet"
  - Index School Revenue Limits to Inflation
  - Support Fair Funding for Our Future
  - Address Vincent vs. Voight – Funding for High Needs Students
  - Increase pupil transportation funding

Climate & Culture

- Every School Should Be a Warm and Welcoming Place for All

- State of WI has a Role to Play

- *SAA Recommendation:*
  - Create an Office of Mental Health, School Safety & Violence Prevention in DPI
    - Coordinate PK-12 Community's Work with Other Agencies
    - Clearinghouse for Effective Practices, Policies, Training
    - Encourage Districts to Adopt Prevention-Based Behavioral Systems
    - Assist Schools Responding to Crisis

Standards, Assessment & Accountability

- Wisconsin students, parents and teachers are best served by having a transparent and thoughtful state process for standards adoption and revision

- It is time for an evidence-based dialogue around assessment and accountability policies and practices to reinforce sound practices, and reform or replace unsound practices

- *SAA Recommendation:*
  - Establish a State Academic Standards & Assessment Review Council
    - Members Appointed by State Superintendent
    - Include Representatives from Governor's Office
    - Includes Chairs and Ranking Minority Members of Education Committees

New Proactive Communications Strategy

- Taking the high ground – raising the dialogue about education in Wisconsin

- Focus on three things
  - Statewide public relations strategy on the value of public education
  - Statewide public relations strategy on evidence-based policy agenda
  - Local advocacy model

1) Statewide public relations strategy on the value of public education

- We have to have a multi-pronged approach, one that focuses on statewide efforts <u>and</u> local efforts.

- Citizens generally believe in public education, they just need to be reminded why they believe in it. At a statewide level, we must remind community members why public education is important
  - Developing good citizens, democratic participation
  - Economy, quality workforce
  - The heart of our communities
  - Socialization of students from different race, culture, background
  - What is at stake if public schools are permanently weakened, abandoned?

- To date, we have developed a robust communications plan

2) Statewide public relations strategy on evidence-based policy agenda

- The launch of the vision document will be on November 19th.

- This launch will be a stepping off point for our efforts during the legislative year.
  - We need your help on the 19th and the days after.
    - We invite you to be at the event on the 19th
    - We encourage you to follow up with reporters in your area
    - We encourage you to share the vision document along with your thoughts and its potential positive impact on your district with parents, community leaders and your board members.
    - In a nutshell, we ask you to do whatever you can based on what might work in your district to help capture the imagination of community members

3) Local Advocacy Model – An Overview

- We know that we cannot win if our only battle for the future of public education takes place in the State Capitol. We need to look inward to generate greater influence

- SAA members number 3,000+ -- very influential in their communities

- We need to engage more SAA members in a more systematic way

- Organize around the district administrative team and the leadership of the Superintendent

- Plan as a team to influence community and legislators

- Efficient, effective use of our limited numbers

3) Local Advocacy Model – An Overview

- Variety of potential team member activities
  - Speak at local service club
  - Engage your local media
  - Building relationships through local chamber of commerce
  - Using social media to convey positive school news
  - Building relationships with your legislators

- Focus on flexibility

- Focus on the whole team

- SAA will provide
  - Training
  - Talking points
  - And other resources

- We see tremendous long-term value in building on your local influence

Local Advocacy Model – Detail

- Review the local advocacy model document, "Coming Together in Advocacy for Our Public School Students"

- According to the ILLSC standards, advocacy should be included in the work of all administrators

- Make advocacy a regular part of administrative team meetings and district planning: It is important to see advocacy efforts as ongoing.

- The key is to work together with your team and to start slowly and build on these efforts over time.

Getting started

- We have shared a "getting started" document that outlines first steps.

- We suggest beginning with your administrative team by discussing the implications of evidence-based vs. non-evidence-based state policies for our school district, both now and in the future

- Identify key audiences in your community and determine how to engage them
  - For example, speaking at your local chamber of commerce meeting, or service club meetings; go on a local radio show; submit articles or letters to the editor of your local and reach out to your locally elected legislators.

Getting started

- Based on this, we suggest that you create a plan. This doesn't have to be fancy, and we have provided a template that you can use to track your efforts.

- Finally, we ask you to have someone from your team that stays in touch with the SAA so we can know what is working, what is not working and so we can determine how we can be of assistance to you and other districts.