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# Summary Report

Report from the April 26, 2017, WISCAPE and MadREP Forum

## The Future of K-16 Education in Wisconsin

July 2017

On Wednesday, April 26, 2017, the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE) and the Madison Region Economic Partnership (MadREP) hosted a forum on the future of K-16 education in Wisconsin at the Hilton Garden Inn in Middleton. The forum built on two previous forums that WISCAPE and cosponsors convened in 2015 in Kimberly and Wausau.

The Middleton forum was attended by 48 individuals, including a wide range of K-12, postsecondary, business, and community leaders and practitioners. Following a brief introduction, participants divided into six groups for a work session focused on three questions:

1. What are the major challenges confronting K-16 education in Wisconsin?
2. How can the state, colleges and universities, and/or school districts help improve college access and success for low-income, first-generation, and other underrepresented high school students?
3. How can K-12 districts and private and public two- and four-year colleges and universities work collaboratively to improve education in Wisconsin?

The work session was followed by a larger group discussion focused on two, additional questions:

4. What were the key themes, issues, ideas, and promising practices that you found most interesting?
5. What significant current and future Wisconsin K-16 issues did we fail to discuss?

Following the forum, participants had the opportunity to identify how they would prioritize the themes and ideas that emerged at the forum by completing an online survey. Eighteen participants responded to the survey.

This report summarizes the major challenges and recommendations identified by participants at the forum and in the follow-up survey. Also included are participant comments expressing a range of viewpoints and ideas.

## Challenges and Recommendations

In order of priority, participants identified the following as **major challenges confronting K-16 education in Wisconsin:**

- Lack of funding at all levels, and state funding reductions;
- Teacher training, recruitment, and retention;
- Aligning education with workforce and societal needs;
- Inequality and achievement gaps among different racial and economic groups;
- Lack of broadband access in rural areas;
- Developing educational and career pathways;
- Unequal college access/affordability;
- Lack of collaboration (among K-12, colleges, businesses);
- Declining enrollment in rural areas; and
- Changing demographics.

In order of priority, participants offered the following **recommendations for improving college access and success for low-income, first generation, and other underrepresented students:**

- Focus on educating parents, so they understand their children’s college and career options and how to apply for and access financial aid.
- Schools should improve community connections and partnerships (e.g., with businesses, community organizations) to provide support for student success.
- Provide additional support for college and career counseling. Counselors are often required to serve more students than they can counsel effectively and are lacking in support and resources.
- Increase state funding for education at all levels.

### Participant comments—improving college access and success for underrepresented students

- *“Work with [students] early [in grade school] to begin to get them college ready; don’t just plug them into college and expect them to succeed. That does a disservice to everyone.”*
- *“Postsecondary education can’t fix the achievement gap without appropriate preparation of these students at the elementary and postsecondary level.”*
- *“We need a coordinated education system where every level knows their role. Not all children need to go to college. We have to get some through high school and into the workforce, some through tech school and into the workforce, and the rest through college into the workforce.”*
- *“Communication and collaboration is critical. We need to ensure underrepresented populations have information and access. Education is key to solving all the problems of society. Let’s help students succeed.”*
- *“There was almost no discussion of systemic racism and the role it has historically (and presently) played in attempts to develop “pathways” and in tracking students in general... I heard a lot of discussion of “college isn’t for everyone” at the meeting and very little discussion about how we keep non-college-bound programs from further segregating schools.”*
- *“Funding is often the driving force of innovation.”*



Participants evaluated a number of **ways for K-12 districts, public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities, and businesses to work collaboratively to improve education in Wisconsin.** These are identified below in order of perceived effectiveness:

- Improve transferability of credits from and within technical schools and UW System schools.
- The state should implement funding models that encourage collaboration.
- Increase business involvement in postsecondary leadership.
- Create a task force to identify barriers to collaboration.
- Create more dual-credit opportunities for high school students.

## Next Steps

We plan to share this report with policymakers and stakeholders in K-16 education, including Wisconsin legislators who serve on the Assembly and Senate K-12 and postsecondary education committees; the DPI superintendent; higher education leaders; statewide K-12 association leaders; Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce; and media representatives.

In addition, we are in discussions with potential cosponsors for another regional forum to be held in southeast Wisconsin this fall.

If you have thoughts or questions about this report or how to further ideas for advancing K-16 education in Wisconsin, please contact one of the individuals identified below.

### Addendums

- Forum Agenda
- Survey Questions

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### Participant comments— collaboration

- *“Many in K-12 and postsecondary [education] have a deep mistrust of business, because it seems like many of the same business people who want schools to serve businesses better are voting for officials who are bent on defunding public schools.”*
- *“The whole discussion on [collaboration] at our session focused on transferability and dual-credits, and that misses the larger issue of collaboration. It concerned me that if educators see this as key, then we’re not going to get to what really needs to happen, i.e. sharing physical and human resources, potentially combining institutions. I believe it is imperative that we try to rethink the whole educational model [as many industries have done over the past several decades]. I don’t believe the current model is sustainable.”*
- *“‘Improve transferability of credits’ is a hard question to simply assign a number to. Too many people do not understand transfer [especially between UWS and WTCS]. Additionally, applicability is equally as important.”*
- *“The business community needs to step it up and also get our governor and legislators to realize that constituents want support for education.”*



## Addendum A: Forum Agenda

### Agenda

#### Forum on the Future of K-16 Education in Wisconsin

Hilton Garden Inn, 1801 Deming Way, Middleton, WI

April 26, 2017

1. 12:30 – 1:00 PM

**Registration:** Please pick up nametag and sit at a table that includes people you don't know.

2. 1:00 – 1:10 PM

**Welcoming Remarks:** Gene Dalhoff, Vice President – Talent & Education, Madison Regional Economic Partnership (MadREP) and Noel Radomski, Managing Director, Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE)

3. 1:10 – 1:20 PM

\* Introduce yourself to your table colleagues.

\* Identify a note taker.

4. 1:20 – 1:55 PM

**Question #1:** What are the major challenges confronting K-16 education in Wisconsin?

5. 1:55 – 2:30 PM

**Question #2:** How can the state, colleges and universities, and/or school districts help improve college access and success for low-income, first-generation, and other underrepresented high school students?

6. 2:30 – 2:45 PM

Break

7. 2:45 – 3:20 PM

**Question #3:** How can K-12 districts, private and public two- and four-year colleges and universities, and businesses work collaboratively to improve education in Wisconsin?

8. 3:20 – 3:50 PM (Group discussion—not table discussion)

**Question 4:** What were the key themes, issues, ideas, and promising practices that you found most interesting?

**Question 5:** What significant current and future Wisconsin K-16 issues did we fail to discuss?

9. 3:50 – 4:00 PM

**Concluding Remarks and Next Steps:** Noel Radomski, WISCAPE

Thank you for coming! Please complete the online survey that you will receive, and drive safely!



## Addendum B: Survey Questions

Thank you for taking time to complete this follow-up survey. We would like to know more about what you think of the ideas/themes that came out of the forum in response to the various questions we discussed. We appreciate your honest feedback.

Question 1: What are the major challenges confronting K-16 education in Wisconsin? Below are some of the challenges that were discussed at the forum. Please evaluate how critical addressing each challenge is to improving K-16 education in Wisconsin.

- Lack of funding/state funding reductions
- Unequal college access/affordability
- Changing demographics
- Inequality/achievement gaps among different racial and economic groups
- Aligning education with workforce/societal needs
- Developing educational/career pathways
- Lack of collaboration [among K-12, colleges, businesses]
- Declining enrollment in rural areas
- Lack of broadband access in rural areas
- Student mental health/wellness
- Teacher training/recruitment/retention

What did we miss? Are there other challenges you heard that should be addressed?

Question 2: How can the state, colleges and universities, and/or school districts help improve college access and success for low-income, first-generation, and other underrepresented high school students? Please evaluate the strategies/solutions below, which were proposed at the forum.

- Improve early childhood education
- Increase state funding
- Improve community connections
- Implement year-round schooling
- Invest in pre-college programs
- Improve support for college/career counseling
- Educate parents about college/career options and financial aid
- Promote trades/technical colleges as much as four-year schools
- Promote distance learning/alternatives to traditional college

What did we miss? Are there other ways do you think the state should work to improve college access for underrepresented students?

Question 3: How can K-12 districts, private and public two- and four-year colleges and universities, and businesses work collaboratively to improve education in Wisconsin? Please evaluate the ideas below, which were proposed at the forum.

- Create more dual-credit opportunities
- Improve transferability of credits
- Create a task force to identify barriers to collaboration
- Implement funding models that encourage collaboration
- Increase business involvement in postsecondary leadership

What other ideas do you have for K-12/postsecondary/business collaboration?



Please describe in your own words what key themes, issues, and ideas presented at the forum you found most compelling.

What did you like most about the forum?

What should we do next to advance the ideas shared at the forum?

Do you have recommendations for how we could improve future events of this nature?

Any other comments?

In which of the following areas is your primary occupation?

- K-12 education
- Postsecondary education
- Business
- Government
- Non-profit/community organization
- Other (please specify below)

What is your name and title/organization? (optional)

