
PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Madison, Wisconsin

The State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council formed in 1995 to serve as a sounding board to the State Superintendent and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) staff on programs and initiatives. Meeting four to five times a year, council members discussed educational issues, policies, new programs that affect children, and parent-school-community partnerships for student success. Membership has included parents from around the state, including those of Hmong, Hispanic or Latino, African American, and Native American backgrounds. Three important initiatives resulted from the Parent Advisory Council.

In 1999, members of the State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council expressed concern that schools were not informing parents adequately about *what* and *how* their children were learning. Specifically, members cited parents did not understand the new Wisconsin Academic Standards and how student learning and assessment would change as a result of the standards. In response, DPI staff from the Partnerships, Student Assessment, and Equity Teams worked together to produce the brochure, *A Parent's Guide to Standards and Assessment*. The brochure explains the relationship between curriculum, standards, and student testing. It offers parents ideas about how to help their children succeed in school. Now in its second edition, more than 250,000 brochures have been distributed free to families statewide. A downloadable version is available on the DPI website at www.dpi.state.wi.us and brochures also were printed in Spanish and Hmong.

DPI produced and distributed the Learning Together packet, *Guide to Developing Grade-Level Brochures for Parents*, to help parents understand *what* their children were learning. Because each local school board determines Wisconsin public school curriculum, DPI could not produce a document describing what children would learn in each subject at each grade. However, DPI did develop a template for districts and schools to make it easier to develop their own grade-level brochures for parents. DPI included easily reproducible developmental characteristics of children by age and other parent-friendly topics to include in the brochures. The template also is downloadable from the DPI website.

Finally, Parent Advisory Council members said that the parent-voice lacked strength where the powerful fiscal decisions affecting schools were really made—in the state legislature. They requested that DPI sponsor a State Parent Forum in February 2001 as an opportunity for parents

to react to the Governor’s education budget early in the legislative process—just one week after it was released. About 100 parents from communities statewide attended the day-long forum, ate lunch with legislators, and came to a consensus on the top four education priorities the state budget should address:

- Elimination of state-imposed revenue caps on schools;
- Stable funding for the SAGE program;
- Meeting the learning needs of all students; and
- Continuing family-school-community partnerships.

Copies of the final forum report were distributed to all participants, school district administrators, and legislators. Although the Wisconsin Legislature is not expected to finalize the state biennial budget until late in the summer, it will be difficult for them to be unaware of the wishes of Wisconsin parents.

The State Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Council has raised important issues, resulting in better information *to* and *from* parents.

Jane Grinde, Director and Ruth Anne Landsverk, Coordinator
Family-School-Community Partnership Team
(608) 266-9356