

Business and Education In Wisconsin

New expectations, needs and visions are reshaping a vital, historic relationship

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I. Introduction

In today's highly competitive, global environment, high-quality education is fast becoming a non-negotiable prerequisite for individual, corporate and national success.

Today's students (and their parents) know that tomorrow's middle-class opportunities and quality of life will belong to those with advanced degrees and the ability to up-grade skills to meet new challenges. Employers aren't looking for "workers." They have to have "talent" that can embrace new workplace realities and thrive in a world of constantly shifting market demands. Policy makers at every level of government know that they cannot keep and attract the businesses and talent they need to support a robust economy and help pay for critical public services without the capacity to provide a reliable supply of highly skilled talent and the ability to up-grade and/or teach new skills as needed to meet real-time demand.

For all of these reasons, when it comes to education, the operative term is "high-quality education" - i.e., schools, colleges and universities that produce students who perform well at the K-12 level on Common Core Standards, have high admission success when applying to institutions of advanced learning, do well in those institutions of higher learning, and graduate able to excel and adapt in the workplace. The competition is already well underway, much of it focused on the critical early-stage component of the talent supply line as students, parents, educators, employers and policy makers around the globe have discovered, or are belatedly discovering, that they will not be able to achieve or sustain a competitive edge without preK-12 schools and infrastructure capable of delivering high-quality education.

Most of the recent studies on these challenges and opportunities underscore the need for a more functional and nimble relationship between businesses and the educational infrastructure charged with producing the next generation of civic leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals and skilled workers.¹

Noting a lack of hard information about preK-12 educator and business community opinions on these and other issues, Wood Communications Group (WCG)², undertook both quantitative and qualitative research to examine preK-12 educator and business leader perceptions of the need for, and receptivity to change in, their respective workplaces and in their interaction with each other.

¹ See, for example, the recent Competitive Wisconsin, Inc. Be Bold 2 report, *Building Wisconsin's Talent Pool*

² Wood Communications Group is a strategic communications and public affairs firm that serves as Strategic Counsel to Competitive Wisconsin, Inc. and its Be Bold initiatives, as well as to the Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable.

II. Research Methodology and Findings

A. Quantitative Research: Survey of state certified teachers (May-June, 2013)

WCG secured a list of the approximately 72,000 state-certified teachers in Wisconsin. The company then drew a random sample of a little more than 21,000 teachers from that list and via email invited those selected to participate in an on-line survey. Internal analysis suggests that the invitation actually reached somewhere between 16,000 and 18,000 teachers. Nearly 2,000 teachers from across the state responded to the survey, generating a return rate between 11 percent and 13 percent.³

Survey responses revealed that teachers across the state recognized that the technology and pedagogy affecting their profession had changed greatly in the past five years and that more than four out of five teachers (84 percent) believe they are engaged in an effort to achieve change in their schools. Responses also highlight the fact that overwhelming majorities of Wisconsin teachers believe that the best practices commonly associated with “personalized learning”⁴ models would enhance their ability to educate students. And, teachers are far more likely to identify more time for planning and collaboration with colleagues, as opposed to more money as their top personal priorities.

In addition to these important findings, the survey gave voice to widespread teacher interest in more interaction with the business community. Specifically, 85 percent of all respondents said that “...if it was up to [them] personally...” they would like to see either a lot (42 percent) or somewhat (43 percent) more interaction between their schools and the businesses in their communities. This response was particularly interesting in light of the fact that most teachers already believed that local businesses are currently supportive (69 percent) and helpful (72 percent), suggesting that their interest laid in enhancing and expanding existing relationships.

B. Quantitative Research: Survey of state-certified teachers (October 2013)

Rather than speculate, however, WCG, with support from the Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation, the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association, and the Madison Regional Economic Partnership undertook additional quantitative and qualitative market research to determine what sort of interaction teachers *and business leaders* would find most helpful.

³ See Appendix A. Note: the return rate and internal analysis of the demographics of the respondent population indicate that the responses are reflective of the surveyed population.

⁴ Personalized learning best practices include such things as more focus on individual student achievement and progress, more team-based learning opportunities, team-teaching, greater engagement with advanced education, teacher mentors, project based learning opportunities, etc.. It is worth noting that the Pewaukee School District has just won a Malcolm Baldwin Award for Excellence for its work on adopting personalized learning best practices.

WCG began the second phase of the research by conducting a second on-line survey focused on teacher priorities for school and business interaction.⁵ In the first survey, a little more than one-third of the respondents indicated that they would, or might be, interested in participating in small group discussions to pursue issues raised in the survey. WCG reached out to 500 of these respondents inviting them to participate in a second survey on the question of school-business interaction. Approximately 25 percent (121) responded.

Teachers thought a variety of interactive options would be “*very helpful*,” including, “Enhancing community understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing teachers and schools in this age of change” (74 percent); “Enhancing teachers' and other educational professionals' understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing businesses in this age of change” (56 percent); and “Translating enhanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities teachers, businesses and communities face into a more interactive and supportive solution-oriented relationship focused on helping students, teachers and schools succeed” (65 percent). Asked to select their top two priorities from the options provided, teachers identified enhancing community understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing teachers and schools (73 percent) and designing and implementing youth intern and apprenticeship programs (62 percent) as their number one picks and enhancing teachers' and other educational professionals' understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing businesses (78 percent) and adapting lessons learned and technology and software developed by the business community to collect and process information to help relieve the time and paperwork challenges teachers indicate they are facing (74 percent) as their number two picks.

C. Qualitative Research: Small Group Discussions (November-December 2013)

Between November 25th and December 5th, Wood Communications Group (WCG) convened regional small group discussions in La Crosse, Eau Claire, Appleton, Madison and Brookfield. The discussions were convened to provide teachers and business leaders with an opportunity to discuss the nature of their current interaction and offer opinions about how to expand and/or enhance their interaction in a fashion that would improve the ability of schools and teachers to help their students realize their full potential.⁶

Teacher participants were invited from a list of 506 state-certified teachers who had expressed an interest in participating in such meetings when responding to an on-line survey undertaken by WCG earlier in the year. Business leaders were invited with the help of the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the Wisconsin REALTORS[®] Association, and members of the regional economic development partnerships around the state.

⁵ See Appendix B.

⁶ See Appendix C

Group discussions focused on:

1. **Type of interaction currently occurring between/amongst businesses and schools.** Four general categories were identified in the discussions, including: 1) in-class interaction with, or presentations from, a local business person; 2) stand alone “field trip” interaction involving visits to local businesses; 3) business sector- (e.g., agriculture, S.T.E.M.) focused interaction involving multiple contacts with local businesses and, often, some sort of interaction with the local technical college; and 4) institutional interaction between schools and local businesses that foster a variety of types of business support for individual schools.
2. **What’s working and what’s not working at the moment.** The conversations about what was working and what was not working evolved out of the review of the interactive activities in which schools and businesses were currently involved. As such, they began with a sense that everyone wanted interaction and early comments focused on what participants perceived as the logistical impediments.

For teachers, logistical impediments included:

- not knowing who from the business community might be interested and/or how to make the arrangements;
- making sure they could get someone who could make a good presentation; and,
- having the necessary funding for the interaction (e.g., transportation costs).

For business people, the logistical impediments included:

- the lack of scheduling flexibility due to teacher desire to have interaction correlate with specific lesson plans or curricula blocs; and,
- not enough guidance in terms of goals, topics or audience.

As participants talked about these logistical issues, however, it became apparent that most had more fundamental concerns related to broader issues.

- Some were concerned about what they perceived as a fixation on preparing students for college and wanted to talk about how business and school interaction might help students and parents appreciate the range and value of non-college employment options.
- Others talked about the need to engage and inspire the students by rethinking the experiential options available.
- Still others wondered how to make the interaction more accessible and user-friendly.

Inevitably, the issue of communications between the schools, teachers, the business community and the community-at-large arose. It was clear early in this collaborative environment that most teachers and business leaders realized that they had not achieved an awareness and understanding of the challenges and opportunities the

others faced and that they needed to do so in order to achieve the more focused, user-friendly, effective interaction they all appeared to want.

As they worked their way through these issues, participants focused once again on logistics; not the logistics involved with event scheduling, but the logistics required to develop and sustain the sort of meaningful relationships required to achieve productive interaction between educational and business communities. Participants talked, for example, about the challenges that arise in cross-sector relationship building when, as things stand now, most, if not all, teachers cannot leave their schools and, therefore, essentially have no time for external interaction during what most business people view as the work day. This limited mobility also seemed to affect what teachers knew about what was happening in other schools and school districts. Teachers appeared equally frustrated by the lack of networking opportunities and both talked about the need to learn more about the challenges and opportunities the others faced.

3. **What could be done to enhance current efforts.** Participants came at this issue from a variety of different vantage points and ultimately highlighted five potential targets for enhancing and/or improving current efforts, including:
 - a. Enhancing knowledge and understanding amongst the participants in these efforts.
 - b. Promoting collaboration in the design of the efforts.
 - c. Enhancing awareness of, and access to, relevant logistical information.
 - d. Enhancing the ability to provide students with information they need and can use.
 - e. Expanding educator, parent, civic organization and business participation in these efforts.

4. **What new ideas or innovations might be helpful.** Conversation about this question paralleled discussions about the five targets for enhancing and/or improving current efforts referenced above. When all was said and done, the suggestions and ideas offered focused on:
 - a. Enriching teacher and business representative experience and understanding of the challenges and opportunities with which each sector is grappling. Suggestions included:
 - i. The development of a comprehensive inventory of school-teacher-business interaction efforts throughout Wisconsin, including program descriptions, media coverage, and contact information for those engaged in the programs;
 - ii. the design and establishment of a “sabbatical” option for preK-12 teachers that would enable them to enhance their ability to teach and help students by spending time expanding their knowledge of: a) the private

- sector; b) new technologies; and/or c) a social or economic issue directly affecting their students;
- iii. the design and establishment of short-term “job swap” opportunities for teachers and business people that would provide a deeper immersion than current options and would focus on knowledge enrichment and relationship building;
 - iv. the design and establishment of a “School Ambassador” program engaging teachers, students, parents, administrators and business people in a variety of experiential and discussion opportunities;
 - v. the design and establishment of opportunities for collaborative innovation and problem solving;
 - vi. an examination of current teacher preparation programs in search of ways to enhance the information they get about the private sector, including internships and other types of work opportunities.
- b. Informing, empowering and motivating students. Suggestions included:
- i. focus a portion of the school-business interaction on the importance of validating the relevance of the educational experience to the student’s ability to enhance his/her career options and life choices, which would include:
 - 1. working with educators to make sure the curricula are relevant;
 - 2. working with students to make sure they understand how the curricula are relevant;
 - 3. working with business people to expand and enhance opportunities to showcase curricula relevance in their workplaces;
 - ii. work on expanding and enhancing work opportunities for students and teachers, including summer employment; flexible hours employment, internships, apprenticeships, mentor programs, and greater use of technology;
 - iii. expand and enhance existing programs that provide opportunities for skill-related, achievement-based learning (e.g., STEM-related programs; blended high school-tech college programs; programs for youth interested in farming and agriculture, career academies).
- c. Improving communications and building relationships. Suggestions, included:
- i. all of the above;
 - ii. continue to survey and convene small group discussion sessions;
 - iii. development of a digital communications platform that provides timely, relevant information and serves as a user-friendly “gathering place” for those interested in these issues.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

1. **Wisconsin’s educational and business communities are meeting at a time of pressing, if not urgent, need and unique opportunity.**

Scientific and technological advancements and the rise of the global economy have changed and will continue to change the workplace. Two major examinations of Wisconsin’s workforce development challenges and opportunities — *Be Bold 2: Growing Wisconsin’s Talent Pool* and *The Road Ahead: Restoring Wisconsin’s Workforce Development*— document the fact that this world of continuous, rapid change requires that employers and workers have functional access to a dynamic educational infrastructure capable of educating, training and re-training students and workers in real-time as the workplace changes.⁷

Wisconsin educators, business leaders and policy makers are already working to address this new paradigm. Significant progress has been made in the past few years on a variety of fronts, including just to mention a few: 1) efforts at the preK-12 level to adopt personalized-learning and collective-impact best practices that have achieved successes in dozens of communities across the country; 2) collaborative efforts between colleges, universities, technical colleges and high schools to provide students with a “blended” educational experience that allows students to enrich their preK-12 options, while giving them a head start on the advanced learning they are likely to need or want; and 3) initiatives by the state’s major universities, colleges and technical colleges to use the digital power of the internet to make their educational resources available to more students and workers.

The *Voices from the Classroom* research described in this document makes clear that both educators and business people understand that change is necessary and that they want to participate in making it happen. However, it also suggests strongly that empowering the realization and desire will require helping educators and business people gain a far better understanding of the challenges and opportunities with which each other are grappling. It will also depend on our ability to develop the individual, organizational and institutional relationships needed to inform and sustain effective collaboration in the new world of constant change.

In short, there is clearly a need to energize and enhance the interaction between the educational community and the business community. That need is particularly

⁷ See *Be Bold 2: Growing Wisconsin’s Talent Pool* at http://www.competitivewi.com/wpcontent/uploads/2012/10/BeBold2_Study_October2012.pdf
See *The Road Ahead: Restoring Wisconsin’s Workforce Development* at <http://doa.wi.gov/secy/documents/sullivanreport.pdf>

pressing in terms of interaction with the preK-12 educational community, a conclusion supported by the fact that 85 percent of state certified teachers say that *if it was up to them* they would like to see more interaction between the schools and the businesses in their area. Similarly, business leaders across the state have indicated a desire to enhance their interaction with their local schools.

Given all of this, it seems clear that how quickly and how well we respond to this time of need and opportunity will have a profound affect on the relationship between Wisconsin's future workforce, its educational infrastructure, its business community, its economy and its quality of life for generations to come.

2. There is a genuine interest in enhanced interaction and important consensus about what that interaction might entail.

As the report indicated earlier (see pp. 5-6), participants believe that the focus should be on improving understanding and relationships, enhancing the educational and operational relevancy of interactive experiences and relationships, recognizing the importance of engaging students and parents, harnessing technological opportunities and better communications.

In pursuit of these goals, educators and business leaders talked about the need for more relevant information, the importance of personal commitment, hands-on experiences and flexibility, and a willingness to pursue and welcome new ideas.

3. Efforts to enhance interaction must be driven by local engagement and customized to reflect local values, needs and opportunities.

Emerging best practices underscore the importance of enhanced interaction amongst schools, communities and businesses. Schools adopting "personalized learning" models, for example, need meaningful relationships with civic and business leaders in order to be able to provide their students with the outreach and experiential components required for these project-oriented learning models to work. Businesses need interaction with their local schools that allows them to understand more precisely what students, parents and educators need to know to help educate, train and support today's and tomorrow's *local* workforce.

4. There is a need to significantly expand and enhance educator, business and policy maker access to information available to inform and support the local efforts.

Both the quantitative and qualitative research revealed limited-to-no awareness of research, pilot programs, practical innovations and the successes (and failures) of other initiatives not just around the nation, but down the road and across town that might have relevance for local efforts around Wisconsin.

The Pewaukee School District, for example, has just won a Malcolm Baldrige Award for excellence, but few participants in discussion sessions were aware of the Pewaukee effort. The Waukesha Business Alliance has developed a sophisticated inventory of businesses and individuals willing to interact with schools, but it is not as well-recognized as it should be inside or outside of the region. Passionate and caring teachers working on alternative educational models and partnerships for students at risk are not aware of successful programs in other communities.

These examples are not offered as criticisms of educators, business leaders and other local leaders whose time is understandably consumed by the day-to-day, hour-to-hour demands of their jobs. Rather, these and many other examples, should serve as a wakeup call reinforcing the need to spread the word about what is working more frequently and effectively.

5. There is a need to inform, energize and support local collaborations on a statewide basis.

Local efforts to educate, train and support Wisconsin's future voters, consumers, taxpayers and workers must be encouraged across the state. One of the more important analyses of where jobs are most likely to grow, Enrico Moretti's *The New Geography of Jobs*, argues persuasively that, for a variety of reasons, new job growth and wealth creation is most likely to occur in urban and suburban areas with an existing industrial base, an active research and development capacity and a mature well-functioning educational infrastructure, including preK-12 schools, technical colleges and universities.

Wisconsin has at least 13 geographic clusters that could meet Moretti's criteria, including: Madison, Milwaukee, Racine-Kenosha, Janesville, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Superior, Wausau, Stevens Point, Oshkosh-Fond du Lac, Appleton-Green Bay, Platteville, Sheboygan-Port Washington. Most of these clusters are located in one or more of the state's statutory economic development regions.

Given the existing inventory of educational institutions (i.e., 424 school districts, 13 four-year UW campuses, 23 private colleges and universities, 16 technical colleges, and 13 community colleges), the reach of the regional economic development organizations (i.e., New North, Grow North, Centergy, Vision Northwest, Seven Rivers, Momentum West and Prosperity Southwest), and the findings of the research referenced in this document, it seems safe to suggest that the need to enhance the interaction between local and regional schools and businesses represents an important opportunity to strengthen Wisconsin's statewide economic development efforts.

For this reason, while stressing the importance of local engagement and direction, we must also focus on enhancing local operational ability (e.g., logistical management, facilitation, evaluation, use of technology).

B. Recommendations

The major needs identified by, and the conclusions drawn from, the recent research suggest that what is most needed at this particular juncture is the development of a support mechanism that will allow existing local and regional efforts to enhance their operational reach and capacity and help local and regional entities without such programs to initiate efforts in their areas. The support mechanism should focus on four areas of activity, including:

- collecting, managing and disseminating information that would enhance educator, business, policy maker and civic community understanding of relevant activities, best practices, new research, changes in technology, and other matters of applicable interest;
- working with educators and business leaders to expand, enhance and/or develop opportunities for each group to gain a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, the challenges and opportunities with which each respective group is grappling;
- enhancing local and regional logistical and management skills related to school and business interaction, including creation of resource inventories, support services for collaborative efforts, and technological support for local information management initiatives;
- providing periodic research insights into: a) educator and business leader opinions on the work being done to enhance interaction between schools and business; b) other school audiences' (e.g., parents, students, administrators, elected officials) opinions on the challenges and opportunities they see in their schools; c) general public opinion on these issues.

Recommendation 1

Design, create and manage a digital information center that will host:

- a. A quarterly electronic magazine designed to enhance reader understanding of and appreciation for what is happening in Wisconsin's educational and business communities by reporting on classroom best practices; school and business interaction, and challenges and opportunities affecting teachers, students, parents, administrators, employers and policy makers. The e-zine will be user friendly and feature individuals, real stories, and easily accessible video and audio information, a portion of which would be suitable for classroom use.

- b. A real-time inventory of school and business interaction activities sorted by location, business, school, targeted age group, purpose of activity, and type of activity. The inventory would contain information about contacts, costs and operational tips from practitioners.
- c. Web and pod casts on relevant topics.
- d. Relevant media coverage on economic and workforce development issues.

Recommendation 2

Create a statewide advisory body of leaders from the local business and educational communities dedicated to focusing on specific challenges and opportunities. The group should begin by:

- a. Determining how best to support local educator-business interaction efforts where they already exist and to jumpstart them where they do not.
- b. Developing specific implementable recommendations for improving teacher, business and community understanding of the challenges and opportunities each faces in their respective environment and for ways in which each might help the other address their challenges and opportunities. [See p. 5, number 4. (a)]
- c. Adapting lessons learned and technology and software developed by the business community to collect and process information to help relieve the time and paperwork challenges teachers indicate they are facing.
- d. Expanding and enhancing student experiential and youth employment opportunities.
- e. Considering how the news media might play a role in helping parents, students and the general public better understand and interact with the realities facing the educational and business communities.

Recommendation 3

Enrich and inform the relationships and dialogues spurred by the activities recommended above by regularly researching education, business and civic leaders' perception of the challenges and opportunities facing them. Specifically, this effort should include:

- a. Two on-line surveys a year of state-certified teachers. Surveys would be conducted in February and October.
- b. Two on-line surveys a year of business and civic leaders in selected communities. Surveys would be conducted in different communities in January and September.
- c. Two facilitated regional group discussions a year in seven to eight locations around the state.

Appendix A
Voices from the Classroom Survey 1

Wood Communications Group
State-Certified Teacher Survey, Statewide Results
June 2013

1. For each of the following statements, would you say you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

	AS	ASW	DSW	DS	NS
Most people understand the importance of making sure our children get a good education	14%	54%	23%	10%	0%
There are a lot of people who are not persuaded that the preK-12 education system is working as well as it needs to	30%	54%	9%	2%	4%
Most people appreciate the critical role that classroom teachers play in making sure our children get a good education	4%	33%	40%	23%	0%
Lots of adults do not understand how much the challenges facing education today have changed since they were in school	80%	15%	2%	3%	0%
Most people support the need for preK-12 education, but don't seem able or willing to pay for it	40%	48%	8%	2%	3%
Most of the teachers I know feel overwhelmed and underappreciated	77%	19%	3%	1%	1%

2. Please tell us whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each of the following statements about preK-12 education.

	AS	ASW	DSW	DS	NS
Our understanding of how to help students learn and realize their potential has changed a great deal in the past five years	44%	42%	10%	2%	2%
The technology available to help students learn and realize	75%	22%	3%	0%	0%

their potential has changed a great deal in the past five years					
How we educate and train future teachers has evolved effectively to reflect changes in our understanding of how best to help students learn and realize their potential	12%	41%	28%	10%	10%
How we fund our schools has evolved effectively to reflect changes in our understanding of how best to help students learn and realize their potential	3%	6%	24%	65%	3%
How we measure performance in our schools has evolved effectively to reflect changes in our understanding of how best to help students learn and realize their potential	3%	14%	33%	48%	2%
Most schools are effectively focused on helping students learn and realize their potential	31%	48%	14%	4%	2%
Most teachers are effectively focused on helping students learn and realize their potential	51%	42%	5%	1%	1%

3. Which of the following terms best describe how you normally feel when you begin teaching each morning? (Please check as many as apply.)

Excited	53%
Tired	38%
Inspired	25%
Worried	28%
Happy	44%
Frustrated	35%
Bored	1%
Part of a team	38%
Well prepared	56%
Unprepared	7%
Angry	4%
Equipped to deal with anything	25%
Irritated	7%
Anxious to get started	21%
Just anxious	14%
Alone	11%
Other	16%

4. Please indicate your sense of whether each of the following items and actions might help or hinder *your ability* to help your students learn and realize their potential. For example, would

you say having smaller class enrollment would have a very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative affect on your individual ability to help your students learn and realize their potential?

	VP	SWP	SWN	VN	NS
Smaller class enrollment than you currently have	64%	29%	2%	1%	4%
Greater student access to smart technology	40%	50%	5%	1%	4%
More flexibility in how you are allowed to address individual student needs	56%	40%	1%	0%	3%
Fewer reporting and paperwork requirements	60%	33%	3%	1%	4%
Teaching assistants/student mentors to help you with your students	49%	40%	5%	1%	5%
Teacher mentors to help you with your teaching	27%	50%	10%	3%	10%
More opportunities for team teaching	41%	43%	6%	2%	8%

5. Some teachers are experimenting with what is being called a “flipped classroom” approach. Wikipedia describes this approach as, “... a form of blended learning which encompasses any use of technology to leverage the learning in a classroom, so a teacher can spend more time interacting with students instead of lecturing. This is most commonly being done using teacher-created videos that students view outside of class time.” Are you familiar with the flipped classroom approach?

Yes	64%
No	31%
Not sure	6%

6. Based on what you know about the flipped classroom approach, would you strongly encourage, somewhat encourage, somewhat discourage or strongly discourage Wisconsin teachers from adopting this approach in their classrooms?

Strongly encourage	6%
Somewhat encourage	40%
Somewhat discourage	18%
Strongly discourage	8%
NS	28%

7. Please indicate your sense of whether each of the following items and actions might help or hinder *your ability* to help your students learn and realize their potential. For example, would you say having less focus on required test results would have a very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative affect on your individual ability to help your students learn and realize their potential?

	VP	SWP	SWN	VN	NS
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Less focus on required test results	44%	47%	5%	1%	3%
Encouragement and support for trying new things	68%	31%	1%	0%	1%
Better options for managing classroom discipline challenges	60%	35%	1%	0%	3%
More focus on individual student needs	57%	38%	4%	0%	2%
A dedicated classroom budget	56%	33%	2%	0%	9%
More project-focused learning opportunities	44%	41%	6%	1%	8%

8. When you think about how the business community and the schools in your community interact, would you say the business community in your area is very supportive, somewhat supportive, not too supportive, or not supportive at all of education?

Very supportive	14%
Somewhat supportive	55%
Not too supportive	21%
Not supportive at all	5%
NS	4%

9. To the extent that the business community does interact with your schools, would you describe that interaction as very helpful, somewhat helpful, not too helpful, or not helpful at all?

Very helpful	21%
Somewhat helpful	51%
Not too helpful	16%
Not helpful at all	3%
NS	8%

10. If it was up to you, would you like to see more or less interaction between the schools and the business community?

A lot more	42%
A little more	43%
A little less	2%
A lot less	2%
No interaction	1%
NS	11%

11. Please indicate your sense of whether each of the following items and actions might help or hinder *your ability* to help your students learn and realize their potential. For example, would you say having better options for engaging parents in the process would have a very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative affect on your individual ability to help your students learn and realize their potential?

	VP	SWP	SWN	VN	NS
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Better options for engaging parents in the process	56%	39%	3%	0%	2%
More support from/engagement with advanced education leaders in my area	37%	50%	4%	1%	8%
More team-based learning opportunities	44%	44%	5%	1%	7%
More focus on individual student achievement and progress	44%	46%	4%	1%	5%

12. Which of the following statements comes closest to your personal view of how schools are approaching the need, or lack of need, for change in how we help preK-12 students learn and achieve their potential? For example, would you be most likely to agree that:

It's taken a lot of effort, but I think most schools and teachers have already adopted and implemented the changes required to help our students succeed and prosper in today's world	8%
We've made progress in understanding what we need to do, but haven't had the time or the money to make the changes we need to	47%
We know we need to change, but can't agree on what or how to make changes and we haven't had the time or the money to make the changes, even if we could agree on what needs to be done	29%
Most of us think the argument for change is overstated. If we could just get the funding and staff we need, we could get the job done without making wholesale changes	13%
We are pretty committed to doing things the way we've always done them, and I don't see much real change coming anytime in the near future	1%
NS	2%

13. If you had it to do all over again, would you choose teaching as a profession? (Please select only one answer.)

Absolutely, no question at all (Go to next question)	27%
Almost positively (Skip next question)	36%
Probably not (Skip next question)	23%
Definitely not (Skip next question)	7%
Not sure (Skip next question)	8%

14. Why are you so committed to teaching? (Text)

15. Which, if any, of the following explains why you are not positive that you would go into teaching again? (Please check as many as apply)

My paycheck does not reflect what I think I am worth	59%
I feel that my benefits are not what they should be	32%
I have to spend so much time on paperwork that I don't have enough time for my students	47%
I am expected to perform too many tasks not related to teaching	59%
I am concerned about my personal safety	11%
Too many students come to my class not prepared to learn the subjects I am expected to teach	44%
Too many student discipline problems	38%
There is not enough respect for teaching or teachers	81%
Other (Please specify)	26%
NS	0%

16. When all is said and done, which of the following do you believe would have the greatest positive impact on your ability to help your students learn and realize their potential? (Please identify your top three choices by numbering them 1, 2 and 3)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
More money	10%	10%	11%	12%	11%	12%	11%	10%	12%
More planning time	27%	20%	16%	12%	9%	6%	5%	3%	1%
More support from my colleagues	1%	3%	4%	7%	10%	12%	17%	19%	27%
More opportunities to collaborate with my colleagues	10%	16%	14%	15%	12%	10%	10%	10%	3%
More opportunities to stay current with what's going on in education	4%	7%	10%	10%	14%	15%	16%	13%	11%
Fewer disruptive students	19%	12%	9%	9%	8%	9%	10%	12%	12%
Less paperwork	9%	12%	14%	12%	12%	12%	11%	10%	7%
More respect from the community for what I do	16%	12%	10%	11%	10%	11%	9%	10%	11%
Better, useable technology	4%	8%	12%	12%	14%	12%	11%	13%	14%

17. How would you say each of the following factors affects your ability to help your students learn and achieve their full potential? For example, would you say for most of your students that health has a very positive, a somewhat positive, a little to no effect, somewhat negative, or a very negative effect either on your ability to help them, and/or on their ability to, learn and achieve their full potential?

	VP	SP	NE	SN	VN	NS
Student health	43%	29%	9%	14%	3%	2%
Family income	17%	38%	16%	18%	9%	2%
English language fluency	30%	30%	17%	14%	4%	5%

Prior student preparation for your class/grade	40%	33%	8%	12%	6%	2%
Student motivation	62%	15%	1%	11%	10%	1%
Student ability	26%	45%	16%	10%	2%	1%
Parental engagement	49%	28%	4%	11%	7%	1%

18. How would you say each of the following factors affects your ability to help your students learn and achieve their full potential? For example, would you say that administrative support has a very positive, a somewhat positive, little to no effect, somewhat negative, or a very negative effect either on your ability to help them, and/or on their ability to, learn and achieve their full potential?

	VP	SP	NE	SN	VN	NS
Administrative support	49%	32%	8%	7%	4%	1%
Support from colleagues	55%	36%	6%	2%	1%	0%
School and classroom safety	52%	33%	9%	4%	1%	1%
Classroom resources	50%	36%	5%	7%	2%	1%
School budget	44%	34%	4%	12%	6%	1%
Preparation time	58%	21%	3%	10%	7%	1%
Classroom diversity	23%	38%	31%	4%	1%	3%
State and national tests	1%	15%	39%	26%	18%	1%
Teacher evaluations	5%	33%	42%	14%	4%	2%
Quality of your education and training	54%	38%	6%	1%	0%	0%
Classroom discipline	53%	33%	4%	7%	2%	1%
Student-teacher relationship	81%	17%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Curriculum	37%	52%	7%	3%	1%	1%
Technology	28%	59%	9%	3%	1%	1%

19. How familiar you are with each of the following concepts, reports and initiatives?

	VF	SWF	NTF	NAAF	NS
The Strive network	1%	3%	12%	79%	5%
Expeditionary Learning	3%	12%	15%	66%	5%
Tough Choices or Tough Times	1%	6%	14%	73%	5%
Deeper or Personalized Learning	7%	17%	14%	57%	5%
Collective Impact	2%	9%	15%	69%	5%
Charter Schools	38%	51%	9%	2%	1%
Choice Schools	32%	43%	12%	12%	2%
Career Academies	10%	28%	22%	36%	4%
Common Core Standards	73%	24%	2%	1%	0%
Performance-based budgeting	14%	28%	24%	30%	3%
The Kahn Academy	18%	24%	14%	40%	4%

Pathways to Prosperity	3%	8%	20%	64%	6%
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20. Which of the following phrases best describes your assessment of the amount of financial resources available to your school to address the educational challenges and opportunities facing you, your students and your school?

We cannot even come close to doing the job we are being asked to do with the amount of money being provided	36%
We can come close to doing the job we are being asked to do with the amount of money being provided	30%
We could certainly use more money, but we can get the job done with the budget we have	24%
We have an acceptable and adequate budget to get the job done	3%
Other	4%
NS	3%

21. Would you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with each of the following statements?

	AS	ASW	DSW	DS	NS
We spend too much money on paperwork and administrative requirements	44%	43%	7%	1%	5%
We need more money for new technology	41%	42%	13%	2%	2%
We are required to spend a large percentage of our budget on a relatively small number of our students	24%	35%	21%	8%	12%
We need to spend more money supporting the classroom experience for our students	52%	40%	4%	0%	4%

22. When you think about how things are going in preK-12 education around the country, would you say that things are pretty much on the right track or would you say things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

Right Track	20%
Wrong Track	50%
Not sure	31%

23. When it comes to how things are going in education here in Wisconsin, would you say that things here in Wisconsin are pretty much on the right track or would you say things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

Right Track	18%
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Wrong Track	67%
Not sure	15%

24. When you think about how things are going in preK-12 education in your area, would you say that things in your area are pretty much on the right track or would you say things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

Right Track	38%
Wrong Track	46%
Not sure	16%

Demographic questions (for statistical purposes only)

25. How many years have you been teaching?

< 2 years	3%
2 to 3 years	4%
4 to 5 years	5%
6 to 7 years	6%
8 to 10 years	10%
11 to 15 years	18%
16 to 20 years	15%
> 20 years	39%

26. What grade(s) are you currently teaching? (Please check as many as apply)

K	21%
1	21%
2	23%
3	24%
4	23%
5	23%
6	20%
7	24%
8	24%
9	34%
10	36%
11	38%
12	38%

27. In which of the following subjects do you regularly teach? (Please check as many as apply)

Reading/English	49%
Social Studies/History	33%
Science	34%
Math	40%
Art or music	14%

Other (Please specify)	33%
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28. Number of students in your school

<100	2%
101 to 200	5%
201 to 300	12%
301 to 400	17%
401 to 500	17%
>500	46%
NS	1%

29. Size of your school district

Very large	20%
Large	29%
Medium	23%
Small	21%
Very Small	7%

30. Location of your school district

Rural	41%
Urban	33%
Suburban	27%

31. Is your school district...

Gaining students	21%
Stable	39%
Losing students	32%
NS	8%

32. Age

21-25	3%
26-30	8%
31-35	11%
36-45	25%
46-55	37%
56-65	14%
Older than 65	1%
REF	1%

33. Region

Northern	6%
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West Central	9%
North Central	6%
Northeast	14%
Southwest	7%
South Central	22%
Southeast	36%
REF	0%

34. Gender

Male	28%
Female	72%

35. Focus Group

Yes	15%
No	62%
Maybe	24%

Appendix B
Voices from the Classroom Survey 1

1. Are you interested in attending one of the teacher-business community conversations being scheduled before the end of the year around the state?

	Response Ratio
Yes	55.3%
No (Skip to question 5)	9.0%
Maybe	31.4%
Not sure/Don't know	3.3%
No Responses	<1%
Total	100%

2. If you do attend, would you prefer to come as an observer or as a panel participant in the conversation?

	Response Ratio
Observer	23.1%
Participant (Skip to question 4)	38.0%
Not sure/Don't know	31.4%
No Responses	7.4%
Total	100%

3. If we are short on conversation participants would you be willing to consider being a conversation panel participant?

	Response Ratio
Yes	44.6%
No	<1%
Not sure/Don't know	18.1%
No Responses	36.3%
Total	100%

4. Which ONE of the following conversation locations would you be interested in attending?

	Response Ratio
Appleton	16.5%
Eau Claire	7.4%
La Crosse	4.9%
Madison	25.6%
Milwaukee	28.0%
Wausau	7.4%
Superior	1.6%
No Responses	8.2%
Total	100%

5. When asked in the first Voices from the Classrooms survey, "If it was up to you, would you like to see more or less interaction between the schools and the business community?" Eighty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they would like to see more interaction. Please look at the following list of possible areas of interaction and indicate how helpful you think more interaction in each area would be in terms of helping you and your colleagues help your students realize their full potential. For example, would you say that more interaction focused on enhancing community understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing teachers and schools in this age of change would be very, somewhat, not too, or not at all helpful in helping you and your colleagues help your students realize their full potential? (If you should have additional suggestions, please use the comment box following the questions.)

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.

	Very helpful	Not too helpful
Enhancing community understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing teachers and schools in this age of change.	90 74%	1 1%
Enhancing teachers' and other educational professionals' understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing students in this age of change.	62 51%	12 10%
Enhancing teachers' and other educational professionals' understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing businesses in this age of change.	68 56%	10 8%
Designing and implementing youth intern and apprenticeship programs.	69 57%	9 7%

Adapting lessons learned and technology and software developed by the business community to collect and process information to help relieve the time and paperwork challenges teachers indicate they are facing.	44	21
	37%	18%
Translating enhanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities teachers, businesses and communities face into a more interactive and supportive solution-oriented relationship focused on helping students, teachers and schools succeed.	79	4
	65%	3%
21 Comment(s)		

6. Now please look at the following list of possible areas, again, and indicate in which TWO areas you think more interaction would be MOST HELPFUL in terms of helping you and your colleagues help your students realize their full potential. PLEASE INDICATE YOUR FIRST CHOICE AS 1 AND YOUR SECOND CHOICE AS 2. (If you should have additional suggestions, please use the comment box following the questions.)

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	1st Choice
Enhancing community understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing teachers and schools in this age of change.	53
	73%
Enhancing teachers' and other educational professionals' understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing students in this age of change.	9
	30%
Enhancing teachers' and other educational professionals' understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing businesses in this age of change.	6
	22%
Designing and implementing youth intern and apprenticeship programs.	28
	62%

Adapting lessons learned and technology and software developed by the business community to collect and process information to help relieve the time and paperwork challenges teachers indicate they are facing.

5
26%

Translating enhanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities teachers, businesses and communities face into a more interactive and supportive solution-oriented relationship focused on helping students, teachers and schools succeed.	34 51%
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6 Comment(s)

7. If teachers and businesses undertook a collaborative effort in your area on one or more of the areas you identified as most important, do you think teachers would actively engage with the effort?

	Response Ratio
Yes	48.7%
No	<1%
Probably	32.2%
Maybe	14.0%
Not sure/Don't know	2.4%
No Responses	1.6%
Total	100%

8. If you indicated you are interested in observing or participating in one of the conversations, please enter the information indicated below, so we can follow up with you.

First Name	101
Last Name	101
Email Address	101
City	101

Appendix C

Small Group Discussion Report

Voices From the Classroom Initiative 2013 Small Group Discussion Report

I. Methodology and Logistics

Between November 25th and December 5th, Wood Communications Group (WCG) convened regional small group discussions in La Crosse, Eau Claire, Appleton, Madison and Brookfield. The discussions were convened to provide teachers and business leaders with an opportunity to discuss the nature of their current interaction and offer opinions about how to expand and/or enhance their interaction in a fashion that would improve the ability of schools and teachers to help their students realize their full potential.

Teacher participants were invited from a list of 506 state-certified teachers who had expressed an interest in participating in such meetings when responding to an on-line survey undertaken by WCG earlier in the year.⁸ Business leaders were invited with the help of the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the Wisconsin REALTORS[®] Association, and members of the regional economic development partnerships around the state.⁹

The decision to convene these meetings was driven by the findings of the survey referenced above, particularly the discovery that 85 percent of the teacher respondents wanted “more interaction” between their schools and the businesses in their areas. In further preparation for the meetings, the 506 teacher invitees were asked to participate in a second on-line survey designed to provide additional insight on what sort of interaction they thought would be most productive.¹⁰

All five meetings were scheduled for after school hours (i.e., 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.) and held in “neutral” locations such as hotels. All of the sessions included an introductory overview of findings from the two on-line surveys. The overview was followed by approximately 90 minutes of interactive discussion facilitated by Jim Wood, President of WCG. All participants were given an opportunity to offer a closing comment at the end of each session.

While each group established its own dynamic, the facilitator encouraged participants in the course of their discussion to engage four areas of inquiry, including: 1) what type of

⁸ See Appendix A

⁹ Timing of the meetings was necessary, but not ideal (e.g., beginning of holiday season, deer hunting season, end of day, etc.). Fortunately, interest in the discussions was significant and more than 100 teachers and business leaders registered for the sessions. Ultimately, weather and last minute demands reduced actual participation to 77, including 34 teachers and 43 business leaders.) The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards and the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators were made aware of the meetings.

¹⁰ See Appendix B

interaction is currently occurring between/amongst businesses and schools; 2) what's working and what's not working at the moment; 3) what could we do to enhance current efforts; and 4) what new ideas or innovations might be helpful?

No public or taxpayer money was used to cover any of the costs associated with this effort. Costs were offset by contributions from the Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation, the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association, the Madison Regional Economic Partnership and Wood Communications Group.

II. Discussion Group Comments and Observations by Area of Inquiry

A. Type of interaction currently occurring between/amongst businesses and schools

***Facilitator Observation:** When asked in the initial survey whether businesses in their area were supportive or not supportive, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of all respondents said they thought businesses were supportive. Almost three out of four (72 percent) indicated that they believed the support their schools received from local businesses was helpful.*

This positive recognition of business engagement with the schools was, however, a composite score of those who believed that businesses had been very supportive and somewhat supportive and that the support had been very helpful and somewhat helpful. The percentage of those who believed that businesses had been very supportive (14 percent) and that their support had been very helpful (21 percent) was considerably smaller than that of those who believed businesses had been somewhat supportive (55 percent) and that their support had been somewhat helpful (51 percent). Often, differences in perception and/or recognition of this sort are the product of personal or first-hand experience, which tend to lead to positive or negative intensity based on the experience (i.e., very...) versus word of mouth or second-hand experience, which tend to lead to less intense opinions based on what respondents have heard (i.e., somewhat....) Both teachers and business leaders with first-hand and second-hand experience were in attendance at the discussions.

Discussion Summary: Descriptions of current interaction fell into four general categories, including: 1) in-class interaction with, or presentations from, a local business person; 2) stand alone “field trip” interaction involving visits to a local businesses; 3) business sector- (e.g., agriculture, S.T.E.M.) focused interaction involving multiple contacts with local businesses and, often, some sort of interaction with the local technical college; and 4) institutional interaction between schools and local businesses (e.g., Adopt-A-School programs) that foster a variety of types of business support for individual schools.

Reflecting the survey results, most participants had positive impressions of all of these efforts, but the depth of personal experience varied significantly. Those who had first-hand experience with the business sector focused interaction were enthusiastic and provided detailed examples of both the interaction process and meaningful outcomes. These interactions seem to have a relatively high profile in the schools and were viewed positively by those who did not have first-hand experience. Those who had participated in field trips tended to feel that the trips were worthwhile, but emphasized that the experiences varied depending upon how well the trips were organized both by the school/teacher and the business being visited. In-class interaction was portrayed as valuable, but also as very dependent upon teacher initiative in terms of scheduling and content advice and upon presenter capability in terms of student engagement and value. Institutional interaction was appreciated, but seen as the purview of administrators and specifics about how it touched the classroom varied depending upon individual teacher experience.

B. What's working and what's not working?

Facilitator Observation: In the recent on-line survey, nearly all teachers either agreed strongly (75 percent) or somewhat (22 percent) that, "The technology available to help students learn and realize their potential has changed a great deal in the past five years." Large majorities also either agreed strongly (44 percent) or somewhat (42 percent) that, "Our understanding of how to help students learn and realize their potential has changed a great deal in the past five years." And, more than eight in 10 teachers agreed strongly (30 percent) or somewhat (54 percent) that, "There are a lot of people who are not persuaded that the preK-12 education system is working as well as it needs to."

This recognition of change and awareness of "customer" or "client" dissatisfaction is affecting educational thought and practice at both the institutional and individual classroom levels. In the discussion groups, for example, one had the sense that both teachers and business leaders were engaged in rethinking the nature and purpose of their "interaction." More specifically, both teachers and business leaders appeared to be raising the bar for interaction in terms of expectations of contemporary functionality. There was, for example, noticeably less interest amongst both teachers and business representatives in what might be called the traditional interaction model, which tended to be crafted around the concept of exposure (e.g., field trips to observe, tell us what you do at work, etc.) and more animated discussion around the question of how does this help the student, the community, and the employer (e.g., field trips to learn how and why things are done and what it means to me the student, parent, teacher, employer; tell me what I need to know about how and why you do the things you do and how might affect me; give me opportunities to gain understanding and skills, etc..)

These changing goals and expectations increase the potential value of interaction amongst the schools, teachers, communities and businesses. They also place a premium on getting the interaction right and to the extent there was frustration with existing

behaviors it tended to focus on issues such as logistical issues, design or nature of the interaction, communications, and partner understanding and flexibility.

The conversations about what was working and what was not working evolved out of the review of the interactive activities in which schools and businesses were currently involved. As such, they began with a sense that everyone wanted interaction and early comments focused on what participants perceived as the logistical impediments. For teachers, logistical impediments included: a) not knowing who from the business community might be interested and/or how to make the arrangements; b) making sure they could get someone who could make a good presentation; and c) having the necessary funding for the interaction (e.g., transportation costs). For business people, the logistical impediments included: a) the lack of scheduling flexibility due to teacher desire to have interaction correlate with specific lesson plans or curricula blocs; and b) not enough guidance in terms of goals, topics or audience.

As participants talked about these logistical issues, however, it became apparent that most had more fundamental concerns related to broader issues. Some were concerned about what they perceived as a fixation on preparing students for college and wanted to talk about how business school interaction might help students and parents appreciate the range and value of non-college employment options. Others talked about the need to engage and inspire the students by rethinking, expanding and enhancing the experiential options available. Still others wondered how to make the interaction more accessible and user-friendly.

Inevitably, the issue of communications between the schools, teachers, the business community and the community-at-large arose. It was clear relatively early in this collaborative environment that most teachers and business leaders realized that they had not achieved an awareness and understanding of the challenges and opportunities the others faced required to achieve the more focused, user-friendly, effective interaction they all appeared to want. For example, business leaders, frustrated by the idea that unprepared students could progress from one grade to the next, were astounded to learn that elementary and middle school students cannot be held back without parental approval. Teachers, for their part, spoke repeatedly about their need to learn more about business and about their desire for more meaningful opportunities to work in the private sector that they could use to inform their teaching and benefit their students.

As they worked their way through these issues, participants focused once again on logistics; not the logistics involved with event scheduling, but the logistics required to develop and sustain the sort of meaningful relationships required to achieve productive interaction between the educational and business communities. Participants talked, for example, about the challenges that arise in cross-sector relationship building when, as things stand now, most, if not all, teachers cannot leave their schools and, therefore, essentially have no time for external interaction during what most business people view as the work day. This limited mobility also seemed to affect what teachers knew about

what was happening in other schools and school districts. Teachers appeared equally frustrated by the lack of networking opportunities and both talked about the need to learn more about the challenges and opportunities the others faced.

C. What could we do to enhance current efforts?

Facilitator Observation: It is important to note that all across Wisconsin there are teachers, administrators, school boards, business leaders, civic leaders, and volunteers working hard to support educators in their efforts to help students achieve their full potential. It is also important to note, however, that both the recent survey data and the small group discussions suggest that there is a pervasive sense that the changing world we live in requires that we do more.

Participants came at this question from a variety of different vantage points and ultimately highlighted five potential targets for enhancing and/or improving current efforts, including:

1. Enhancing knowledge and understanding amongst the participants in these efforts.

As has been suggested earlier, it is clear that teachers want a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing businesses. They would also like more hands-on experience in the private sector. It is also clear that the business community could benefit from a deeper awareness of the issues with which educators are grappling. The goal in both cases would be to fine-tune current approaches based on a better understanding of needs being addressed and a more informed sense of available options.

2. Enhancing collaboration in the design of the efforts.

See No. 1 above.

3. Enhancing awareness of, and access to, relevant operational information.

Two issues arose in this area. First, it was clear that participants were frustrated and, in some cases inhibited by a lack of information they believed they needed. Teachers, for example, talked in most of the meetings about not knowing how to reach, or who to contact in, the business community to arrange for more interaction. Second, it was also apparent that some of these efforts were being hampered by a lack of awareness about relevant information. For example, business groups like the Waukesha Business Alliance have worked hard to develop inventories of people, resources and activities that educators might find useful, but based on the discussion groups teacher awareness of these resources needs to be heightened.

4. Enhancing the ability to provide students with information they need and can use.

Participants talked about the need for information and interaction that would engage students. This was not a call for less rigor, but for a sharper focus on relevance. Students need to appreciate the relevance of what they are learning in their classrooms, which of course means that what they are being taught must be relevant to what they will need to live their lives to the fullest. For that paradigm to work, interaction with the business community (and other external audiences) must be clearly related to their educational experience (e.g., here's how what you are learning today gets put to use in our workplace). There was also discussion about the need to make greater and more effective use of technology in efforts to inform students and teachers.

5. Expanding educator, parent, civic organization and business participation in these efforts.

Growing acceptance of the complexity of the interconnectivity amongst the challenges and opportunities facing schools and the communities they serve is spurring increased interest in multi-sector collaborations and a growing realization of the need for greater engagement.

D. What new ideas or innovations might be helpful?

Facilitator Observation: The research undertaken by WCG suggested that teachers understood the need for change in the educational effort and that most teachers see themselves as actively engaged in an effort to agree on what changes were necessary and appropriate. Most business leaders, for their part, have been part of a decade-long, highly visible and often difficult effort to accommodate changes in their environment. Both experiences informed and shaped participant engagement with this question producing an openness to thinking in new ways and an interest in moving forward together.

Conversation about this question paralleled discussions about the five targets for enhancing and/or improving current efforts referenced above. When all was said and done, the suggestions and ideas offered focused on:

1. Enriching teacher and business representative experience and understanding of the challenges and opportunities with which each sector is grappling. Suggestions included:
 - a. the development of a comprehensive inventory of school-teacher-business interaction efforts throughout Wisconsin, including program descriptions, media coverage, and contact information for those engaged in the programs;

- b. the design and establishment of a “sabbatical” option for preK-12 teachers that would enable them to enhance their ability to teach and help students by spending time expanding their knowledge of: a) the private sector; b) new technologies; and/or c) a social or economic issue directly affecting their students;
 - c. the design and establishment of short-term “job swap” opportunities for teachers and business people that would provide a deeper immersion than current options and would focus on knowledge enrichment and relationship building;
 - d. the design and establishment of a “School Ambassador” program engaging teachers, students, parents, administrators and business people in a variety of experiential and discussion opportunities;
 - e. the design and establishment of opportunities for collaborative innovation and problem solving;
 - f. an examination of current teacher preparation programs in search of ways to enhance the information they get about the private sector, including internships and other types of work opportunities.
2. Informing, empowering and motivating students. Suggestions included:
- a. focus a portion of the school-business interaction on the importance of validating the relevance of the educational experience to the student’s ability to enhance his/her career options and life choices, which would include:
 - i. working with educators to make sure the curricula are relevant;
 - ii. working with students to make sure they understand how the curricula are relevant;
 - iii. working with business people to expand and enhance opportunities to showcase curricula relevance in their workplaces;
 - b. work on expanding and enhancing work opportunities for students and teachers, including summer employment; flexible hours employment, internships, apprenticeships, mentor programs; and greater use of technology;
 - c. expand and enhance existing programs that provide opportunities for skill-related achievement-based learning (e.g., STEM-related programs; blended high school-tech college programs; programs for youth interested in farming and agriculture, career academies).
3. Improving communications and building relationships. Suggestions, included:
- a. all of the above;
 - b. continue to survey and convene small group discussion sessions;
 - c. development of a digital communications platform that provides timely, relevant information and serves as a user-friendly “gathering place” for those interested in these issues.

III. Conclusion

Thank you to all those who participated in and supported the discussion sessions.

The discussion groups were extremely informative and, with the other research findings, provide both important insights into the challenges and opportunities facing our schools and employers and an intriguing menu of possibilities for moving the needle on some critical issues.

At the end of each discussion session, participants were asked whether or not they believed the session had been useful and whether or not it made sense to continue work on the issues discussed. While no “votes” were taken, it is fair to say that there was near universal, if not universal, support for moving ahead. With that in mind, WCG will share this information with a variety of interested audiences over the next 12 to 16 weeks, and develop a proposal for continuing the conversations, taking action and moving forward.