



Education in Wisconsin **The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly**



Below is a survey of the state of education in Wisconsin:

The Good

Standards – In 2010, Wisconsin’s English language arts (ELA) and math standards received a D and F, respectively, from the national Thomas B. Fordham Institute.¹ On June 2, 2010, the Wisconsin State Board of Education adopted the rigorous Common Core State Standards in ELA and math for grades K–12.² These new standards received a B+ and an A- for ELA and math, respectively, from the Fordham Institute.³ Mastery of these standards will help ensure

that Wisconsin students are prepared for success in college and the workforce.

Data System – Wisconsin’s state longitudinal data system contains all ten core elements that the Data Quality Campaign deems essential. Now, Wisconsin must work to maximize use of that data capacity in driving effective decision making to improve system and student performance.⁴

The Bad

Charter School Laws – According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ 2011 ranking of state charter school laws, Wisconsin’s public charter school law is ranked 34th in the nation. Wisconsin allows a variety of charter school options, including new start-ups, conversions, and virtual schools, but the state caps student enrollment in virtual charters at 5,250. In Milwaukee, the law allows the local school board, city of Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee Area Technical College to serve as authorizers; however, outside Milwaukee, only local school boards may serve as authorizers. Wisconsin must expand authorizing options, ensure authorizer accountability, provide adequate authorizer funding, strengthen quality control measures, increase operational autonomy, and ensure equitable funding and access to facilities. For the 2010-11 school year, Wisconsin has 35,000 students attending public charter schools, which provide needed educational options for families.⁵

Teacher Policies – In its *2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, the National Council on Teacher Quality gave the state of Wisconsin an overall D for state policies focused on teachers.⁶

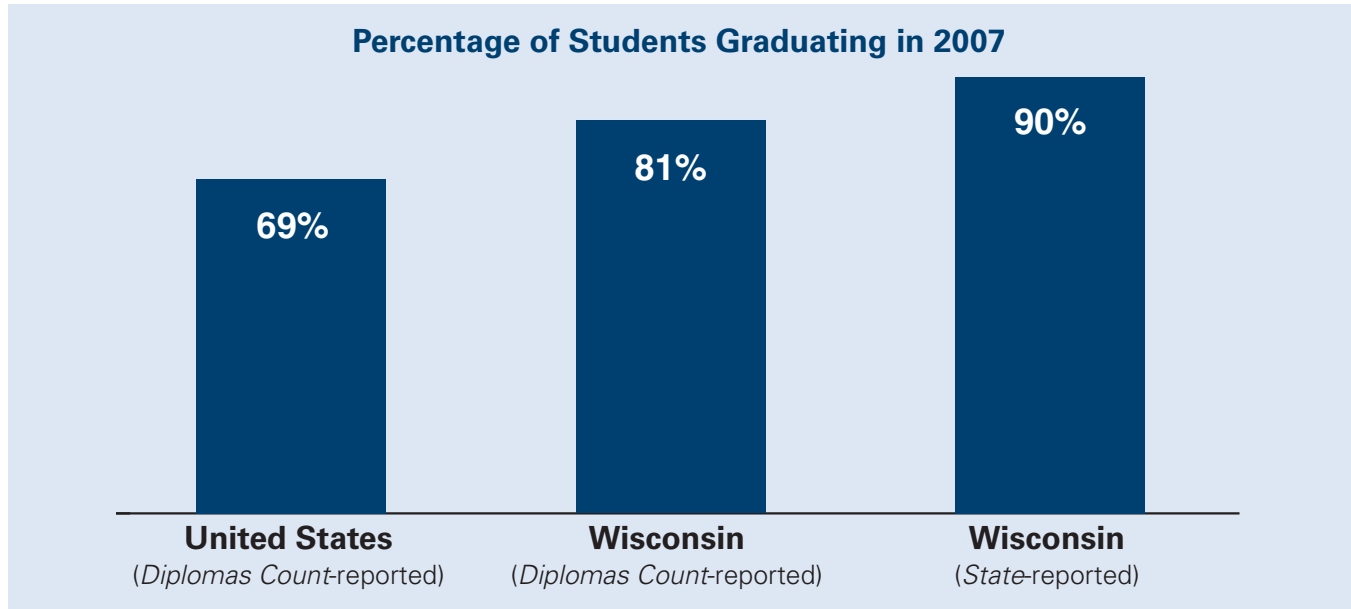
Specifically, the state received grades on its ability to perform in the following areas:

- Delivering well-prepared teachers: D-
- Expanding the pool of teachers: D-
- Identifying effective teachers: D-
- Retaining effective teachers: C
- Exiting ineffective teachers: D

However, Wisconsin has since enacted legislation repealing its teacher-student data firewall and now allows the use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations.⁷

Return on Investment – Student achievement in Wisconsin is middling relative to state spending on education according to the 2007 national *Leaders and Laggards* report. Wisconsin received a C and ranked 23rd among all states for its return on investment, which was measured by its students’ performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—an independent measuring stick also known as the Nation’s Report Card—relative to its per-pupil spending (\$8,205, after controlling for student poverty, the percentage of students with special needs, and cost of living).⁸

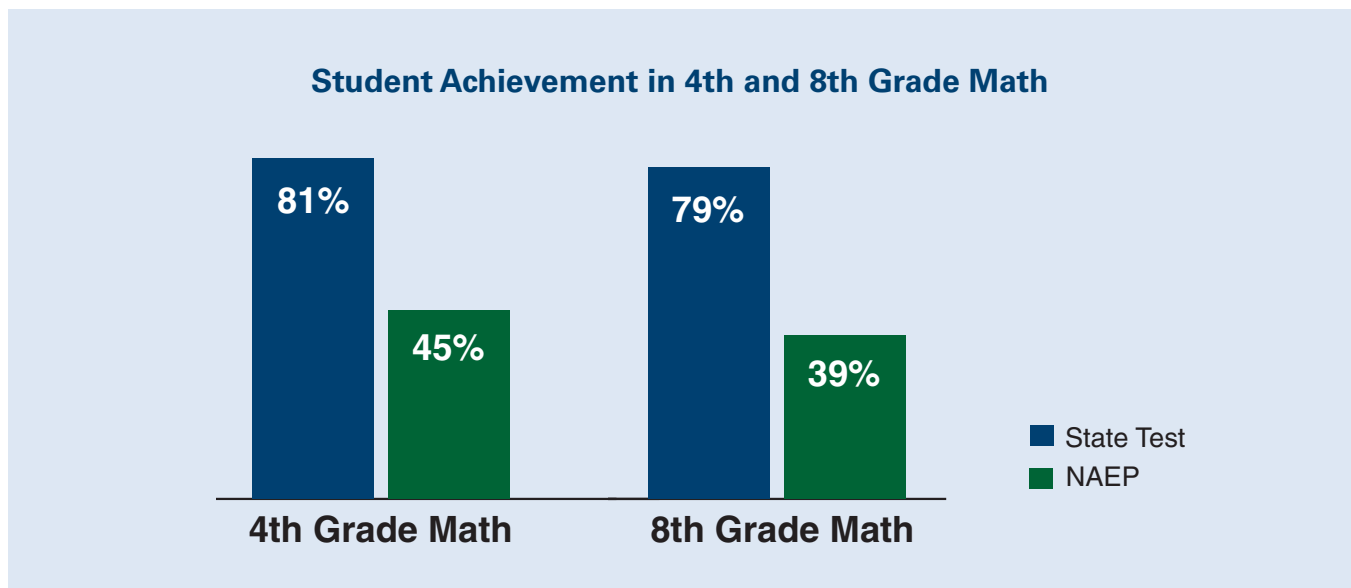
Graduation Rate – Wisconsin reports a 90% graduation rate,⁹ but the national *Diplomas Count* report calculates a rate of 81%.¹⁰ Below is the percentage of students graduating in 2007 in Wisconsin as compared to the United States.



The Ugly

Student Achievement – Like many other states, Wisconsin paints a misleading picture of how well its students are performing. While the state reports

proficiency rates of 79% or higher for 4th and 8th graders in math, NAEP reveals a 45% or lower proficiency rate for both grades.¹¹



Achievement Gap – Not only is the state performing insufficiently overall, but some groups of students are faring even worse. There is more than a 30-point gap in scores between Wisconsin's black and white students on both 4th and 8th grade reading and math tests.¹² This is morally unacceptable and a significant threat to continued prosperity and economic competitiveness in Wisconsin and the nation.

Dropouts' Effect on the Economy – The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the

lost lifetime earnings in Wisconsin for the 2010 class of dropouts alone would total over \$3.7 billion. If Wisconsin graduated all students ready for college, the state would save as much as \$86.2 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings. In addition, if the state increased its male high school graduation rate just 5%, Wisconsin's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about \$101 million each year.¹³ Significantly reducing dropouts each year would multiply these positive outcomes.



Endnotes

- ¹ Thomas B. Fordham Institute, *The State of State Standards – and Common Core – in 2010*, July 2010.
- ² National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standard Initiative: Preparing America's Students for College and Career*, October 2010. (<http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states>)
- ³ Thomas B. Fordham Institute, *The State of State Standards – and Common Core – in 2010*, July 2010.
- ⁴ Data Quality Campaign, *2010-11 Survey Results*, 2011. (<http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey/states>)
- ⁵ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, *Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws*, January 2011.
- ⁶ National Council on Teacher Quality, *2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, January 2010.
- ⁷ National Council on Teacher Quality, *2010 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, January 2011.
- ⁸ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness*, February 2007.
- ⁹ U.S. Department of Education, ED Data Express, State Graduation Rate, All Students: 2006-07 (<http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm>). Accessed on February 9, 2011.
- ¹⁰ Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *Diplomas Count 2010*, June 2010.
- ¹¹ New America Foundation, *Federal Education Budget Project*, September 2010. (<http://febfp.newamerica.net/>)
- ¹² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009.
- ¹³ Alliance for Excellent Education, *Wisconsin High Schools*, 2010. (<http://www.all4ed.org/files/Wisconsin.pdf>)

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