

College and Career Readiness Initiatives Headline State Superintendent Visit to New Berlin

New Berlin, Wis. – State Superintendent Tony Evers and John Ashley, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards visited the School District of New Berlin on Monday to learn how the district is using the research-based performance metrics recommended by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) to inform subsequent phases of the district’s College and Career Readiness initiative.

The district has been a leader in the implementation of Education for Employment legislation and Academic and Career Planning.

“It is our collective work to ensure all students graduate as informed consumers of postsecondary education and training to encourage completion of a postsecondary credential with value in the labor market,” SDNB Superintendent Joe Garza said. “We are committed to our role in fueling innovation and job creation while supporting the projected workforce needs in the 21st century innovation economy for the benefit of our students, our region, and the state of Wisconsin.”

One of the challenges faced by many high-performing districts like the SDNB is the case statement for change. Superintendent Garza’s earlier work on the Joint Legislative Committee for Improving Opportunities in High School caused him to pursue changes that would provide additional relevance to the learning opportunities available to students throughout their K12 career.

“We encourage all students to pursue postsecondary education or training after high school,” Garza said. “It’s part of our culture. But we also want to make sure they are informed consumers of whatever they choose to pursue. For those students who choose to go to a university, we want to make sure that they are prepared to effectively navigate the system to get the most of their investment and complete their degree in a timely manner.”

In recent years, the district has implemented programming that provides career awareness, exploration and preparation to all students regardless of their plans after high school. The district has also developed and expanded pathways in manufacturing, engineering, construction, healthcare, teaching, computing, entrepreneurship, and more.

“I am not worried about students in the School District of New Berlin getting the academic content they need. New Berlin has always done a good job with that,” Ashley said. “It would have been easy for the district to rest on their laurels. I applaud their efforts to raise expectations even higher to ensure that students can see the relevance in what they are learning.”

“This work was not easy and it was not free,” Garza added. “We had to rethink some of our priorities in order to expand the opportunities available to students so they could set and pursue action plans in alignment with their personal, academic, social and career goals. Our students are encouraged to try out experiences from many different pathways before graduation.”

The district provided an update on their work with the AASA’s Redefining Ready campaign to show how expanding the metrics used to measure College and Career Readiness are aligned to the shared objectives of Education for Employment legislation as well as Academic and Career Planning.

“At the state level, our accountability systems started with those things that were easy to measure,” Evers said. “We can slice and dice test scores to help districts monitor progress. But we understand that test scores can’t be the only measure. Finding benchmarks that adequately measure progress toward College and Career Readiness across such a diverse group of districts is important work. We appreciate pioneers like the School District of New Berlin as your efforts can help to inform our work.”

The SDNB Board of Education signed a resolution that supported the district’s work on expanding the metrics used to monitor progress toward College and Career Readiness in September. The City of New Berlin recently signed a similar resolution, and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards has also signed a resolution providing its support at a state level.

The District plans to have a new framework to propose to the Board of Education later this spring that will include the research behind recommended metrics for those learning experiences that have proven to lead to postsecondary success. This will include some or all of the following:

- Career awareness and exposure
- Experiential learning
- AP coursework
- Dual enrollment coursework
- Co-curricular engagement
- Community Service
- Industry credentials
- Attendance

The district continues to evaluate ways to expand the opportunities for students in each of these areas and how to efficiently and effectively measure the number of students who engage in them as part of future reporting.

During the visit, students from select programs provided their perspective on how the changes in the SDNB have impacted them personally and how their experiences might affect their postsecondary plans. Guests were provided a tour of Eisenhower Middle/High School, with specific stops to visit with students in the certified nursing assistant lab; engineering and construction spaces; and the TechKNOW program, a student-centered technology support program.

“It is great to see districts approaching education much differently than we did in the past,” Evers added. “The students representing the School District of New Berlin are impressive and demonstrate the breadth of learning that tests simply can’t measure.”

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