

Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

Reducing Gaps and Providing More Opportunity in a Rural Community

Need

Northland Pines School District (NPSD) has seen changes in student demographics and an increase in students living in poverty. There was an identified, growing learning gap between economically disadvantaged students and students that were not economically disadvantaged. The traditional approach to education was no longer meeting the needs of all students in the school district.

Priority Areas

1. Increasing access to a quality high school education for educationally disadvantaged students.*
2. Reducing and eliminating achievement gaps

Charter School Type: District Instrumentality Charter School

District Size: 1,306 students

Solution

NPSD, located in Northern Wisconsin, created a committee made up of educators and community members to look into alternatives to the traditional approach to educating their students. This committee concluded that a Montessori charter school would help the school district meet the needs of all students. There is a great amount of research supporting the Montessori approach to learning when working with students who are economically disadvantaged. NPSD decided to create a different approach to learning by opening a Montessori elementary school in 2016. [Northland Pines Montessori Learning Center](#) (NPMLC) is co-located in the same building with St. Germain Elementary School. The two schools work together by sharing expertise and resources to best support the needs of all families and students. Families now have two different choices for their elementary students. NPMLC has a mission to support the whole child socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually through the use of Montessori methodology. NPMLC has the following four focus areas:

- Recognize and celebrate the unique gifts of students through personalized learning
 - Create a prepared environment that encourages responsibility to self and others
 - Promote student, family, and community engagement
 - Foster citizenship skills through environmental education and organized community
- School Type: District Instrumentality Charter School

**Educationally disadvantaged students - economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, migrant students, limited English proficient students (also referred to as English learners or English language learners), neglected or delinquent students, or homeless students.*

Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

High School Students Get a Head Start on a College Degree

Need

There are many roadblocks that get in the way of high school students making the transition from high school into post-secondary education. Many research studies claim lack of stable support is one of the greatest roadblocks to post-secondary education. Having difficulty navigating the transition year after high school graduation affects all demographics of students. Simply just providing financial support and facts about the application process is not enough. Without positive emotional cultivation and advice from knowledgeable support staff, getting to and through college becomes a much harder challenge. Students often do not know what it truly takes to succeed or where to find the right support and resources they need. During the transition year, students often lack a caring adult who believes in them and in their academic goals.

Priority Areas:

1. College and career readiness
2. Reducing and eliminating achievement gaps
3. Increasing access to a quality high school education for educationally disadvantaged students*
4. Serving students at risk of dropping out or who have previously dropped out
5. Increasing the overall graduation rate

Charter School Type: Independent Charter School

School Size: 245 students

Solution

[Tenor High School](#), chartered by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, opened in 2005 and continues its mission to ensure students get a head start on college. Students complete high school graduation requirements during their first three years at Tenor High School. Then students are supported through a transition to one free year of college through the dual completion of a high school diploma and a Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) program certificate or technical diploma, and/or credits in a post-secondary degree program. Tenor staff provide individual guidance and mentoring that makes each student's transition to college successful. Tenor helps open the door to college for many students who might not otherwise consider education beyond high school. Many students continue at MATC after high school graduation to complete an associate's degree while others have chosen to pursue a bachelor's degree at a four-year college or university.

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

From 6th Grade to the Doors of College

Need

There is a large achievement gap between white students and African-American students in Milwaukee and across the state of Wisconsin. There is also a large achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and students who are not economically disadvantaged. A disproportionate number of students of color and of low socioeconomic status are not on track to be career and college ready. According to the ACT Policy Report (2005), College Readiness Begins in Middle School, college readiness should begin in middle school.

Priority Areas

1. Reducing and eliminating achievement gaps
2. Increasing graduation rates
3. Serving students at risk of dropping out or who have previously dropped out
4. College and career readiness

Charter School Type: District Non-Instrumentality Charter School **District Size:** 75,431 students

Solution

[Milwaukee Excellence](#) is a 6th-12th grade charter school located in North Milwaukee. Milwaukee Excellence has a goal to have 100% of students accepted to college with college-ready skills by graduation. Milwaukee Excellence uses a college preparatory curriculum aligned to state and national standards to prepare students for the rigors of college. Milwaukee Excellence has created an extended school day (compared to surrounding schools) where students starting in grade six receive triple the amount of English instruction and double the amount of math instruction to establish a ninth-grade cohort that is prepared for the demands of a college-bound high school curriculum. Milwaukee Excellence also implements the following supports:

- Role models from industry partners and volunteers who represent careers and college backgrounds they would not otherwise see or hear about at home
- College match programs to connect students to universities that reach out with the goal of providing opportunities for low-income students
- Support for the parents through parenting classes where poverty impacts home support
- Free, school-led tutoring for the SAT and ACT

Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

Offering an Alternative: Proficiency-Based Learning

Need

During the 2017-2018 school year, Green Bay Area Public Schools (GBAPS) had approximately 9,000 students in grades 6-12. Within this grade range, over 2,300 students met the criteria of being “Children at Risk” under [Wisconsin State Statute 118.153](#). Nearly 50% of all students enrolled in grades 6-12 fell within the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Dropout Early Warning System’s (DEWS) moderate- to high-risk categories. Additionally, 88% of English language learners and 80% of students receiving special education services enrolled in GBAPS fell within the DEWS’ moderate to high-risk categories. GBAPS wanted a response for these growing needs. GBAPS was looking for an alternative education option to support all learners.

Priority Areas

1. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students.*
2. Reducing and eliminating achievement gaps
3. Serving students at risk of dropping out or who have previously dropped out
4. Increasing graduation rates
5. College and career readiness

Charter School Type: District Instrumentality Charter School

District Size: 20,391 students

Solution

[Northeast Wisconsin School of Innovation](#) (N.E.W. Innovation) serves students 7-12 grade. N.E.W. Innovation implements a proficiency-based curriculum where students advance upon demonstration of mastery. By advancing upon demonstrated mastery rather than at the end of a course or semester, students are more engaged and teachers can direct their efforts to where students need the most help. Student support is based on demonstrated need. Staff provide students with the support, time, and flexibility they need to learn and demonstrate the skills and knowledge. N.E.W. Innovation’s proficiency-based education centers on the design, development, and application of knowledge. Each student has a personalized learning plan that meets each student where they are, gets them where they need to be, and guides them where they want to go. N.E.W. Innovation also ensures that its graduates have the skills necessary to transition successfully to post-secondary school or high-demand careers.

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

A K-12 Pathway to Meet Every Child Where They Are At in Their Learning Journey

Need

The Village of Necedah had a growing number of families living in poverty. Necedah had the 39th highest poverty rate among Wisconsin's 420 districts. As a result of the scarcity of resources and options available, Necedah has seen student achievement suffer on state and local tests. The gap between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students on state testing continued to widen. Economically disadvantaged students also had a high likelihood to have poorer attendance than their non-economically disadvantaged peers. A community planning process began in 2017 to address the following interrelated factors affecting student learning: poverty, life experience, post-secondary goals, and mental health.

Priority Areas

1. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students.*
2. Reducing and eliminating achievement gaps

Charter School Type: District Instrumentality Charter School

District Size: 699 students

Solution

The Necedah School District's community planning team decided to create an alternative K-12 pathway in the district as a solution to the effects of generational poverty and to provide another option for students. Necedah School District opened two charter schools: [N-Vision Learning Center](#) (elementary grades 1-5) and [N-Gage Academy](#) (middle/high school grades 6-12). These charter schools are designed around project-based and experiential learning. Along with Eric Jensen's research found in *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, each school is specifically designed to provide every student with unique experiences and opportunities to broaden their understanding of what is possible.

At N-Gage Academy, students participate in a unique blend of seminars, field experiences, and real-world project-based learning to provide a different approach to learning. At N-Vision Learning Center, powerful learners are created by developing personalized learning goals for each student focused on the student's strengths and needs. Both charter schools are open to all learners as each student has an opportunity to personalize their learning—Necedah has re-imagined what education can look like for each student.

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QUESTIONS?

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

Connecting with the Community to Serve Students Differently

Need

Over 40% of the elementary students in the School District of Waupaca were considered economically disadvantaged, based on free- and reduced-lunch eligibility. Through school improvement efforts and analysis of district data it was determined that the school district needed to work to reduce and eliminate the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students.* This sub-group has shown a consistent achievement gap over the past several years. The school district and community members determined that there should be more learning choices in the community. The school district also felt it was important to have greater connections to the local community. A learning choice for families was needed and would help all students in the district.

Priority Areas

1. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students*
2. College and career readiness
3. Reducing and eliminating achievement gaps

Charter School Type: District Instrumentality Charter School

District Size: 2,113 students

Solution

The School District of Waupaca worked with community focus groups to determine the need for a charter school to differently support all students. [Chain Exploration Center](#) (CEC) was created to support the work of the district to reduce and eliminate the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students* and to increase career and college readiness focusing on 21st century skills. The largest economic specialties of Waupaca County are in Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting, Fishing, Manufacturing, and Construction. The four focus areas of the school (S.T.E.M., Fine Arts, Environment, and Agriculture) were chosen in part because they reflect the local economy, offering students hands-on, relevant learning experiences that will be supported by local experts in the field.

CEC was designed to use project-based learning (PBL) for several reasons: PBL has demonstrated effectiveness with low-income populations, the methodology is a tool to differentiate for all learners, outcomes of PBL include self-awareness and self-confidence that will be supported by our small school environment, and lastly PBL allows for flexibility in final products and creative learning processes in which students of all socio-economic backgrounds thrive. PBL incorporates 21st century learning skills to ensure all children are prepared for their next step in career and/or college. The CEC contains a natural alignment with 21st century skills development, which is intentionally and organically integrated into student projects.

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

Using Nature to Meet the Needs of All Students

Need

English Language Arts (ELA) and math data for Northern Ozaukee demonstrated a need to better serve students who are educationally disadvantaged and not achieving at the same rate as their peers. Results from the Forward Exam suggest a large achievement gap in both ELA and math for students who are educationally disadvantaged (especially students with disabilities). In ELA, 5th grade Northern Ozaukee students without disabilities dramatically outperformed students with disabilities according to Forward Exam results. Also, Northern Ozaukee students with disabilities' ELA achievement on the Forward Exam was significantly lower than the state average. In math, 5th grade Northern Ozaukee students without disabilities outperformed students with disabilities according to Forward Exam results by a much greater difference than the state average. Finally, Northern Ozaukee students with disabilities math achievement on the Forward Exam was lower than the state average. The community could clearly see that educationally disadvantaged students* needed a different approach for their learning.

Priority areas

1. Reducing and eliminating the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students*
2. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students*

Charter School Type: District Non-Instrumentality Charter School

District Size: 1,030 students

Solution

Research suggests regular opportunities to learn in the outdoor setting can promote students' health, social development, concern for the environment, and overall learning of academic material. As a result, [Riveredge Outdoor Learning Elementary School](#) (ROLES) was created on 379 acres of restored prairies, woods, and wetlands at [Riveredge Nature Center](#) near Newburg, Wisconsin. By creating a classroom without walls in a small community, ROLES' intention is to individualize instruction taking full advantage of the flexibility for curriculum, classroom settings, and the days and hours of instruction to meet the needs of students. Through an engaging environment that awakens curiosity in a setting immersed in nature, ROLES' mission is to serve educationally disadvantaged students* (especially those identified with ADHD) who may not otherwise be engaged in a traditional setting, as well as to reduce and eliminate the achievement gap.

The school community creates a laboratory for outdoor learning which amplifies the outcomes of public education, serves learners of all abilities and needs, fosters a deep connection to the environment, and prepares students for success in school and life. Inquiry, nature and community drive the approach for learning. Students who are engaged in learning tend to achieve at greater levels. Through this innovative and personalized approach, ROLES is designed to increase access and reduce/eliminate the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students.*

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

A Consortium Solution to Create New Learning Mindsets and Behaviors to Overcome Barriers

Need

The Wisconsin Indianhead Network (WIN) Consortium, which includes the school districts of Bruce, Cadott, Cornell, Gilman, Lake Holcombe, New Auburn, and Stanley-Boyd will work collaboratively to improve student achievement. Over half of all consortium students (52.06%) were identified as economically disadvantaged youth. Economically disadvantaged rural youth were not learning at the same rate and level as their peers as measured by state tests and site-based assessments. The community concluded that time needed to be spent eliminating barriers to poor families participating in WIN learning opportunities. A consortium solution where barriers would be removed and overcome was an essential next step.

Priority areas

1. Reducing and eliminating the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students*
2. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students*

Charter School Type: District Consortium Charter School

Total Consortium Size: 5,720 students

Solution

WIN, Edvisions, Chippewa Valley Technical College and several community partners came together to create [eSucceed Charter School](#). eSucceed is an online virtual charter school that helps students develop a solid foundation of knowledge and real-life, problem-based thinking skills through their own curriculum Environments of Success™. Through an array of distance learning and online course options, students experience a program of “gradual release of responsibility.” Research supports the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and online learning to support students (especially educationally disadvantaged) with increased engagement, rigor, and flexibility. Students at eSucceed are prepared to meet the demands of a career and college through hands-on, practical, community-based projects rooted in the necessary skills of the modern workplace.

The partnership with CESA 10 provides access to curricular and instructional experts, subject-area specialists, special educators and instructional coaches. This partnership ensures instructional coaches are used, specifically targeting innovative practices to serve educationally disadvantaged students,* ensuring eSucceed is meeting the needs of all learners. The WIN consortium’s eSucceed charter school is open to all students as it works to address the needs of educationally disadvantaged students* through increased learning engagement, critical thinking, and real-world problem solving.

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

Creating a School for the Exceptional Mind

Need

District and community leaders in North Fond du Lac recognized and determined that traditional educational approaches and complementary programming were not adequately supporting and addressing the needs of students with disabilities, especially students with neurological variations. On average, 24% more of the students with disabilities failed to achieve proficiency on the Wisconsin Forward Exam than was the case for the students without disabilities. When the Aspire test was used as a measure, 38.7% more of the students with disabilities tested as “Not Ready” than was the case for the students without disabilities.

North Fond du Lac also recognized the lack of transition services for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual Disorder (ID). Students with ASD and ID were often not prepared for employment despite often being in school longer than their peers without disabilities. The 2017 report of the Autism Society of Wisconsin (ASW) discussed the failure to address the needs of individuals with ASD by highlighting the scarcity of access to adequate services, lack of caregiver support, missing social interactions, and an overall absence of community awareness. Individual families affected by autism reported much stress while trying to access needed support and services.

Priority areas

1. Reducing and eliminating the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students*
2. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students*

Charter School Type: District Non-Instrumentality Charter School **District Size:** 1,446 students

Solution

North Fond du Lac School District decided to partner with the Treffert Center (a multidisciplinary education, evaluation, treatment, and research center providing services to people with autism, behavior, or communication difficulties) to create a charter school specifically designed to serve educationally disadvantaged students* with characteristics of neurological variation. The [Treffert Way for the Exceptional Mind](#) charter school partners with families and the school district to ensure comprehensive learning opportunities and services based on the needs of each individual student. Treffert Way focuses on the needs of each student based on a complete assessment of the strengths and needs of each child. A strength-based educational program is designed based on each student’s diagnosis. The school’s program also includes specific support for families and caregivers, creating a systems approach to education. Natural Environment Teaching (NET) is used to help the teaching of language across persons and settings. Treffert Way scaffolds all learning to ensure student motivation and transferable learning outside the school walls. Treffert Way for the Exceptional Mind’s unique model supports the success of all students as it provides endless possibilities to build upon each student’s unique strengths and abilities.

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Wisconsin Charter School Case Studies

A Greater Community Where All Children Are Prepared to Contribute and Succeed

Need

Only 34% of children in the Madison area had access to a quality day care or preschool. A large percentage of families residing in the 53713 zip code do not earn enough income to afford the cost of early childhood education, especially high-quality day care or preschool. Head Start, which serves young children from low income families, had limited space and was consistently full. It was highly unlikely that children who are living in poverty would begin first grade ready to succeed educationally. This lack of access was creating a large achievement gap in Dane County. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment shows that Black and Latino children tend to start out one year behind their white peers in school and then fall further behind as they progress through each succeeding grade level. According to the Madison Metropolitan School District data, 83% of Black elementary students during the 2016-17 school year were reading below grade level. With these trends, there is no way Madison or Dane County will ever significantly reduce racial disparities in education and employment between people of color and their white peers.

Priority areas

1. Reducing and eliminating the achievement gap for educationally disadvantaged students*
2. Increasing access to a quality education for educationally disadvantaged students*

Charter School Type: Independent Charter School

District Size: 26,917 students

Solution

[One City Expeditionary School](#) believes in a two-generation community impact approach to cultivating healthy and successful children. One City enrolls students starting at 12 months old. One City is the only public school in Wisconsin that has a longer school day and a longer school year. One City students are in school from 8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and for 219 school days compared to the typical 180 school days per year. Expeditionary Learning (EL), One City's developmental and educational program, is rooted in a creative, play-based curriculum that integrates student-driven project-based learning. Teachers construct learning expeditions that are of interest and importance to children and their future learning needs. Expeditionary Learning engages all learners through a dynamic, creative, project-based, and student-centered learning program that keeps children excited, engaged and appropriately challenged in the learning process.

Students at One City learn about themselves, their community, their family, and the world in their classrooms, on field trips, at home, and through other special learning opportunities created for them. One City understands the importance of community impact as it educates and engages parents in the curriculum and strategies used in the classroom and across the school. One City connects families with community resources through the school's Family Center and Families and Schools Together (FAST) Program.

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