

Redefining the Path to Success

School leaders share how student success is about more than just grades

SESSION *Redefining College and Career Readiness in Wisconsin Schools*

Presenters New Berlin: Laura Schmidt, strategic advisor to the superintendent; Kellie Sanders, chief academic officer; Antigo Unified: Colleen Timm, district administrator



Laura Schmidt, New Berlin

Graduating from high school should mean that a student is ready to enter the workplace or go on to college. In reality, many students are far from ready.

Statistics show that 70 percent of high school students enroll in college but only 46 percent get a degree. Just 30 percent meet ACT benchmarks for readiness.

With new state laws adding more requirements for Wisconsin school districts to demonstrate that their students are career and college ready, the time for closing the gap is now, according to a panel of presenters who discussed a new initiative for measuring readiness.

Laura Schmidt, chief strategic adviser to the superintendent, and Kellie Sanders, chief academic officer — both of the New Berlin School District — shared their district's experience using "Redefining Ready!," a program developed by the AASA (American School Superintendents Association). Also on the panel was Colleen Timm, superintendent of the Antigo School District.

One of the main goals of Redefining Ready! is to expand the traditional indicators of post high school readiness beyond standardized test scores.

"We have students who learn in a variety of ways so we need to have ways that they can demonstrate their readiness," Schmidt said.

The AASA developed a new list of readiness indicators based on comprehensive research. Among some of the key findings were: course attendance is eight times more predictive of success as a freshman than eighth-grade test scores; students who successfully complete Algebra 2 are twice as likely to complete a four-year degree; and completing community service to fulfill class requirements enhances the average odds of college graduation by 22 points.

Redefining Ready! has indicators for college ready, career ready and life ready. In addition to a 2.8 GPA and standardized testing benchmarks, the indicators for college readiness include completion of an AP class, passing an AP or IB exam, and completing Algebra 2 and a dual credit college or math course. Other indicators include completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), taking a math class beyond Algebra 2, and participating in a career pathway course sequence and college academic advising.

Indicators for career readiness include 90 percent attendance rate, 25 hours of community service, a work-based learning experience and two or more organized co-curricular activities, among others.

With new requirements for academic and career planning in the state budget approved last fall and upcoming changes to the state report

card format, Schmidt said Redefining Ready! can help districts with their efforts although much of the work is unfunded.

"Accountability has been an issue. Funding has been an issue," she said. "But, in the end, career and technical education is still good for kids."

Sanders and Timm shared the way they have incorporated the new indicators into their measurement of student readiness. New Berlin's efforts include building an online template that students and parents can access to measure students' progress towards readiness. Their website contains detailed information on the multiple indicators and benchmarks used throughout a student's school career.

Before coming to Antigo, Timm used the Redefining Ready! indicators and research to help create a comprehensive program of improving and measuring student achievement at the Mishicot School District. She has continued those efforts in Antigo but warned audience members that the effort does require new time-intensive data collection methods.

Antigo and New Berlin are members of the Wisconsin cohort of Redefining Ready! which was launched at the State Education Convention. For more information, visit wasda.org/?page=WIReady228. ■