

Research-Practice Partnerships: Paths to Achieving Equity at Kindergarten Entry

Wisconsin Readiness Equity Network (WREN)

RATIONALE

The Wisconsin Readiness Equity Network (WREN) is a collaboration of the five largest urban school districts in Wisconsin. Designed as a response to Wisconsin's enduring racial/ethnic disparities in educational opportunities and academic success, WREN brings together administrators and educators focused on early childhood education in Beloit, Kenosha, Madison, Milwaukee, and Racine.

A research-practice partnership, WREN convenes expertise from UW Madison, the Department of Public Instruction, and the five member districts to develop innovative pathways for action.

The network began in 2018 with visits to districts to share a plan for collaboration, review district programming, and identify general issues of concern. Synthesizing the information shared, the UW WREN team planned two summit meetings on campus. The April summit focused on building a network community, exploring affordances and concerns across actor roles, and identifying critical issues for action. On the basis of that convening, the WREN team identified two themes and did literature reviews to inform practice related to building the capacity for high quality play-based instruction and easing the transition between 4K and 5K. The August summit was designed as a deep dive into these topics and to brainstorm next steps. The team then devised a plan for the upcoming year. The iterative work plan ensures that design reflects partners needs.

Project Purpose:

- To equalize the opportunities for all children through high quality early school experiences.
- To understand how members of a research-practice partnership understand persistent issues in practice in 4K & 5K and to build on strengths while collaborating around challenges and needs.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS

WREN partners identified the following specific interests about high quality play-based instruction:

- Need for teachers to see examples of high quality play-based teaching and learning.
- Shared definition of play-based instruction.
- Greater understanding about the teacher's role in play.
- Professional development for both teachers and administrators about play as a teaching strategy.
- More clarity about teaching literacy and mathematics through play.
- Education for parents and school boards about the power and practice of play-based teaching.
- Planning for play, including assessment and data-use to inform play-based instruction.

METHODOLOGY

To illustrate varied examples of play-based instruction, the research team will video-record practice of expert 4K and 5K teachers in each district. These recordings will be edited to create:

- Critical incidents and used in group and individual interviews with teachers and administrators about local definitions of play, how individuals understand play-based teaching, its prevalence, and the needs for planning for play.
- In addition, the research team members will document 4K and 5K outcomes specified by standards, curriculum, and reporting forms and work to link to existing assessments for 4K and 5K.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The project works with five largest urban school districts in Wisconsin:

- School District of Beloit
- Kenosha Unified School District
- Madison Metropolitan School District
- Milwaukee Public School
- Racine Unified School District

The participants include district administrators, instructional leaders, principals, directors of centers, Head Start, 4K and 5K teachers, staff from DPI, and researchers at UW-Madison.

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HOPES

Our iterative project plan addresses participant concerns with attention to developing local examples of high-quality play-based instruction.

Video recorded examples across partner districts can be used to:

- Create locally relevant teacher professional development for teachers and administrators highlighting play-based teaching.
- Facilitate coaching.
- Develop shared ideas about play.
- Provide informational materials for school boards, community members, and families.
- Stimulate conversations about barriers and opportunities for teaching through play.



EVENTS

Past meetings:

Spring and Summer summits in 2018 at UW-Madison

Future meetings:

Spring Summit 2019 at UW-Madison to share video materials



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