

**STATE OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

**AGENCY PRIMER: “WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW”**

JANUARY 2023



**INSTITUTE FOR  
REFORMING GOVERNMENT**



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## FROM THE DESK OF CJ SZAFIR

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Freedom and Opportunity. Those are ideals that bind us together as a state. Unfortunately, the size and scope of state government too often gets in the way of individuals and families being able to achieve their full potential as they build their share of the American Dream.

We can do better, and we must do better. We all should ask, — “Is the mission of state government, — of each and every agency, bureau, and division —, aligned with the vision that everyday Wisconsinites have for Wisconsin? Is state government set up to help citizens succeed, or is it a roadblock to success? We need a conservative vision for state government, indeed for each and every agency.

Last spring, with support from our donors and Board of Directors, the Institute for Reforming Government started an ambitious project to help answer those questions about the biggest state agencies to help answer those questions because we believe the best way to enhance liberty is to improve transparency. This project was the work of eight experts in Wisconsin state government, including three senior-level cabinet officials, a budget director, and subject matter experts. In addition, our team had regular meetings with former top officials in state government as well as business leaders and other experts outside of government. We looked at past revenue and spending trends. The findings are not surprising.

State agencies are massive. They spend record amounts of taxpayer dollars year over year. They too often get in the way of individual success and are set up as enforcement agents instead of partners in creating a better Wisconsin. They need reform. We need leaders to bring forward conservative visions to the agencies.

In these briefings, we shine light onto state agencies to help all citizens diagnose what is broken. Later, based on these and discussions with people all over Wisconsin, we'll offer government reform ideas and detailed budget analysis to help chart a new course for Wisconsin, - one where each and every individual in our state has the freedom and opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,

CJ Szafir  
*President*  
Institute for Reforming Government

## “Light and liberty go together”

Thomas Jefferson, In a letter to Tench Coxe, 1795”

This document prepared by the Institute for Reforming Government (IRG) is intended to inform policy makers and the public of the full scope of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Our partners at the IRG Action Fund will release conservative, free- market, and liberty- minded policy reforms in a separate document.

For the general public, the executive branch of Wisconsin state government can be a mystery. There are countless agencies with billions of tax dollars flowing through them. Although some may have an understanding of an agency because of their daily work or real- world experience, few people in Wisconsin have a handle on the entirety of the executive branch. Each agency has its own mission, functions, and programs. Some agencies generate their own revenue, some rely on state tax dollars, and many of them take some sort of federal funding. Each agency has unique powers and authorities. The goal of this briefing document is to pull back the veil and show Wisconsinites how their government taxes, spends, and regulates.

Over the course of months, a team of policy experts at IRG pored over all of the information on Wisconsin’s biggest agencies. In this briefing document, you will see agency functions, budget trends, a list of past appointees, and policy concerns. These items create a basis for understanding the scope and history of each agency in an effort to inform policy makers in Madison as they carry out their work in the coming legislative session.

The Department of Public Instruction sustains the apparatus of traditional public education in Wisconsin. They allocate an immense amount of local, state, and federal funds to do so, determine rules and standards for teacher hiring, and determine what children need to succeed by setting state curriculum standards. As a bureaucracy, they also have wide jurisdiction over charter schools, private schools participating in one of the school choice voucher programs, and families interacting with those schools.





The Wisconsin Constitution created the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1848 and required the legislature to provide free public education for all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years old. The State Superintendent served two year terms until the office was changed to a four year term in 1902. Most school operations and curriculum were handled at a local level with the State Superintendent dispersing state funds. The department shared teacher licensing authority with local school districts until the legislature transferred all licensing authority to DPI in 1939. In 1983, the state created uniform high school graduation requirements. In 1985, DPI set standards that all school districts must meet to receive state aid.

Today, the Department of Public Instruction oversees approximately \$16 billion in annual expenditures, most of it directed to the state's 421 local school districts. In addition to managing formula funding, categorical spending programs, and federal funds for the state, the agency is also tasked with overseeing school choice programs. In all, the Department manages the education of about 950,000 students enrolled in public and private schools.

The Department also is responsible for issuing teacher licenses and publishing accountability data such as state report cards. While much of this work is mandated by federal law, the agency is frequently criticized both for inefficiently executing on its required tasks while micromanaging districts in areas that may not be DPI's purview.

DPI is located in the GEF 3 building near the Capitol Square in Madison. There are also a small number of staff who service Wisconsin Educational Opportunity Programs in Ashland, Eau Claire, Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Wausau.

# AGENCY DESCRIPTION, MISSION, & FUNCTION

Information in this section was pulled directly from public sources on the Department of Administration and Department of Public Instruction websites.

## Agency Descriptions

The department is headed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a constitutional officer who is elected on the nonpartisan spring ballot for a four-year term. The State Superintendent appoints a deputy state superintendent, an executive assistant, a special assistant and assistant state superintendents. The assistant state superintendents are responsible for administering the five operating divisions of the department: Academic Excellence, Finance and Management, Learning Support, Libraries and Technology, and Student and School Success.

## Mission

The department, under the leadership and direction of the elected state superintendent, advances the cause of public education and public libraries, and supports Wisconsin's public schools, so all school-age children can access high-quality educational programs meeting student needs and all citizens have access to comprehensive public library resources and services. The department's mission advances educational equity and is driven by the state superintendent's vision that every child is a graduate, college and career ready. The department's work builds on the state's nation-leading graduation rates, college entrance exam scores, and more students taking rigorous college-level courses. But, this vision also acknowledges that today, not every child graduates ready for college or career, and this inequity ultimately drives the department's work. To achieve our vision for every student, the department is committed to ensuring educational equity remains central to how the department functions. Educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income. The department wants all students in Wisconsin to graduate from high school both academically prepared, as well as socially and emotionally competent. The department strives to ensure all graduates possess and demonstrate: proficiency in academic content and knowledge; the ability to apply their knowledge through skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity; and, habits for success, including perseverance, re-



sponsibility, adaptability, and leadership. To this end, the department has established five focus areas of work: Effective Instruction: Each student is taught by teachers using high-quality, standards-aligned, culturally responsive materials and practices. School and Instructional Leadership: Each student's needs are met in schools led by high quality and effective educators. Family and Community Engagement: Each student attends a school that authentically engages with families, communities, and libraries. Safe and Supported Students: Each student learns in an environment that promotes social, emotional, and physical well-being and removes barriers to learning. Meaningful Relationships with Students: Each student has meaningful connections with at least one adult in their school. Public education in Wisconsin is one of our state's great economic and social strengths. The department's mission drives this agenda, providing direct actions to improve student learning, promoting safe and healthy school environments; and ensuring our educators and schools remain the best in the nation. Transforming our education system so every child is a graduate, ready for college and career, will continue to make a lasting impact and strengthen prosperity for all in Wisconsin.

## **Function**

The functions of the Department of Public Instruction are carried out by its five divisions and one office:

### **Office of the State Superintendent**

The Office of State Superintendent is the office of the executive leadership of the Department of Public Instruction. The Office of Legal Services, human resources, information technology, and department budgeting are within the superintendent's office.

### **Division for Academic Excellence**

The division is responsible for teacher licensing, career training and advancement programs, and other programs that support teachers and professional development.

### **Division for Finance and Management**

The division is responsible for state and federal grant administration, school finance and reporting, collection of school enrollment data that is used to determine state aid, and statistical data collection. The division also administers the school choice, open enrollment and homeschool support programs.



### **Division for Learning Support**

The division is responsible for special education programs that support the education of students with disabilities. The division is also responsible for DPI's programs that support student wellness, school discipline, social workers, counseling, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, attendance, and safety. The division is also responsible for statewide programs that support students that are visually impaired or hard of hearing.

### **Division for Libraries and Technology**

The division develops and supports DPI's information technology systems, provides networking and other IT support to school districts, and maintains the Wisconsin Information System for Education (WISE). WISE is a system used by schools to report information required by state and federal law. The division is also responsible for supporting the state's public and school libraries.

### **Division for Student and School Success**

The division is responsible for student assessments, accountability and testing. This includes the Forward Exam, ACT, reading assessments, and National Assessment of Educational Progress. The division also manages the school report cards, programs for Title I compliance, and other programs that support low-income students.



# AGENCY BUDGET TRENDS

The state budget process begins in September of every even year when each agency sends its budget requests to the Department of Administration. The Governor then has several months to put together the executive budget proposal that is forwarded to the Legislature. The Legislature, through the work of the Joint Finance Committee, then holds hearings and votes on the budget through the spring and summer of the odd year. This culminates with the signing of the budget document that summer. While technically due by July 1 of the budget year, often budget debates will drag into the Summer and sometimes the Fall. However, the government does not shut down in Wisconsin as it does at the federal level when there is a budget impasse - it simply continues on the current spending plan until a new budget is adopted.

The Department of Public Instruction has seen a massive increase in funding over the last three budget cycles. Over that time period, DPI has seen an increase of almost \$2 billion in state funding. Despite these large increases, in September of 2022, the Department requested an additional \$2.47 billion for the 2023-2025 budget cycle.

## Agency Budget Trend

Fund	2017 ACT 59	2019 ACT 9	2021 ACT 58
GPR	\$12,254,675,200	\$13,308,403,900	\$14,243,347,500
FED	\$1,758,688,900	\$1,762,171,600	\$1,764,686,800
PR	\$93,235,400	\$94,562,400	\$106,736,300
SEG	\$113,727,500	\$122,596,900	\$136,815,800
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$14,220,327,000</b>	<b>\$15,287,734,800</b>	<b>\$16,251,586,400</b>

## FTE Position Summary

Fund	2017 ACT 59	2019 ACT 9	2021 ACT 58
GPR	252.47	252.47	252.47
FED	312.84	311.84	313.84
PR	76.69	76.69	76.69
SEG			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>642</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>643</b>

# AGENCY LEADERSHIP

The Department of Public Instruction is led by the State Superintendent, a constitutional officer elected to a four-year term. The State Superintendent appoints the other members of their team to help them carry out the duties and responsibilities of the Department. Descriptions of each appointed position are listed below:

## **STATE SUPERINTENDENT**

Elected to a four-year term, the State Superintendent leads and represents the agency. The position is responsible for directing and managing the agency and fulfilling the position's constitutional requirements to oversee public education in the state while ensuring the efficient operation of the agency per state statute. The position is also responsible for reporting on the agency's matters to the Governor and Legislature.

## **DEPUTY STATE SUPERINTENDENT**

The Deputy State Superintendent serves at the pleasure of the State Superintendent and is primarily responsible for assisting the State Superintendent with carrying out the mission of the agency including but not limited to personnel management, day-to-day operations, and external affairs.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT**

The Executive Director of the Office of the State Superintendent also serves at the pleasure of the State Superintendent and is responsible for assisting both the State Superintendent and Deputy State Superintendent. Responsibilities may include but are not limited to day-to-day operations, the office of legal counsel, and external affairs aligned with the agency's mission.

## **CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL**

The Chief Legal Counsel serves at the pleasure of the State Superintendent and provides legal counsel and support involving the agency's affairs.

## **LEGISLATIVE LIAISON**

The Legislative Liaison is primarily responsible for facilitating and managing relationships with the Legislature and external stakeholders to provide information as needed and requested. The position also helps develop the agency's legislative agenda to align with the State Superintendent's priorities, current industry standards and stakeholder concerns.





## COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

The Communications Director supports the State Superintendent in strategic communications and responds to media inquiries. The position may also speak on behalf of the Secretary and represent the agency in the media.

## ASSISTANT DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT

Assistant Deputy Superintendents are appointed by the State Superintendent and are similar to division administrators in other agencies. They are responsible for providing leadership, personnel management and guidance on day-to-day operations for their assigned division. These positions typically report to the Deputy State Superintendent, communicating activities and providing advice to ensure the division is in line with the agency's mission.

These appointments may change during the four-year term of a state superintendent. Listed here are the teams serving under Superintendent Underly in mid-2022, as well as the team that served at the end of Superintendent Evers' last term.

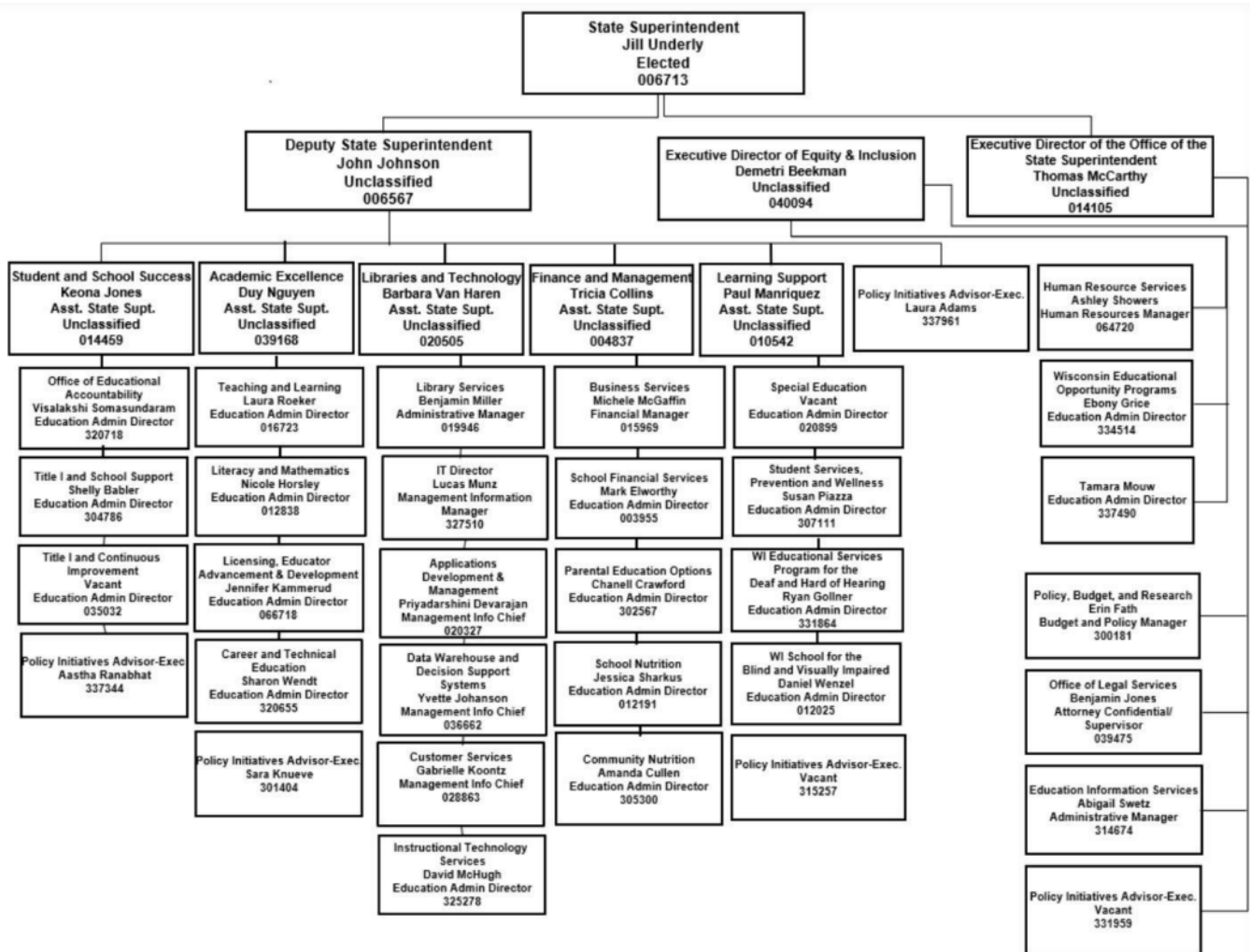
### Agency Leadership

POSITION	EVERS	WALKER
State Superintendent	Jill Underly	Tony Evers
Deputy State Superintendent	Dr. John Johnson	Michael Thompson
Chief of Staff	N/A	Emilie Amundson
Special Assistant	N/A	Scott Jones
Executive Director of the Office of the State Superintendent	Thomas McCarthy	N/A
Chief Legal Counsel	Ben Jones	Ryan Nilsestuen
Senior Policy Advisor	N/A	Jeff Pertl
Communications Director	Abigail Swetz	Tom McCarthy
Policy, Budget and Research Team Director	Erin Fath	N/A
DIVISION ADMINISTRATORS		
Assistant State Superintendent - Division for Academic Excellence	Duy Nguyen	Sheila Briggs
Assistant State Superintendent - Division for Student and School Success	Dr. Keona S. Jones	Dawn Crim

Assistant State Superintendent - Division for Libraries and Technology	Tessa Michaelson Schmidt	Kurt Kiefer
Assistant State Superintendent - Division for Finance and Management	Tricia Collins	Brian Pahnke
Assistant State Superintendent - Division for Learning Support	Paul Manriquez	Carolyn Stanford Taylor



# ORGANIZATION CHART





# ATTACHED COUNCILS, TASK FORCES, & COMMITTEES

Unlike most agencies, DPI's councils, task forces, and committees are overseen by the elected state superintendent, not the Governor. Generally, these groups either give advice to the State Superintendent or they are part of the regulatory process itself. Some major councils follow below.

## **Academic Standards Review Council**

The council recommends academic standards for review and participates in final acceptance of new standards.

## **Advisory Council on Charter Schools**

The council advises the State Superintendent on charter school policies, especially to serve low-income children.

## **Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Programs**

The council provides advice and research on programs to reduce alcohol and drug abuse.

## **Blind and Visual Impairment Education Council**

The council advises the department on statewide programs and standards for the education of students who are blind or visually impaired.

## **Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Education Council**

The council provides the state superintendent advice and information about education programs for the education of students who are hearing impaired.

## **Council on Library and Network Development**

The council provides the department and state superintendent with methods and programs that can improve access to library services statewide.

## **Professional Standards Council for Teachers**

The council advises the state superintendent and department on standards for teacher licensing, teacher education programs and how local school boards can develop teacher evaluation, training and effectiveness programs.

## **School District Boundary Appeal Board**

Members of this board hold hearings and make decisions regarding appeals of local school district boundaries, dissolutions, annexations and mergers.

## **Council on Special Education**

The council advises the state superintendent on issues related to education programs for students with disabilities.



# MAJOR PAST INITIATIVES (2011-PRESENT)

Most major policy initiatives happen during the budget process. The Governor, State Superintendent, and the Legislature, will propose a major reduction or increase in spending for any number of programs. The major initiatives dating from 2011 to the present for the Department of Public Instruction area listed below:

## Major Past Initiatives

INITIATIVE	GOVERNOR	ENACTED	NOTES
Read to Lead	Walker	Yes	
School report cards	Walker	Yes	
Course choice	Walker	Yes	
Voucher expansion	Walker	Yes	
WI ESSA plan	Evers	Yes	
Education pods/ microschools	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
Reducing gaming on school report cards	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
Gifted and talented reporting	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
MPS Breakup	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
Parental Bill of Rights	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
Parental opt-out of face coverings, requiring in-person learning	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
Independent charter school expansion	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers
School choice for all (eliminating income and enrollment caps)	Legislature	No	Vetoed by Evers

# STAKEHOLDERS

Every agency has a number of organizations, professions, and industries that are uniquely interested in the policy or regulatory decisions that could affect their membership or industry. The groups are commonly organized into trade associations and are represented by registered lobbyists that stay in touch with agency leadership. These lobbyists keep their membership informed on current policy debates and use their expertise to educate policy makers on the issues important to their industries. Below is a non exhaustive list of stakeholders that are interested in the Department of Public Instruction.

STAKEHOLDER	TYPICAL ISSUES
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association	Reading, Early Childhood Education
American Federation For Children	K-12 Education
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce	K-12 Education, School Choice, Milwaukee Public Schools
Wisconsin Education Association Council	K-12 Education, Teacher Licensing, Funding
Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty	Legal Issues, School Choice
School Choice Wisconsin	School Choice
WI Association of School Boards	Public School Funding, School Governance
School Administrators Alliance	Public School Funding, School Governance
Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools	School Choice, Voucher Funding



# GOVERNMENT REFORM OPPORTUNITIES

Wisconsin government has grown too big and too expensive. This has precipitated issues across the whole of the executive branch that have become a barrier to the success of Wisconsin residents and businesses alike. The Institute for Reforming Government endeavors to shine light on these issues as prime opportunities for bold reform. Below you will find a non-exhaustive list of policy concerns that we have highlighted for the Department of Public Instruction.

## **Improving Education Options**

Wisconsin has been a pioneer in providing families with options for education besides the public school where they live. Open enrollment, charter schools and the school choice program have empowered parents to make decisions about their children's education. These programs need additional state support and a reduction in bureaucracy to continue to offer families alternatives to traditional public schools.

## **Public School Governance**

Public schools are managed by local school boards under a variety of state and federal laws and regulations. These laws and regulations must be streamlined and improved to ensure that schools are providing an effective education and that parents have confidence that their children are being prepared to be successful adults and good citizens. Parents also should receive accurate, timely data on their schools' performance.

## **Increased Accountability**

Wisconsin needs a strong K-12 education system to educate our children, foster an informed public and grow our economy. High-quality schools make our state an attractive place to live and improve the community. We need to make sure that all schools are held to high standards and that problems are identified, communicated with the public, and addressed. This can be achieved by improving the personnel, curriculum, and funding inputs and holding school district leaders accountable for academic and career outputs..

# CONCLUSION

At the Institute for Reforming Government we know that the government isn't the way of the future - people are. And we believe that in order to empower people and ideas to flourish, our government needs to get out of the way.

This is nothing new for Wisconsinites- we have a long history as the standard bearer for government reform - we were the first state to implement unemployment insurance, Wisconsin Works (W-2), and we were on the cutting edge of major collective bargaining reform. But today the state we love is beginning to lag behind. Our executive branch has become bloated, slow, and expensive - a burden to the state's economy instead of a catalyst.

The solution to this problem isn't more government, it's less. What we need is a conservative vision for the state. This introductory document lays bare the issues and problems that are standing in the way for Wisconsin. In the coming months, IRG will be releasing a series of reforms that will cast a conservative vision for key executive branch agencies in the state.

Now is the time to renew our faith in the people of Wisconsin, not the government.

