

Date: August 29, 2013
To: District Administrators
From: Mike Thompson, PhD, Deputy State Superintendent
Subject: Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) Launch

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will launch a new tool on September 10 as part of our online data portal to help school districts systematically identify students who may drop out or have an unplanned late graduation. The Wisconsin Information System for Education, or WISEdash, will be the home for the new Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS).

As you well know, most of the approximately 6,000 students who drop out of Wisconsin public schools do so in the 11th or 12th grades. However, it is during the middle school years when these students start falling behind and lose interest in school. Identifying these students early will provide you, your staff, and your community time to intervene before and during the critical transition to high school.

DEWS was developed using historical data you already report to the DPI for federal data collection requirements. Researchers looked at attendance, disciplinary removal, mobility across schools and districts, and statewide assessment records to compute the likelihood of successful high school completion in the form of a DEWS score. The scores range from zero to 100. The DPI also groups students into categories of high, moderate, and low risk based on the DEWS score. Low risk indicates a higher likelihood of on-time graduation and high risk indicates a possible need for additional services to keep the student on track toward high school completion.

With the launch of the DEWS site, authorized staff in your district and schools will have access to preliminary individual student risk scores for each of your current seventh- through ninth-grade students. (DEWS scores will be added for incoming sixth-grade students for the 2014-15 school year.) Because DEWS scores are based on prior year data, we encourage looking at local data for each student to provide a richer picture in determining the services or interventions that will help the student succeed. The DEWS Action Guide will have more information about score calculations and how to use local data and contextual information for considering the case of each student. The guide will be on the DEWS website when the system launches in September.

Our Agenda 2017 goal is to have every child graduate college and career ready. Using a diagnostic tool like DEWS facilitates planning and adds to your broader district- and school-level efforts to identify students who may need additional support to succeed.

We are truly grateful to the 34 schools throughout the state that piloted DEWS in spring 2013. Feedback from the pilot was overwhelmingly positive and helped us launch this tool for the beginning of the 2013-14 school year. Technical details for accessing and using DEWS will be announced on launch day.