

Outline of Councils for Achieving Academic Excellence for All in Dane County
Leads: Eric Grodsky, Marah Curtis, Pete Miller, Leslie Orrantia and Carmen Valdez

For many years, Dane County has been characterized by alarming levels of social inequality along racial/ethnic lines. Through a combination of events including changes in University and school district leadership, evolving social movements like Justified Anger and the release and media attention given to the *Race to Equity* report, these issues have captured the attention of policy makers, advocates and the general public over the past few years. We seek to capitalize on this momentum to take action to eliminate racial/ethnic and economic disparities in educational success in Dane County. We will work with community members at the school or neighborhood level to select a specific educational outcome, synthesize research on policies and practices designed to affect that outcome, and collaborate with the community to implement one or two of these policies or practices.

With the resources of community organizations, the university, and government partners at the state and local levels, we seek to build a local model for working in collaboration to achieve these goals. We will learn from our community partners and work to gain their trust and respect. We will look within and beyond the schools to reduce disparities in educational opportunity and success, engaging with those involved in maternal and child health, child care and social services in addition to those tasked with educating children inside and outside of schools.

We have developed a model for community-university partnerships, hereafter referred to as the Councils for Achieving Academic Excellence, with two councils underway and a third in development. These councils include four to six community members and one student from each participating community and four to six representatives from the University. Each council will 1) select one or two explicit and measurable dimensions of educational success on which to focus (e.g., grades, test scores, attendance); 2) identify promising strategies for reducing disparities in these educational outcomes informed by existing research summarized by the university team; 3) pursue the resources necessary to execute the strategies the council adopts in a way that supports a high-quality evaluation of impact; and 4) monitor progress toward achieving the council goals with both qualitative and quantitative (administrative) data. Council leads will assume primary responsibility for advocating for the changes the council recommends but will be supported by other members of the council in their advocacy.

The success of these councils hinges not only on the efforts of those faculty and community members at the table, but on the efforts of many other people to whom council members are connected. On the community side, we need others to advocate, monitor and help improve what happens on the ground. They see it every day; they are much closer to the action. On the university side, our faculty and staff have expertise across a broad spectrum of research in education. They have insights gained through years of research and practice as well as professional networks they can call upon to inform and enable

our work. The councils will draw extensively on the expertise of others in the SoE and the wider university as they move forward.

Thus far, the southwest council (co-led by Miller and Grodsky) has met twice and the northside council (co-led by Curtis and Grodsky) has met once. The initial meeting is largely introductory—outlining the group’s general objectives and the approach they will take, discussing what each person brings to the table and reviewing some data on disparities by race/ethnicity and free/reduced lunch eligibility in grades, test scores and chronic truancy over time in the local community. In the second meeting, the council aims to decide what specific, measurable outcome the group will focus on and brainstorm about what might be done to reduce disparities in that outcome. The third meeting features a presentation by the university leads summarizing their review of the research and seeks to conclude with a commitment to pursue a policy change, program or intervention.

The remainder of the meetings of each Council will facilitate continued two-way communication about the evolution of the initiatives the Council endorsed at its third meeting. Council leads will report on progress, consult with council members on how to overcome obstacles and enlist the support of council members, directly and through council members’ extensive networks, to implement the practices and/or policies council members believe will reduce the disparities the council has targeted. These meetings will also continue to develop bonds of mutual trust and respect among participants that will be needed for the success of the council and future collaborative work to eliminate academic achievement disparities by race/ethnicity and income in Dane County.

We proposed these Councils as a scalable experiment in true community/university collaboration with an explicit focus on opportunity and achievement gaps that inhibit our children and our community from achieving their true potential. This initiative grew out of the School of Education’s Academic Excellence for All agenda. If successful, we believe this approach will offer a scalable model for other community/ university collaborations in Dane County and beyond.

Northeast council

University

Mara Curtis, Associate Professor, Social Work

Gail Allen, Clinical Director, Department of Pediatrics

Annalee Good, Associate Researcher, Wisconsin Center for Education Research

Katherine Magnuson, Professor, Social Work

Community

Kshinte Brathwaite, Director of Programs, Goodman Community Center

Tony Dugas, Principal, O'Keefe Middle School

Carmen Porco, Executive Director of Housing and Community Learning Centers for

Housing Ministries of American Baptists in Wisconsin

Southwest council

University

Pete Miller, Associate Professor, ELPA

Beth Graue, Professor and Chair, C&I

Kristen Slack, Vilas Professor, Social Work

Community

Mike Bruce, Social Worker, Joining Forces for Families

Lisa Hemauer, Social Worker, Joining Forces for Families

Jeff Peterson, Owner, JP Hair Design

Marques Flowers, Social Worker, Memorial High School