2026-2027 Disproportionality Plan
Waunakee Community School District

Introduction

The Waunakee Community School District (WCSD) is dedicated to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and diverse educational environment where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential. Our Disproportionality Plan reflects the district's commitment to addressing systemic inequities, strengthening students' sense of belonging, increasing engagement, and ensuring equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students.

The district's equity statement reflects this commitment:

The Waunakee Community School District embraces the differences among our students, staff, and families. We work to provide a safe environment with access to resources, opportunities, and instruction for all students to reach their full potential in the classroom and beyond. We strive to create a culture of dialogue, acceptance, and inclusion. We are committed to engaging all students so that they may thrive academically, socially, and emotionally in an ever-changing multicultural society.

Understanding Disproportionality

Disproportionality in education refers to the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of particular demographic groups in educational outcomes, programs, or services, including special education.

WCSD was identified as disproportionately overidentifying African American students for special education services during the 2023-2024 school year. This identification prompted a comprehensive examination of district systems, instructional practices, and student experiences to better understand the factors contributing to disparities in educational outcomes.

As part of the federal requirements associated with the district's disproportionality identification, WCSD developed a comprehensive improvement plan addressing systemic barriers and potential biases. The district was also required to reserve 15% of its federal special education funding to support activities designed to address the identified disproportionality.

Rather than focusing exclusively on special education identification, WCSD recognized the importance of examining the broader educational experiences of students and the systems that influence their academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes.

The District has made slow growth in decreasing overall disproportionality in special education:

2023 = 2.6119

2024 = 2.5893

2025 = 2.5736

Using Data to Identify Our Priorities

The district conducted a comprehensive review of academic achievement, student behavior, attendance, special education identification, and stakeholder perception data. This analysis revealed disparities in student experiences and outcomes, including:

- Sense of Belonging: While 71% of white students reported feeling a sense of belonging in their school, only 55% of students identifying as multiracial reported the same.
    - Data is collected every 3 years on the Dane County Youth Assessment, so our next administration will be in 2027.
- Behavior Incidents: African American students were twice as likely as their white peers to experience a behavior incident requiring intervention from administrative or student services staff.
    - This data indicator has not changed significantly over the past 3 years.
- Academic Achievement: African American students represented the lowest-performing demographic group, on average, in academic achievement data collected between 2017 and 2022.
    - Reading Forward Data:
        - 2023 - 2024 - 45.7% proficient/advanced
        - 2024-2025 - 48.7% proficient/advanced
        - 2025-2026 - 43.2% proficient/advanced
    - ELA Forward Data:
        - 2023-2024 - 42.9% proficient/advanced
        - 2024-2025 - 41% proficient/advanced
        - 2025-2026 - 45.9% proficient/advanced
    - Math Forward:
        - 2023-2024 - 42.9% proficient/advanced
        - 2024-2025 - 35.9% proficient/advanced
        - 2025-2026 - 43.2% proficient/advanced

Although these data reflected different aspects of students' educational experiences, the district identified a common theme: the importance of strengthening students' sense of belonging and engagement within their school communities.

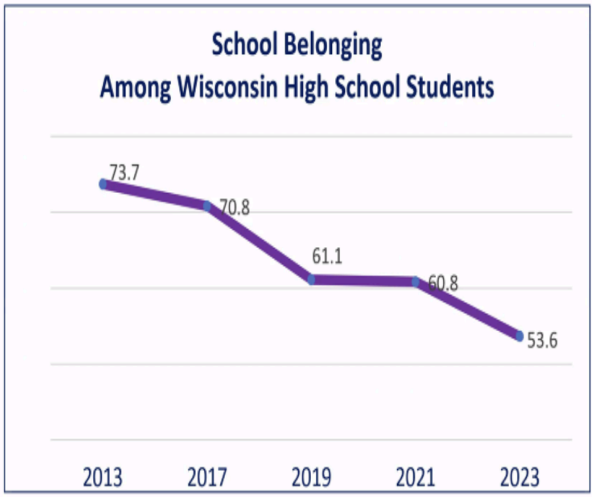
WCSD determined that belonging and engagement should serve as foundational priorities for districtwide improvement efforts. By creating environments where students feel connected, respected, represented, and actively engaged in learning, the district aims to address underlying conditions that may contribute to disparities in student experiences and outcomes.

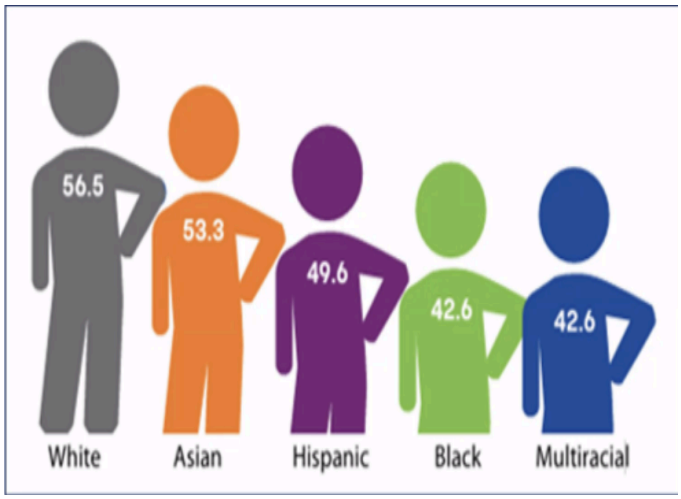
Research

Research supports the connection between academic performance and a student's sense of belonging.

Belonging interventions show the largest positive impact on Black students, significantly improving identity, engagement and long-term outcomes. (Corbin-Thaddies, 2022)

Students who feel a strong sense of belonging are 2.2 times more likely to be engaged in their learning. (OECD PISA Student Well- Being Report)





Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health

Establishing Belonging and Engagement as a Districtwide Priority

To support this work, WCSD partnered with Center 4 All to implement Belonging & Engagement Walks across the district. The walks provide a structured process for observing classroom environments, instructional practices, and school culture using clearly defined indicators associated with student belonging and engagement. This process allows school teams to move beyond examining student outcome data alone and begin identifying the adult practices and environmental conditions that contribute to positive student experiences. The information collected through the walks is used to identify strengths, recognize opportunities for improvement, guide professional learning, and inform school improvement planning.

Demonstrating Growth: 2024–2025 to 2025–2026

During the 2024–2025 school year, WCSD established baseline data through its initial Belonging & Engagement Walks. During the 2025–2026 school year, the district conducted reassessment walks to evaluate progress and identify areas for continued growth. The reassessment results demonstrated encouraging improvement in classroom environment indicators associated with belonging and engagement. The districtwide average for the five assessed classroom environment indicators increased from 2.20 in 2024–2025 to 2.32 in 2025–2026, representing an increase of 0.12 points on a three-point rating scale.

All five assessed environment indicators demonstrated growth, including:

- Classroom visuals and instructional materials that positively reflect students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.
- Teachers' instruction and modeling of a growth mindset.
- Equitable use of teacher proximity with students.
- Teacher body language, gestures, and expressions that communicate the importance of students' questions and opinions.
- Displaying student work within classroom environments.

These results provide evidence of progress in strengthening classroom environments that foster belonging and engagement. The district recognizes that meaningful and sustainable improvement requires ongoing attention to adult practices, instructional approaches, and the experiences of students. As a result, WCSD will continue building on the progress achieved during the first two years of the plan.

Expanding Our Focus: 2026–2027

Building on the progress demonstrated during the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 school years, WCSD will expand its Belonging & Engagement Walk framework during the 2026–2027 school year to focus on two new sets of indicators:

1. Instructional Practices

2. School Culture and Climate

These priorities were intentionally selected to strengthen the connection between belonging, student engagement, effective instruction, and positive school experiences. The instructional practices indicators are aligned with evidence-based High-Leverage Practices (HLPs), allowing the district to integrate belonging and engagement priorities with ongoing instructional improvement efforts included in our SAIL work. The school culture and climate indicators focus on creating inclusive, respectful, supportive, and affirming school environments where students experience positive relationships and equitable opportunities. Together, these priorities represent the next phase of WCSD's commitment to strengthening belonging and engagement as foundational components of student success.

Vision for Improvement

WCSD envisions a district in which:

- Every student experiences a strong sense of belonging and connection to their school community.
- Students feel valued, respected, represented, and supported in their learning environments.
- Instructional practices provide equitable opportunities for all students to engage, participate, and demonstrate their learning.
- Teachers consistently communicate high expectations while providing responsive instruction and support.
- Classroom environments and schoolwide practices affirm students' identities, backgrounds, and experiences.
- Positive relationships between students and adults contribute to safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.
- Students have meaningful opportunities for voice, agency, leadership, and collaboration.
- Families are engaged as valued partners in their children's educational experiences.
- Staff use data, reflection, and collaboration to continuously strengthen instructional practices and school culture.

2026–2027 Belonging & Engagement Goals

Goal 1: Strengthen instructional practices that promote belonging and engagement

During the 2026–2027 school year, the district will focus on Criterion 3: Instructional Strategies within the Belonging & Engagement Walk framework.

The indicators emphasize:

1. Active Student Engagement: Teachers use strategies to engage all students in learning.
2. Multiple Ways to Demonstrate Learning: Students are provided opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and learning in multiple ways.

3. Culturally Responsive Instruction: Instructional resources and strategies are culturally relevant, responsive, and affirming to the student population and community.
4. Growth Mindset: Teachers instruct and model a growth mindset.
5. Connections to Prior Knowledge: Lessons are developed using students' backgrounds, experiences, and prior knowledge.
6. Differentiated Instruction: Multiple access points to grade-level standards are provided through differentiated instruction.
7. Collaborative Learning: Collaborative learning structures are intentionally incorporated into instruction.
8. Responsive Feedback: Teachers engage in individual instructional conversations and provide responsive feedback to meet students' academic needs.
9. High Academic Expectations: Teachers clearly communicate, post, and maintain high academic expectations for all students.
10. Student Agency: Students are provided meaningful opportunities to exercise agency in teaching and learning.

Alignment with High-Leverage Practices

A central component of this goal is the intentional alignment of Belonging & Engagement Walk indicators with High-Leverage Practices (HLPs). The district recognizes that many of the instructional practices associated with belonging and engagement are also foundational to effective instruction for students with diverse learning needs.

The instructional indicators align with High-Leverage Practices that emphasize:

- Systematic instructional planning.
- Adaptation of curriculum tasks and instructional materials.
- Scaffolded instructional supports.
- Flexible grouping and collaborative learning.
- Active student engagement.
- Responsive instructional feedback.
- Cognitive and metacognitive strategies that support student independence.
- Consistent, organized, and respectful learning environments.

By aligning belonging and engagement priorities with High-Leverage Practices, WCSD will create greater coherence across professional learning, instructional improvement, and school improvement planning.

Measures of Progress

Progress will be assessed through districtwide Belonging & Engagement Walk data for Criterion 3, building-level indicator analysis, staff reflection, and evidence of implementation of aligned instructional practices. The district will use initial assessment results to establish baseline data and identify measurable targets for improvement and then complete a reassessment during the 2027-2028 school year.

Goal 2: Strengthen School Culture and Climate to Foster Belonging

WCSD will strengthen schoolwide practices that create inclusive, supportive, respectful, and affirming learning environments where every student experiences a strong sense of belonging.

During the 2026–2027 school year, the district will focus on Criterion 4: School Culture within the Belonging & Engagement Walk framework.

The indicators emphasize:

1. Student Representation: Students and their work are positively represented throughout school environments.
2. Inclusive School Environments: School visuals and displays reflect and affirm diverse identities.
3. Clear Behavioral Expectations: Behavioral expectations are clearly communicated throughout school learning spaces.
4. Equitable Academic Opportunities: Students have equitable access to academic support and enrichment.
5. Equitable Recognition: School systems provide equitable opportunities for student praise and recognition.
6. Student Leadership: Leadership opportunities are available for all students.
7. Effective School Routines: Students understand expectations and routines that support effective transitions and maximize instructional time.
8. Inclusive Collaboration: Students work collaboratively and inclusively to build upon one another's learning.
9. Positive Behavioral Supports: Adults respond to unexpected behaviors through positive, nurturing, and instructional approaches.
10. Restorative Practices: School communities provide opportunities for students to problem-solve, repair harm, and strengthen relationships.
11. Inclusive Learning Environments: Classroom composition reflects the natural proportional representation of the overall school population.
12. Respectful Relationships: All adults interact with students with warmth, care, respect, and dignity.

Alignment with High-Leverage Practices

Several school culture and climate indicators complement or directly align with High-Leverage Practices, particularly:

- HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.
- HLP 9: Teach social behaviors.

The district recognizes that positive relationships, predictable environments, supportive behavioral practices, and equitable schoolwide systems create important conditions for effective instruction and student engagement.

Measures of Progress

Progress will be assessed through districtwide Belonging & Engagement Walk data for Criterion 4, building-level analysis, student and feedback, and evidence of implementation of schoolwide improvement strategies. The district will use initial assessment results to establish baseline data and identify measurable targets for improvement and then complete a reassessment during the 2027-2028 school year.

Expected Outcomes

Through the implementation of these goals, WCSD aims to strengthen instructional practices, improve school culture and climate, increase meaningful student engagement, and create learning environments in which every student experiences a strong sense of belonging. The district will continue using multiple sources of data to monitor progress, evaluate the impact of improvement efforts, and identify opportunities to address disparities in student experiences and outcomes. By connecting belonging and engagement with

evidence-based instructional practices and positive schoolwide systems, WCSD will continue building a culture of continuous improvement that supports the academic, social, and emotional success of all students.