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NEWS & DOCUMENTARIES | HERE AND NOW TRANSCRIPT

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First, we are discussing education reform. Former president George W. Bush's educational legacy No Child Left Behind is not working in Wisconsin. That's according to two Wisconsinites who have significant power to make some significant changes. Governor Walker and State School Superintendent Tony Evers announced a reform package this week to improve educational accountability throughout the state. Dr. Evers joins us now. Thank you for joining us.

Tony Evers:

Thanks a lot, Adam.

Adam Schrager:

Maybe the best way to start this conversation out, in the concept of talking about a new evaluation system, let's first talk about what is wrong with the old system.

Tony Evers:

Sure, the present accountability system is driven by No Child Left Behind as you mentioned. For the most part, it's driven by a single measure, and that's our standardized tests taken once a year. Clearly, and then schools are kind of judged and determined to be in need of improvement or needing adequate yearly progress based on primarily that one test. That frankly, serves no one. It's clearly a system that is broken. It's one size fits all. We are very, very happy to develop a new system. Hopefully get a waiver from the federal government to allow us to use that new system.

Adam Schrager:

Let's talk about what are some of the fundamental tenets that you'd like to see in that new system.

Tony Evers:

There are several, and they're real important. One is that indeed, we will use that standardized test as kind of putting a bench mark there, but most importantly, we allow growth to be valued in the system, which in the present system it does not. We have to use multiple measures, which is not part of the present system. We have to use a definition of what is career and college ready. And also, we are going to be utilizing this to judge and make decisions around all publicly funded schools, the traditional public schools, charter schools and the choice schools in the Milwaukee area and Racine.



Tony Evers on Wisconsin's new school accountability program

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2011

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State School Superintendent Tony Evers joins Here and Now to discuss his work with Gov. Scott Walker to develop a new school accountability program for the state of Wisconsin.



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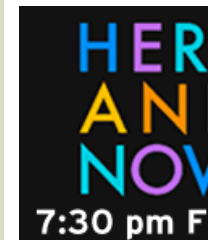
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Adam Schrager:

You talked about growth. For folks out there who may not understand that, you and I were talking ahead of time, explain for people what you mean when you talk about the language that is longitudinal testing.

Tony Evers:

Basically now, if the bar is set here, and you have a group of students or even any students that are far below that bar coming in at say a third-grade level in an eighth-grade class and you raise the achievement level to the seventh-grade level, that's four grades in one year, that's a failure under the present system. How ridiculous is that? We should be celebrating that. We should be actually, another kind of segue here is that the good part of this is that we are going to be able to target high performing schools and low performing schools. With the high performing schools, help them to spread the word around the state what is going well. With the low performing schools, we can use the limited resources we have to help them move along. Growth is a real important part of this.

Adam Schrager:

You know, as a classroom teacher, this is usually one of things celebrated in the classroom, and maybe a supervisory teacher or administrator in the school knows it. Is this just now kind of the case of expanding this so not only just these few people know about it, but it's more transparent so that the community knows about it?

Tony Evers:

Right, it's more transparent. Parents and the community know about it. And it's systemic across the state instead of having an accountability system in every single classroom in the state, this is one that the state will be assisting school districts to do. It's absolutely the right way to go.

Adam Schrager:

Let's talk about the process then. How does this new accountability system come to pass?

Tony Evers:

Well, we are bringing together all the major stakeholders that have input on this, our teachers, our principals, our superintendents, members of the choice community and charter community, business leaders, philanthropists. We're bringing together a large group of people that will spend time over the next several months. It will probably be the good share of the school year that we will be developing this in a significant way. Of course, there's going to be all sorts of work going on behind the scenes with the folks providing input and providing direction for us. It's going to be a long process. It's going to be a collaborative process. We found common ground here that we can all agree on, so we're going to go for it. Then some time during the school year, we'll be

requesting a waiver from the federal government so we can use our new system.

Adam Schrager:

You talked about the major stakeholders at the table. I'm sure you've seen the reactions to this. Mary Bell, the head of the state teachers union said that she "doesn't necessarily trust this process." Representative Roberts, the democratic leader on the Assembly Education Committee says she "deeply distrusts" the governor's motives. Your thoughts, as we kind of launch this, I mean, you're not even in it before there's criticism on the front of it.

Tony Evers:

There's nothing that comes easy in this world. I truly believe, and at the end of the day, we will have individuals like Representative Roberts and Mary Bell from WEAC there. We especially need to have teachers of our state at the table. This not only impacts them, but it really is going to drive a discussion about what we value in education. For example, as part of this, do we take a look at how many, not just diplomas districts have, but how many advanced placement courses they have, how many industrial certificates are given to students. We have a chance to say, okay, what do we really value in Wisconsin? And to have that discussion, we need to have the teachers there. I'm very hopeful that they will be.

Adam Schrager:

You have been critical of the governor's budget, in particular for the money, the funding cuts to education. I guess this question is twofold. Can you accomplish this new system under the current funding mechanism? And secondly, is this one of those few areas you can find common ground?

Tony Evers:

To answer your second question, absolutely. I think that's a leader's responsibility. There will be other times when I disagree with the governor and he will disagree with me. Leaders have to absolutely work hard to find common ground. In this case we did, and I'm real happy about that. The money part of it really, this isn't necessarily a money issue. Where the money comes in is helping underperforming schools to do better. We have a limited amount of federal funds. That's the important thing right now, it's hard to target the worst performing schools and help them raise their level of performance. This way, we can target it better and use our resources more wisely.

Adam Schrager:

Half a minute left. The best case scenario, does this help everyone in the process, not just the schools, but parents and families as well.

Tony Evers:

Absolutely. It makes things much more transparent. It also

makes it clear what we value in education as Wisconsinites. I think those are really important things for our state.

Adam Schrager:

Dr. Tony Evers, thank you very much for being with us.

Tony Evers:

Thanks a lot, I appreciate it.

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