

# Family Impact Seminars

## *What Are Family Impact Seminars?*

Family Impact Seminars are a series of seminars, briefing reports, newsletters, and discussion sessions for state policymakers including legislators, legislative aides, Governor's office staff, legislative service agency personnel, and state agency representatives. The seminars provide objective, solution-oriented research on timely policy issues such as child support, children's health insurance, education, and helping poor kids succeed.

The seminars feature a panel of premier researchers, policy analysts, or program directors. Each seminar is accompanied by a briefing report that summarizes state-of-the-art research on the topic and provides a range of policy options.

## *Why Are Family Impact Seminars Unique?*

Family Impact Seminars are unique in four ways:

- The vast majority of Americans (91%) say that their family is extremely important to them. So, we encourage policymakers to consider the impact of policies on families, just as they routinely consider economic or environmental impact.
- The seminars offer state policymakers easy access to one of the top ten research organizations in the country—the University of Wisconsin. The seminars aim to connect the two ends of State Street—the University and the legislature.
- Rather than lobbying for particular policies, the seminars deliver objective, solution-oriented information to policymakers.
- The seminars provide a neutral, nonpartisan setting outside the political environment for policymakers to discuss issues and seek common ground.

## *What Resources Are Available to State Policymakers?*

- **A Researcher Hotline** - Identify University of Wisconsin researchers who are studying child and family issues by calling 262-5779.
- **Briefing Reports** - Download 21 Wisconsin briefing reports that provide a family impact perspective on topics such as corrections; education; health care; long term care; prescription drugs; and welfare reform.
- **Audio Tapes or Web Audio** - Listen to audiotapes and web audio of recent seminars.
- **Family Impact Assessment Tools** - Use family impact assessment tools for examining how responsive policies, programs, schools, and communities are to families.
- **Web resources** - Browse available resources at <http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/wifis.htm>

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The Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars are affiliated with the Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars which aims to connect research and state policymaking and to promote a family perspective in research, policy, and practice. The Institute, located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension, facilitates dialogue and resource exchange among the sites conducting Family Impact Seminars which currently includes 17 states and the District of Columbia. Further information on the Institute is available at <http://www.familyimpactseminars.org>



Wisconsin

## Family Impact Seminars

## Where Research Meets Policy and Families Matter

The Center for Excellence in Family Studies  
University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

1300 Linden Drive, Room 130  
Madison, WI 53706-1524



## What Is the Track Record of the Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars?

Since 1993, 21 Family Impact Seminars have been held in Wisconsin on topics such as corrections policy, health care, and welfare reform. To date, 1,508 participants have attended the seminars, including 101 different state legislators and 150 legislative offices. Seminar speakers often meet one-on-one with the Governor, state agency secretaries, or Department of Administration officials.

The 18th seminar was attended by 110 participants, including 28 legislators and 35 legislative aides. An additional five legislators attended the luncheon, bringing the total to 33. During the day's activities, 59 legislative offices were represented. Another 15 ordered copies of the briefing report or audiotape, which means this seminar reached 74 legislators and their staff—over half of Wisconsin's 133 legislative offices.

In evaluations, seminar participants rate the seminars as highly objective, relevant, and useful. For example, on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), the average objectivity rating for the last 21 seminars was 4.3. Attendees also gave high marks to the seminars' relevance to their needs and interests (4.4) and usefulness in their current role (4.2). In policymakers' own words:

*"...the ability to present and prepare unbiased research based on objective analysis and without political taint is truly refreshing."*

**state legislator**

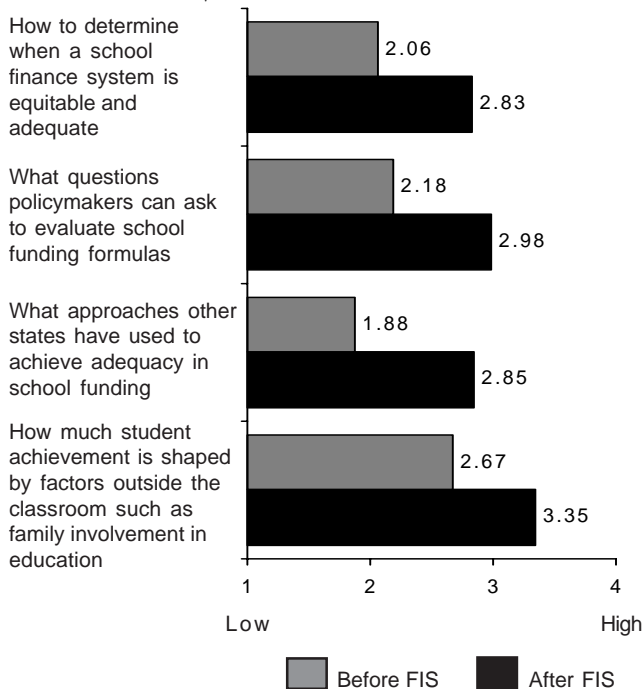
*"...this is the only time such a broad group gets together to really discuss family-related issues in an atmosphere that encourages good public policymaking over politics."*

**state agency section chief**

## How Successful Are the Seminars in Increasing Knowledge and Understanding?

Participants in a school finance seminar reported knowing significantly more after the seminars than before about the research presented at the seminar and how the issue affects families.

### How Participants Rated Their Understanding of



**Note.** Each of these differences was statistically significant in paired sample t-tests, based on responses from 58 participants (73% response rate).

## How Do Policymakers Use Seminar Information?

Legislators report using information from the seminars to develop positions on legislation, such as welfare reform and a cigarette tax. Following two seminars on prescription drugs, two legislators stated that they used seminar information to draft new legislation. Later, several features of other states' prescription drug programs discussed at the seminar were incorporated into Wisconsin's newly-enacted law.

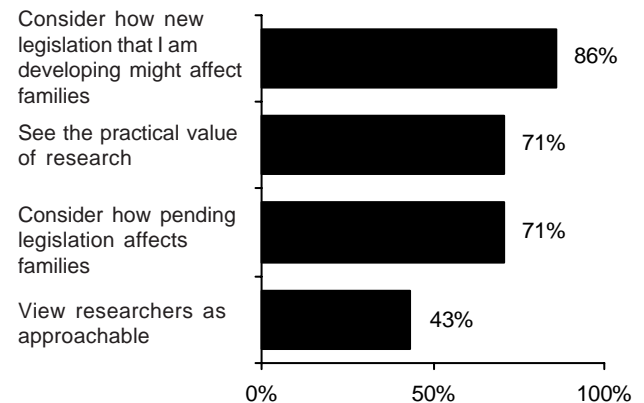
In phone interviews following one seminar, 11 legislators (55% response rate) reported applying what they learned at the seminar in the following ways:

- 100% to evaluate pending legislation;
- 81% to incorporate into speeches or presentations;
- 64% to share with colleagues.

## How Do the Seminars Change Attitudes Toward Research and Families?

Policymakers report that the seminars also help them see the importance of high-quality research and a family perspective in policymaking.

### Because of the Family Impact Seminars, Legislators Are "Quite a Bit" More Likely to



**Note.** Based on phone interviews of eight state legislators following the 2002 childcare seminar (67% response rate).