



"Leadership in Public School Governance"

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STATEMENT ON ADDRESSING WISCONSIN'S TEACHER SUPPLY CHALLENGES

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The evidence and the message we hear from our Wisconsin school board members and districts demonstrates that Wisconsin is experiencing a serious and growing undersupply of teachers. It has reached the point where many Wisconsin public schools began the current school year with unfilled teacher positions. This disrupts student learning and the continuity of instruction and it pits districts against each other in a quest to find qualified educators to teach their students amid a dwindling supply.

While multiple factors are contributing to Wisconsin's teacher supply issues, three key measures bear noting:

- ▶ **Attrition**—a measure of the number of teachers leaving the profession. Often this occurs through retirement of older teachers but, alarmingly, this is increasingly happening with teachers much earlier in their careers.
- ▶ **Attraction**—a measure of how many new teachers are entering the profession. We face a need to replace the ranks of baby-boomer teachers who have retired or will soon be retiring as well as those who are leaving mid-career.
- ▶ **Turnover**—a measure of the numbers of teachers moving from one district to another. When the number of teachers leaving a given district is greater than the number of teachers coming into that district, this creates a teacher supply problem for that district.

Since 2009-2010, the number of teachers in Wisconsin has decreased by 1,338, or 2.2%, while the number of students enrolled in public schools in the state over the same time period decreased by 0.5% (2,269 students). (Source: [Stay in School: An update on teacher workforce trends in Metro Milwaukee December 2017.](#))

For reasons that bear further study, fewer people are entering the teaching profession than in years past. Over the past decade or so, there has been a steady decline in both the number of candidates *enrolled in* initial teacher license programs and the number *completing* such programs. *Enrollments* in Wisconsin teacher preparation programs declined 37.6% in from 12,624 in the 2009-10 to just 7,878 in the 2016-17. (Source: [Title II Reports - Highlights.](#)) Over the same period there was a 32% decline (from 4,112 to 2,795) in the number of students *completing* initial teacher license programs.

When the number of teachers leaving the profession exceeds the number entering the profession, teacher supply problems are created. These supply problems are not uniformly impacting all Wisconsin districts. Smaller and more rural districts are being hit harder. So are urban districts. The shortage of teachers in certain licensure categories is greater than in others.

Wisconsin, like other states, has established teacher licensing requirements in an attempt to ensure that quality teachers who meet high standards serve our students. But increasingly, as a last resort, schools are being forced to hire people on an emergency basis who have not yet met those standards but have pledged they will do so within three years.

The WASB has long been concerned about the teacher supply situation and its impact on student achievement and school operations. The WASB is also committed to work toward comprehensive solutions to this situation. This fall, in a series of regional meetings around the state, we held workshops to educate our members about the teacher supply problem and to suggest steps they can take to address this issue at a district level.

Alarming, many licensed teachers, including many young teachers, are leaving the teacher profession, often expressing dissatisfaction about pay, benefits and working conditions.

Statewide, there were 4,604 teachers working in the 2014-15 school year who did not return to the profession for the 2015-16 school year.

Retaining teachers has become a challenge facing school districts with respect to teachers of all experience levels, but it is a particularly pressing issue for those new to the profession. Research indicates that between 40% and 50% of teachers leave the profession in their first five years. (Source: [*Stay in School: An update on teacher workforce trends in Metro Milwaukee December 2017.*](#))

In Wisconsin, there were 2,153 first year teachers in the 2009-10 school year. Four years later, 712 of those teachers – 33.1% – had left the profession. (Source: [*Help Wanted Analysis Public School Teacher Pipeline Greater Milwaukee Public Policy Forum April 2016.*](#))

There is a clear shift toward younger teachers leaving the workforce, as opposed to older teachers retiring, in both the state and (especially) the metro Milwaukee region. Source: [*Stay in School: An update on teacher workforce trends in Metro Milwaukee December 2017.*](#))

Turnover is also a significant problem. Nationally, 16% of public school teachers leave their individual schools annually. Source: [*Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey.*](#)

High levels of turnover are generally harmful for districts, schools, and students. When turnover occurs year after year it negatively affects both student achievement outcomes and efforts to build a strong organizational culture and maintain staff cohesion. Schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, or low-achieving students are often disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of teacher turnover, worsening achievement gaps. And replacing teachers is costly. Districts must advertise, review and interview prospective candidates, assuming they can find qualified candidates.

What can schools do about the inadequate teacher supply? Schools need strategies to both attract new teachers and retain the teachers they already have. Schools can increase teacher salaries and make health coverage more attractive and affordable; they can improve working conditions, rework their child rearing and family leave provisions, provide flexible scheduling options or in-school child care for teachers who are parents of young children; they can provide professional development opportunities and mentoring and restore or improve post-employment benefits. Schools can also develop programs to “grow their own” teachers, by encouraging students

and paraprofessionals to earn college credits to help them achieve licensure faster. However, most, if not all, of these options involve costs that districts are likely not able to afford under revenue limits.

Schools are limited in what they can do to recruit new and retain existing teachers under the constraints of tight budgets and revenue limit restrictions, but more must be done to increase the supply of teachers, including help from the state.

The WASB has asked for help from the state Legislature, such as through the creation and expansion of student loan debt forgiveness for young teachers who agree to work for a given number of years in districts facing shortages. More needs to be done in this area. The state could also provide tuition remission or stipends for teacher candidates during the semester in which they are completing their required practice teaching. At a time when rising student loan debt is a growing concern, it makes no sense to force would-be teachers to pile on additional debt while they provide uncompensated service.

In a state facing worker shortages generally, it makes no sense to have qualified teachers sitting idle when teachers are needed to fill positions across the state. The Legislature could help by repealing or rolling back the law that causes retired teachers who wish to return to teaching to have to give up their pension payments.

Some retired teachers hold teaching certifications in hard-to-fill subject areas where shortages are acute. They could immediately increase the supply of able, qualified, licensed teachers in those areas if they were encouraged to return to work. However, current law restricts a retired teacher's ability to go back to their original school district employer or another school district employer, by limiting the number of hours they may work before they are required to forego receiving their pension payments. This not only discourages qualified teachers from returning to work, but it encourages disruptive turnover as rehired retirees reach their limit of working no more than 880 hours for an individual school district and move on to another district. Current law causes retired teachers who return to work to hop from district to district, the very definition of turnover.

Further, current law incentivizes retired teachers in border areas to return to teaching in neighboring states rather than in Wisconsin. Teachers who retired from Wisconsin service who return to work in Iowa, Minnesota or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, for example, can continue to receive their Wisconsin pension payments while teaching. This helps other states solve their teacher supply problems but provides no help to Wisconsin schools.

Finally, we need a better understanding of why young people are avoiding entering the teaching profession as a career. To provide much-needed data in this area, we believe colleges and universities need to survey their students about why they are choosing not to enter teaching preparation programs and why their graduates of teacher preparation programs are leaving teaching after only a few years. If we can get a better handle on why this is happening, we can attempt to fashion solutions.

None of these proposals would, by itself, be a solution to the teacher supply problem. However, each of these things would help in its own small way to lessen the current shortage situations. A comprehensive approach is needed. Until we can devise such an approach, every step forward will help.