



Fewer Teachers, More Poverty Mean Challenges for Wisconsin Schools

As the new school year approaches, Wisconsin schools face significant challenges, including a reduction in state resources, fewer teachers in classrooms, and an increasing number of students living in poverty. These trends began before the budget cuts and collective bargaining changes of 2011.

Schools have long been an engine of our state's economic growth. We have depended on a well-educated workforce, shaped by excellent public schools, to lay the foundation for our prosperity. To ensure that Wisconsin is competitive in the future, Wisconsin schools must have the resources to offer students a high-quality education.

Shifting Funding to Local Taxpayers

In a sharp change from the way Wisconsin has traditionally funded education, school districts now rely as much on local sources of revenue as they do on state support, as shown in the chart below. Local support predominantly comes from property tax revenue, but also includes other revenue sources such as school lunch fees.

Over the last decade, state support for Wisconsin schools has declined. Between 2000 and 2011, per student state funding for school districts dropped by

6%, and revenue from local sources increased by 27%, despite limits imposed by revenue caps. Federal support, which makes up a relatively small portion of total district funding, increased in 2009 when the Recovery Act pumped stimulus money into schools, and has gradually decreased since then.

Between 2000 and 2011, the share of total school funding in Wisconsin that came from state sources dropped from 55% to 46%. Over that same period, the share of school funding coming from local sources rose to 45% from 40%. Less complete but more recent data shows this trend continuing since 2011.

The shift away from state support for schools, and toward local support, have made property tax increases more frequent and more costly.

Fewer Teachers in Wisconsin Classrooms

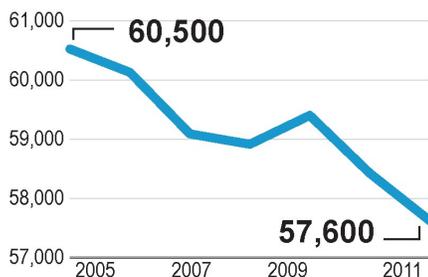
Wisconsin classrooms have fewer teachers, resulting in more crowded classrooms and less individualized attention for students.

Over the last six years, the number of teachers in Wisconsin public schools has fallen by nearly 3,000, even as student enrollment has increased. The chart below shows that in the 2010-11 school year, there were

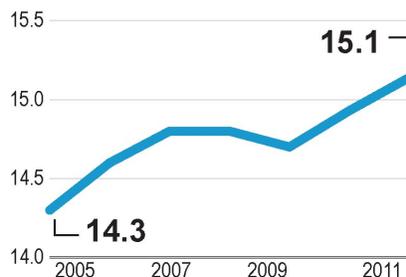
Disturbing Trends for Wisconsin Schools

The number of teachers in Wisconsin public schools is declining, classroom sizes are increasing, and reliance on local sources of revenue is increasing. Amounts are in 2011 dollars.

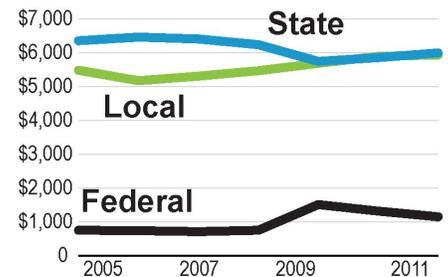
TEACHERS IN WISCONSIN SCHOOLS



STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO



PER-STUDENT FUNDING BY SOURCE



Source: National Center on Education Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau

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57,600 teacher FTEs (full-time equivalents) in Wisconsin public schools, down from 60,500 six years earlier — a decrease of 4.8%.

The decline in the number of teachers sets Wisconsin apart from most other states. Nationally, the number of teachers has stayed consistent in recent years. Only seven states had larger percentage declines than Wisconsin in the number of teachers over this period.

The decline in the number of teachers has resulted in higher student-teacher ratios in Wisconsin. Having fewer students for each teacher helps students learn better, but in Wisconsin, the trend is going in the opposite direction. In 2005, there were 14.3 students for every teacher in Wisconsin; that number had risen to 15.1 students by 2010-11. Only five states had a higher percentage growth in students per teacher over that period.

Although Wisconsin still has fewer students per teacher than the national average, our rank among the states has

been dropping. Between 2004-05 and 2010-11, Wisconsin slid from 18th to 28th in student-teacher ratio.

A Rising Tide of Poverty in Wisconsin Schools

The number of Wisconsin children who are from low-income families has climbed for nine straight years, according to the Department of Public Instruction.

In the 2012-13 school year, 42% of Wisconsin children were eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches, up from 30% in 2003-04.

Students in families earning less than 130% of the federal poverty level qualify for free school lunches. For the 2012-13 school year, students from a family of four earning less than about \$30,000 would qualify. A much smaller number of students in families earning between 130% and 185% of the poverty level qualify for reduced-price lunches.

In each of Wisconsin's five largest school districts, more than half the students are from low-income families. Eighty-four percent of the students in Milwaukee Public Schools were from low-income families in the 2012-13 school year.

The rising number of low-income students presents challenges for Wisconsin schools. Children from low-income families lag their peers in educational achievement. They also are less likely to graduate from high school and become well-educated, healthy members of Wisconsin's skilled workforce.

A Rocky Road Ahead

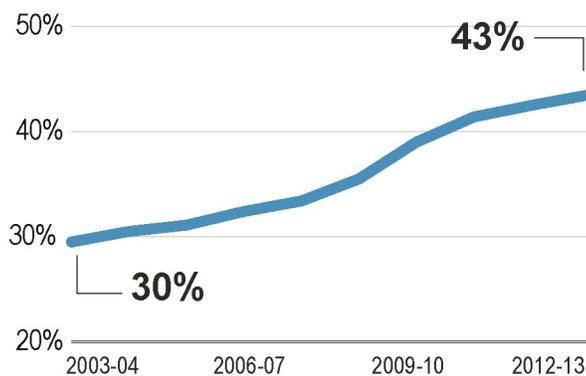
Cuts in state aid and uncertainties about funding at the local level have caused a period of turmoil in Wisconsin schools. But even before the significant budget cuts and changes to collective bargaining that began in 2011, the trends in Wisconsin were toward fewer teachers, more crowded classrooms, and higher levels of poverty.

As we make funding decisions at the state and local levels, we should ask ourselves whether we want to continue our state's historical tradition of offering children a public school system that exceeds the national average in many measures of educational quality. If we maintain the current trends of inadequate funding and smaller staffing, we risk becoming a state with a run-of-the-mill educational system.

Tamarine Cornelius
August 26, 2013

A Rising Tide of Poverty in Wisconsin Schools

STUDENTS QUALIFYING FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE SCHOOL LUNCHES



LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICTS	SHARE OF STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES
Milwaukee	84%
Madison	56%
Kenosha	54%
Green Bay	57%
Racine	62%

Source: DPI

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