



An initiative of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

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## Fewer Teachers, Bigger Classes, and More Poverty in Wisconsin Schools

The number of teachers in Wisconsin public schools has fallen dramatically over the last several years, according to a [new analysis by the Wisconsin Budget Project](#), an independent Madison-based research group that focus on tax and budget policy. Even before the budget cuts and collective bargaining changes of 2011, Wisconsin was losing teachers at a faster rate than most other states.

Wisconsin lost 2,900 teacher full-time equivalents (FTEs) between the 2004-05 and the 2010-11 school years. That amounts to early 1 out of every 20 teachers working in public schools. 2010-11 is the most recent school year for which the National Center on Education Statistics has information. Only seven other states lost a bigger share of their teacher workforce over this period, according to the report.

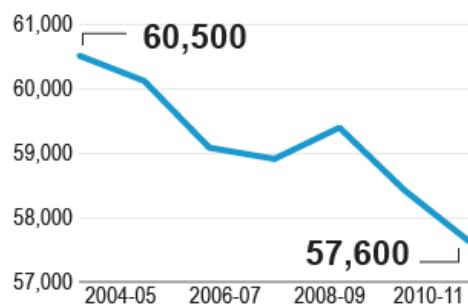
This analysis relies on national figures so as to be able to make comparisons among states. State-level figures show that the number of teachers in Wisconsin has dropped slightly since 2011.

Over this same period, total enrollment in Wisconsin public schools increased. The combination of fewer teachers and more students means that the student-to-teacher ratio in Wisconsin has risen, as shown in the chart below. Only five states had a higher percentage growth in the number of students per teacher between the 2004-05 and 2010-11 school years.

### Disturbing Trends for Wisconsin Schools

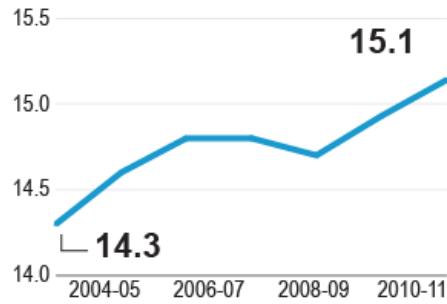
The number of teachers in Wisconsin public schools is declining and classroom sizes are increasing.

#### TEACHERS IN WISCONSIN SCHOOLS



Source: National Center on Education Statistics

#### STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO



WISCONSIN BUDGET PROJECT

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"There's absolutely no doubt that smaller class sizes are one of the keys to better schools," said Wisconsin Budget Project Research Analyst Tamarine Cornelius. "If this trend is allowed to continue, the quality of the education our students receive will certainly suffer."

The publication also examines the rising tide of poverty in Wisconsin schools and changes in the way public education is funded in Wisconsin.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the number of Wisconsin children who are from low-income families has climbed for nine straight years. 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. In each of Wisconsin's five largest school districts, more than half the students are from low-income families, including 84% of the students in Milwaukee Public Schools.

"Poverty takes a serious toll on a child's chances for success in school," Cornelius said. "This trend presents serious challenges for Wisconsin's school districts, and the fact of shrinking resources makes it even more difficult to address those challenges effectively."

In a sharp change from the way Wisconsin has traditionally funded education, school districts now rely about as much on local sources of revenue as they do on state support. Between 2000 and 2011, the share of total school funding in Wisconsin that came from state sources dropped from 55% to 46%, while the share of school funding coming from local sources rose from 40% to 45%. This shift from state to local funding has made property tax increases more frequent and more costly.

"As state and local lawmakers make school funding decisions, they need to ask themselves where we're headed," Cornelius said. "Do we want to continue Wisconsin's long tradition of educational excellence, or are we going to allow our education system to sink toward mediocrity?"

The new Wisconsin Budget Project paper is online at <http://www.wisconsinbudgetproject.org/?p=3722>.

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