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Bigger Classrooms, More Students in Poverty Pose Challenges for Wisconsin Schools

There are fewer teachers in Wisconsin classrooms and more students living in poverty, according to a [new analysis by the Wisconsin Budget Project](#) that compares long-term trends in classroom sizes, student economic well-being, and state support for education.

The Wisconsin Budget Project is an independent Madison-based research group that focuses on taxes and budget policy.

Wisconsin classroom sizes grew substantially between the 2004-05 and 2011-12 school years, according to the [analysis](#). Wisconsin public schools had 1.2 more students per teacher in 2011-12 than they did in 2004-05, an increase of 8%. Only three states – California, Arizona, and Nevada – had bigger increases in classroom sizes over this period.

“Smaller class sizes are one of the keys to better schools,” said Tamarine Cornelius, Wisconsin Budget Project analyst. “Wisconsin is still better than the national average in classroom size, but if we don’t get a handle on this trend, the quality of the education our students receive will suffer.”

In 2004-05, Wisconsin ranked 18th among the states in the number of students per teacher. By 2011-12, Wisconsin’s ranking had dropped to 30th.

The root cause for the increase in classroom sizes is a decrease in the number of teachers in Wisconsin. Wisconsin lost 4,300 teachers between 2004-5 and 2011-12, or 7% of the teacher workforce.

The [analysis](#) also examines the rising tide of poverty in Wisconsin schools. The share of Wisconsin children who are from low-income families has grown steadily over the last ten years, climbing from 30% in 2003-04 to 43% in 2013-14.

“Poverty takes a serious toll on a child’s chance for success in school,” Cornelius said. “This trend presents serious challenges for Wisconsin’s schools, and the fact of shrinking resources makes it even more difficult to address those challenges effectively.” Wisconsin’s recent cuts in state support to schools are among the largest in the country.

Read the full publication, “[Fewer Teachers, More Poverty Mean Challenges for Wisconsin Schools](#).”

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