

Leadership Group on School Staffing Challenges

Full Summary of Preliminary Licensing Recommendations

School staffing issues, including high turnover, fewer applicants for positions, and shortages in a variety of disciplines, are occurring in Wisconsin and across the country. With fewer new teachers entering the profession and increasing teacher turnover, education leaders are looking for new approaches to deal with these changing workforce dynamics and ensure all children have access to the high quality educators they deserve.

As a result of these growing challenges, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers and Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) Executive Director Jon Bales convened the Leadership Group on School Staffing Challenges (Leadership Group). The goal of this group, comprised of high-level leaders from PK-12 and higher education, is to make improvements to the PK-12 educator workforce in Wisconsin and promote the overall attraction, preparation, recruitment, retention, and development of Wisconsin educators.

The work of the Leadership Group follows several other recent efforts to address workforce challenges in elementary and secondary education. They include:

- The **Professional Standards Council**, established by state law to provide advice to the State Superintendent on the teaching profession, has been developing a strategic plan to address school staffing issues since 2015. They have conducted professional surveys and completed the first iteration of a [strategic plan](#) in November 2016.
- The **State Superintendent's Working Group on School Staffing Issues**, comprised of district administrators, principals, and teachers of the year, served as a focus group to identify pressing school staffing issues and recommend administrative policy solutions. As a result of [their work](#), The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) published emergency rules promulgating several of the group's recommendations in August 2016.
- Wisconsin's **Teacher Equitable Access Plan**, required under federal law and submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in 2015, outlines [detailed recommendations](#) to ensure that low income and students of color are not disproportionately educated by inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers.
- The University of Wisconsin-Madison is developing a first-of-its-kind supply and demand report focused on Wisconsin's educator workforce, scheduled for publication in 2017. This report will provide more extensive and detailed data about the nature of the staffing issues in Wisconsin, and a more detailed problem diagnosis.

Membership

Membership on the Leadership Group is comprised of statewide organizations in a position to help implement and affect changes at the state and local levels, including groups representing administrators, school boards, teachers, and higher education. They include:

Tony Evers, State Superintendent, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Jon Bales, Executive Director, Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA)

John Ashley, Executive Director, Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB)

Barbara Bales, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Educational Innovation, University of Wisconsin System (UW System)

John Hedstrom, Director, Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators (WASPA) represented by **Julie Grotophorst**

Jim Lynch, Executive Director, Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA)

Ron Martin, Middle School Teacher, Eau Claire; President, Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC)

Gary Myrah, Executive Director, Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS)

Reid Riggle, President, Wisconsin Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (WACTE)

Rolf Wegenke, President and Chief Executive Officer, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU)

The Leadership Group is also staffed and supported by the DPI, including Deputy State Superintendent **Mike Thompson** and Assistant State Superintendent **Sheila Briggs**.

Meetings

During its first meeting (December 13, 2016), the Leadership Group identified a set of core, guiding principles and discussed strategies aimed at improving educator licensing. In small and large group settings, members reviewed and responded to a summary of recommendations advanced by the Professional Standards Council (PSC) and other groups, and began identifying initial areas of agreement. During its second meeting, members refined specific options related to improving educator licensure and identified specific recommendations. Future meetings will address attracting educators to the profession; educator preparation; educator recruitment, retention, and development; and educator workforce data collection and use.

Guiding Principles

The Leadership Group identified the following five guiding principles as cornerstones for their work. Of particular importance to members is a focus on equity and ensuring that historically underserved populations are paramount in any action step.

- All children should have access to high quality, well prepared educators.
- All educators should have access to high quality preparation programs that equip them with the knowledge and skills to be successful.
- All educators should be licensed under one statewide system that ensures license holders have the knowledge and skills to be successful.
- All educators should receive ongoing support and development to grow as professionals and improve student outcomes.
- Equity and a focus on historically underserved populations and areas must be a primary focus across all work.

Recommendations

To date, Leadership Group members have identified six strategies to improve educator licensing in Wisconsin, and have made specific recommendations to achieve each strategy. The strategies and recommended action steps are outlined below.

While the group has focused on reviewing and improving the state's licensing rules and practices, it will focus on other areas of educator workforce development, including attracting, preparing, recruiting, retaining, and developing educators, as well as development and use of educator workforce data, during future meetings.

Licensing Strategy 1: Simplify the current educator licensing system.

The Leadership Group strongly agreed with the premise that, while Wisconsin should maintain a statewide system of licensure that ensures a high standard of quality and portability, Wisconsin's current licensing system should be simplified and streamlined.

Wisconsin's system of educator licensure is codified in DPI administrative code PI 34. Generally, PI 34 outlines a three-tiered structure of initial, professional, and master educators, as well as several legacy licenses and emergency licenses and permits. Provisions of this system include the following:

- 87 distinct licensing categories related to teaching, pupil services, administration, supplementary areas, and additional licenses. Several content-specific licenses (i.e. science, social studies, English Language Arts, etc.) are further broken down into additional subcategories.
- All licenses in the teaching category are differentiated into one of five developmental levels ranging from early childhood to adolescence as follows:
 - Early Childhood (birth to age 8)
 - Early Childhood – Middle Childhood (birth to age 11)
 - Middle Childhood – Early Adolescence (ages 6 to 12 or 13)
 - Early Adolescence – Adolescence (ages 10 to 21)
 - Early Childhood – Adolescence (birth to age 21)

In its review, the Leadership Group agreed that the current licensing system should be simplified by establishing fewer licenses with more flexibility for educators and employers alike. This effort should address age ranges and developmental levels that educators can be licensed to teach, as well as the content scope of certain teaching licenses. Further, members were interested in expanding the pool of potential pupil services and related fields.

Recommendation 1(a): Amend administrative rules to consolidate developmental levels from the current five to two: PK-9 and PK-12 for all subject area licenses and special education. PK-9 licenses would be offered with an early childhood, elementary school, or middle school emphasis. Special education licenses would be offered PK-12 with emphasis opportunities in developmental ages or specific disabilities.

As part of this recommendation, PK-9 licenses would be offered with an early childhood, elementary school, or middle school emphasis. Preparation programs would ensure appropriate developmental preparation across the spectrum PK-9 spectrum, and would have flexibility to deliver the early childhood, elementary, or middle school

emphasis through courses, field work, or other relevant experiences. As a result of this change, educators would have enhanced marketability to cross age ranges/grades that is not currently available in only one license, while school districts would have greater flexibility to utilize an employee in different ways.

The Leadership Group recommends all subject area licenses would be offered PK-12. Many subject area licenses, such as agricultural education, health, art, and foreign languages, are currently offered as early childhood-adolescent licenses. This change would bring all subject areas into alignment with one developmental level, and would give license-holders and hiring authorities maximum flexibility to serve children.

Additionally, under this recommendation, special education licenses would be offered PK-12 with emphasis on developmental ages or specific disabilities. The Leadership Group recommends that special education candidates be broadly prepared to teach children at all ages, as is currently the case with speech and language pathology or visual impairment, but have the opportunity to obtain an emphasis on specific developmental ages (such as early childhood) or specific disabilities. Among other improvements, this change would allow an educator to move with his or her students as they age.

Recommendation 1(b): Change administrative rules to consolidate current subject area licenses with multiple subcategories (e.g. English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Music) into single subject area licenses. Candidates would be offered opportunities to pursue an emphasis in specific area within the consolidated subject area license (e.g. biology emphasis in a science license; history emphasis in a social studies license).

As part of this recommendation, all consolidated subject area licenses would offer emphasis opportunities in specific area (i.e. science license with a biology emphasis; social studies license with a history emphasis). This change would allow license-holders to continue to focus on a specific area, but would also allow the license-holder maximum flexibility to teach additional coursework within their broad content area. For example, a teacher holding a science license with a biology emphasis could also teach a course of chemistry.

Further, educator preparation programs would have flexibility to determine how an emphasis would be offered (i.e. through coursework, professional development, field work, etc.). This change would not necessitate a major or minor in the emphasis area, but instead would allow preparation programs the opportunity to structure how candidates will demonstrate competency across the license and in the area of emphasis in a multitude of ways.

Members noted that many school districts, particularly those in rural areas or with declining enrollment are unable to hire a full-time licensed teacher in one narrow subject area (such as physics or economics), and these courses may often be eliminated as a result. By broadening the scope of what content area teachers are prepared to teach in a related field, students would have more opportunities, districts would have more flexibility in hiring and staffing, and educators would be more marketable as a result. This change, combined with changes above related to developmental licensing, also increase opportunities for more educators to be offered a full 1.0 FTE job opportunity in schools and districts where this is not currently possible.

Recommendation 1(c): Change administrative rules to offer universal licensure for certain pupil service, supplementary, and additional license categories that are substantially similar to licenses offered by the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), such as social workers or speech and language pathologists.

A universal license would allow certain trained and licensed professionals to move back and forth from a school to other settings without having to acquire a school-specific license. This is currently the case with some pupil support staff, such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc. In those cases where candidates would need additional training, school districts could provide the professional development or practicum to the employee. This change would provide greater employment opportunities to the license-holder, and would provide districts with a greater pool of candidates in shortage areas.

While members recommended that all pupil services and related licenses be on the table for consideration, they recommended further study and caution about two licensing categories that serve primarily students with disabilities: speech and language pathologists and school psychologists. Members noted that there are restrictions related to federal IDEA law that would need to be addressed to make this change for speech and language pathology. With respect to school psychology, members noted that preparation for that license is substantially different than a clinical psychologist in another setting, including training for the identification of specific disabilities.

Recommendation 1(d): Change administrative code to consolidate multiple pathways to licensure into new identifiable “tiers” to enhance simplicity and transparency; create new opportunities to use interns, residents, and others who are pursuing but have not yet completed full licensure as teachers of record on a limited term basis; and eliminate barriers in the licensing system to encourage greater use of retired educators in part-time or short term roles.

The Leadership Group recommends consolidation of the patchwork of licenses, permits, and pathways into additional tiers as follows:

Tier 0/Permit Tier: Permit Holders

This tier would include individuals without education training or background who have a temporary, limited permit to for a specific and narrow purpose within a school, such as an emergency permit, substitute permit, or trade specialist permit. Generally, permit holders are not enrolled in a program or seeking broader licensure, and are not included in state-required professional development efforts associated with licensure.

Tier 1: License with Stipulations

This new tier would recognize those educators who are in the process of completing their requirements for full licensure. Educators in this tier would include interns, residents, emergency license holders, Teach for America candidates, and others who are eligible to serve as teachers of record in a school on a temporary or provisional basis as they complete their licensure requirements. Educators in this tier would have stipulations on their license noting what remains to be completed, and once those stipulations are addressed, they would be endorsed for full licensure as an initial educator. While the Leadership Group recommends adoption of this new tier, the group recognizes that it has not fully fleshed out all of the details associated with this new tier. For example, it will discuss at future meetings more specificity around which current licenses would fall this in this category, how long an educator could hold a Tier 1 provisional license, and whether it could be renewed.

Tier 2: Initial Educator

This tier would remain as it currently exists for traditionally trained as well as alternatively prepared educators who have achieved full licensure.

Tier 3: Professional Educator

This tier would remain as it currently exists for professional educators with five years of experience, professional development, etc.

Tier 4: Master Educator

This tier would remain as it currently exists for master educators or National Board Certified Teachers under current law.

Tier 5: Retired Educator

The Leadership Group recommends establishment of this new tier to recognize efforts to recruit retired educators to return to roles in the classroom without having to navigate all of the other licensing and professional development requirements of the system. For example, DPI has already promulgated rules that would allow a recently-retired educator to receive one automatic five year renewal of his/her license without being required to take additional coursework or undertake a professional development plan. Members also recognized the need to simplify the process for retired educators to receive a substitute license, and the need to reform current laws that prevent retired educators from returning to the classroom without risking their existing payments from the Wisconsin Retirement System. Addition of this tier acknowledged the experience of retired educators, and the important role they can play in addressing critical shortages across the state.

Recommendation 1(e): While changes are underway, DPI should communicate to the field about flexibility available under current law, and continue internal efforts to assist users of the licensing system.

As work commences on updating rules above, DPI should provide communication and assistance to the field about flexibility that currently exists, such as the ability for teachers to be assigned to a broader range of developmental levels based on a school's configuration. The need for this flexibility will go away after the developmental level changes discussed above go into effect. While work commences on updating administrative rules, the Leadership Group agreed that DPI should proactively communicate to the field about flexibility that exists under current law to allow educators to teach a broader range of developmental based on their school's configuration, or other areas of flexibility. For example, districts that have configured K-12 buildings are able to seek approval for their licensed educators to teach at the K-12 level. Several school districts have taken advantage of this flexibility.

DPI should also continue to update users of the system about new communication venues and consider additional problem solving efforts to shorten wait times for licensing questions and approvals. DPI currently has a number of individuals who already dedicated to fielding licensing questions and a "hotline" for district administrators. Other steps could be explored, such as an improved system for special education licensing questions or additional capacity building at the CESA level.

Licensing Strategy #2: Empower districts with more options and flexibility in hiring, particularly when a shortage exists.

The Leadership Group recognized efforts currently underway to address emergency and substitute licensure to give districts more options and flexibility, particularly when addressing shortages. Instead of focusing on those areas, the Leadership Group advocated for higher level, ongoing collaborations and interventions to address educator pipeline and shortage issues, including greater flexibility and use of interns or resident educators.

Recommendation 2(a): DPI should convene leaders from PK-12, higher education, and workforce development on a semi-annual basis to review educator workforce data, identify emerging and critical workforce shortages, and develop concrete workforce development strategies, such as “fast track” credentialing in areas of identified need.

Members of the Leadership Group strongly agree that state level leaders from across the PK-higher education spectrum should be responsible for understanding Wisconsin’s educator workforce pipeline issues as a whole, and are well positioned to collaborate and deploy statewide resources to implement solutions, including “fast track” credentialing programs.

In addition to developing specific solutions to shortage areas, the Leadership Group noted that there is no current role for higher education in the placement of their graduates. Students, educator preparation programs, and districts alike would benefit from a greater understanding of where the needs are, what the education job market looks like, and what additional training prospective educators will need to fill those gaps. School districts and higher education could then pursue greater collaboration and provide resources and incentives to get graduates not only in the right content areas, but placed in the areas of the state where they are needed most.

Recommendation 2(b): Compile a clearinghouse of innovative and “fast track” credentialing programs that exist for credentialing educators in shortage areas.

Several institutions of higher education (IHEs) have already created fast-track, online, or hybrid programs to quickly credential candidates in shortage areas, but anecdotal evidence among deans and directors of educator preparation programs is that this information is not widely available to school districts or interested candidates. The Wisconsin Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (WACTE) has begun compilation of this clearinghouse.

Recommendation 2(c): Amend state law or administrative rules as needed to allow new or enhanced internship/residency experiences for students who are not yet fully licensed. Specifically, the group recommended the option for interns/residents to obtain a Tier 1 license as described above and flexibility to do the following:

- *Serve as teachers of record;*
- *Work full time;*
- *Serve for a full year;*
- *Be paid for work; and*
- *Be hired at different points in the year.*

Members supported expansion of efforts to give prospective teachers greater clinical experience as teachers of record on an “internship” or “residency” basis, straddling both their formal preparation and their clinical work in a school district. The Wisconsin Internship Program, as it currently exists, allows interns to be employed only half-time, and current deadlines for the program are too restrictive.

Additional flexibility in this area could allow high achieving students greater on-the-job clinical experience than what is currently offered. Further, this option could provide districts, particularly those who are struggling with shortages, more opportunities to hire qualified interns for longer periods of time and at different points in the year when needs arise, or to hire two interns to job share a position that cannot be filled. Lastly, this option would create new opportunities to create “residency” programs for new educators that would provide enhanced mentorship and support in critical early years of teaching.

Licensing Strategy #3: Explore greater license reciprocity with other states.

Members recognized that there are current efforts underway at DPI to pursue greater recognition of out-of-state licenses with neighboring states, as well as recent law changes that generally allow anyone prepared out of state with a year of teaching experience to become licensed in Wisconsin. However, members believed improvements can still be made in this area, particularly for candidates coming straight out of a preparation program and experienced educators. The group coalesced around a few recommended ideas, but agreed that more discussion was necessary around issues such as the statutory requirements placed on out-of-state candidates for additional coursework and what to do for candidates from states that don’t require the edTPA.

Recommendation 3(a): Update administrative rule and policies as needed to grant automatic license reciprocity for candidates prepared out of state that successfully pass the edTPA.

There are currently 722 educator preparation programs in 38 states and the District of Columbia that are utilizing the edTPA, a summative teacher performance assessment that measures a candidate’s readiness to teach. Members strongly endorsed the rigor and reach of the edTPA, and recommended DPI recognize and offer license reciprocity to candidates who successfully pass the exam. Members further recommended exploring additional alternatives for states that don’t require the edTPA, which might include in-state experience or other assessments, but have not yet reached consensus on an alternative.

Recommendation 3(b): Consider license reciprocity for military spouses.

The group recognized the unique challenges faced by military spouses in navigating a multitude of state licensing systems, and recommended that options for automatic or expedited credentialing for these individuals be explored.

Recommendation 3(c): Provide educators prepared out of state the opportunity to receive a Tier 1 License with Stipulations as described above.

This option reflects members’ desire to reduce barriers that currently exist for educators prepared out of state and to expand in-service opportunities for professional development and growth. As part of this proposal, educators prepared out of state but who the year of teaching experience currently required under law to receive a license could be granted a Tier 1 License with Stipulations. After a year of successful teaching experience in Wisconsin, based on multiple measures of success, these educators could become eligible for full Wisconsin licensure.

Licensing Strategy #4: Review and reconsider testing requirements currently in place for licensure.

Leadership Group members expressed significant concern with the collective impact of assessments on prospective educators, and questioned the role of the myriad of assessments as a disincentive to entering the profession. In addition to serious questions about the appropriateness of certain assessments, potential bias in assessments, and the sheer number of tests, members also raised concerns about the total cost of all of the assessments, which can exceed \$1,200.

In discussing potential recommendations, members noted that current policy already allows students to present satisfactory ACT or SAT scores in lieu of a Praxis I or CORE exam of basic skills. Further, according to information presented by WACTE, a significant correlation exists between a student's GPA and their scores on the Praxis II or ACTFL content examinations, particularly when a student's GPA is 3.0 or above, raising questions about the need for this exam.

Members also raised significant concerns about the Foundations of Reading Test (FoRT). While members acknowledged the importance of raising the knowledge and preparation level of all elementary and special education teachers in teaching reading, they also cited the law's rigidity as a significant barrier to entry. Without a waiver policy or other flexibility, students who have been successfully trained and are sought by school districts are currently unable to achieve full licensure unless they pass this exam. This lack of flexibility is of increasing concern, particularly as recent law changes allow a teacher prepared out of state with only one year of teaching experience to become eligible for a teaching license in Wisconsin without passing the FoRT exam.

With the elimination of highly qualified requirements under the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), there is no longer a federal requirement for these assessments, with the exception of special education. State law requires passage of the Foundations of Reading Test (FoRT), and current administrative code requires the other assessments.

Recommendation 4(a): Adopt changes to administrative code or policy as necessary allowing students to demonstrate competency in a subject through either a 3.0/4.0 GPA or higher or through successfully passing a content test. Continue to require content exams for alternative route programs or adding on license, and develop waiver policy that mirrors EdTPA and CORE waiver policies to address extraordinary situations.

Specifically, the Leadership Group recommends the following:

- A teaching major/minor GPA of 3.0/4.0 would constitute evidence of a candidate's mastery of content for candidates who are currently required to take a subject-specific Praxis II exam. Candidates whose GPA is below that level would continue to be required to demonstrate competency by passing the subject-specific Praxis II exam.
- An overall GPA of 3.0/4.0 would constitute evidence of a candidate's mastery of content, for candidates who do not currently have a subject specific Praxis II exam. Candidates whose GPA is below that level would continue to be required to demonstrate competency by passing the Praxis II exam.

- An overall GPA of 3.0/4.0 in the language major/minor would constitute mastery of content for candidates seeking to teach a foreign language. Candidates whose GPA fell below that threshold would be required to pass the ACTFL to demonstrate competence.
- Candidates prepared through an alternative route or seeking to add on a license would continue to be required to pass these exams.

Recommendation 4(b): Seek flexibility in administrative code as needed to allow prospective educators who are required to take the FoRT but have not yet passed the exam to acquire a Tier 1 provisional license as described above. Require successful passage of the FoRT as a condition of endorsement for licensure as an initial educator.

Some members expressed their belief that this exam would be more appropriate for educators who have already had an opportunity to have significant time teaching and implementing reading strategies in order to successfully pass the exam. Providing otherwise qualified candidates with the opportunity to teach on a provisional basis would give them time to pass this exam, while still acknowledging the Legislature's intent in requiring it. This recommendation also recognizes the reality that there are candidates currently on emergency licensure who have completed every portion of their preparation except for successfully passing this exam.

Recommendation 4(c): Seek flexibility in state law and administrative code as needed to allow educators currently required to take the FoRT but who have not yet passed the exam to acquire a Tier 1 License with Stipulations (as described above). Allow those educators the option of demonstrating competency in an alternative way, such as providing multiple measures of improved student performance in reading as a condition for endorsement as an initial educator.

Similar to the option above, this strategy would provide educators who have completed their preparation programs but not yet passed the FoRT to receive a provisional license. These candidates would demonstrate their proficiency in teaching reading through multiple in-service measures that demonstrate improved student reading performance. State law would need to be amended to permit this route to licensure.

Licensing Strategy 5: Expand pathways for current license-holders to become licensed in new content areas.

DPI recently promulgated emergency rules to expand options for licensed educators to add on a license by passing a content test. While this provision opens up one new pathway for current license holders, Leadership Group members agreed that there should be an additional mechanism for a school districts to offer new opportunities to currently licensed educators. The Leadership Group agreed that there should be a district-level process that allows for the movement of experienced teachers into areas outside of their license on a trial basis and under the supervision and mentorship of the school district.

Recommendation 5(a): Update administrative rules to create a new pathway allowing experienced, licensed educators to teach and acquire licensure additional subjects or developmental levels outside of their license area under the supervision of the school district. Specifically:

- The state could issue a Tier 1 License with Stipulations in the new content/developmental area to an Initial Educator (Tier 2, as proposed) with one year of experience. While giving districts and educators maximum flexibility, the group believes the majority of educators who take advantage of this provision will be Professional Educators (Tier 3).
- The school district would be responsible for ensuring that the candidate receives the support needed to acquire additional content or pedagogical knowledge and skills, including through possible partnerships and/or validation through educator preparation programs.
- After two years, the district could recommend that the candidate be eligible to move within the district in the new content/development area.
- After three years and with partnership with educator preparation programs for additional validation encouraged, the school district could endorse the candidate for full licensure in the new content/developmental area. The license would then be transferable across the state.

Licensing Strategy 6: Review professional development requirements for recertification and continuing licensure renewal in light of other district and state-required efforts.

Members briefly discussed the overlap that exists among professional development requirements for continuing licensure and other district and state-required efforts, including Educator Effectiveness. This strategy will be further explored at future meetings. However, members expressed support for a pilot currently underway that would allow educators to use their Educator Effectiveness work to meet the Professional Development Plan requirements for continuing licensure. There are currently 30 school districts of varying size (urban, suburban, rural) participating in this pilot.

