



State Superintendent's Working Group on School Staffing Issues

Final Report

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
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Madison, WI

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Introduction

Wisconsin public schools, like schools across the country, are facing historic teacher shortages. Significantly fewer students are pursuing education as a career, and Wisconsin districts are reporting increasingly shallow applicant pools for a variety of positions. Certain disciplines, as well as certain areas of the state, are at critical shortage levels. Addressing these shortages, while attracting, developing, and retaining top talent, is thus one of the most critical public policy issues facing our state.

Wisconsin is pursuing multiple strategies to address the educator workforce shortage, including the Talent Development Initiative, a large-scale collaboration to improve the recruitment, retention, and development of Wisconsin's educators. Started in 2015 and headed by the state's Professional Standards Council, the Talent Development Initiative is engaging and seeking feedback from a wide array of education stakeholders from around the state, including school district and school board leadership, school-level educators and organizations representing educators, education preparation program representatives, legislators, and other interested citizens. Ultimately, this initiative will deliver a statewide strategic plan focused on creating a world class education workforce needed for the next generation.

While this longer-term effort is progressing, State Superintendent Tony Evers wanted an immediate review of the most pressing problems and barriers contributing to the educator workforce shortage and counsel from local education leaders about what could be done to quickly address these problems. As a result, the State Superintendent convened the State Superintendent's Working Group on School Staffing Issues in March 2016.

The ten-member Working Group, comprised of school district administrators, principals, and former Teachers of the Year from across the state, was charged with identifying the most pressing problems driving school staffing issues and recommending potential solutions to address them. Specifically, the State Superintendent asked the Working Group to identify actionable solutions that the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) could implement as soon as possible to alleviate workforce shortages and otherwise positively address school staffing issues, while remaining focused on ensuring effective, high quality instruction and support for all Wisconsin students.

The Working Group conducted its business through the course of three in-person meetings and one teleconference from March through June 2016. The following report, submitted to State Superintendent Evers in June 2016, details the Working Group's view of the most urgent staffing problems facing Wisconsin schools, and their specific recommended strategies to immediately alleviate workforce shortages and school staffing issues.

Working Group Membership

The State Superintendent selected district administrators, principals, and former Teachers of the Year who represent a broad cross-section of Wisconsin public schools and students, as well as differing perspectives and experiences with school staffing issues. The DPI is grateful for their time, dedication, and service. They include:

Randy Bergman, District Administrator, Prentice
Pat Deklotz, District Administrator, Kettle Moraine
Bill Fisher, District Administrator, Elcho/White Lake
Larry Haase, Principal, Menasha High School, Menasha
Marsha Herman, Westside Elementary School, Sun Prairie (*Elementary TOY, 2012*)
Peggy Jones, Principal, Bonduel Elementary School, Bonduel
Roger King, Holmen High School, Holmen (*High School TOY, 2015*)
Jane McMahon, Director of Teaching and Learning, Baraboo (*Middle/Junior TOY, 2014*)
Barb Sramek, District Administrator, Marshall
Aaron Tarnutzer, Principal, Indian Mound Middle School, McFarland

In addition, several DPI staff members contributed significant time and effort to staffing and supporting the Working Group meetings. They include:

Mike Thompson, Deputy State Superintendent
Sheila Briggs, Assistant State Superintendent, Division for Academic Excellence
Tammy Huth, Director, Teacher Education, Professional Development, and Licensing
Jessica Justman, Policy Initiatives Advisor, Office of the State Superintendent
Mary Jo Christiansen, Executive Staff Assistant, Office of the State Superintendent

Identifying the Problem

The first meeting (March 15, 2016) of the Working Group focused primarily on identifying the most urgent school staffing problems facing Wisconsin school districts. Based on their collective knowledge, experiences, and expertise, participants were first asked to identify the most pressing staffing issues facing their schools or districts, and were then asked to describe what factors they believe are driving their staffing problems. The following is a qualitative summary of their feedback and opinions.

Identifying the Problem: What are the Most Pressing Staffing Issues Facing Your School/District?

For many years, school districts across Wisconsin have experienced workforce shortages in certain disciplines and geographic locations. However, the Working Group asserted that staffing shortages in these disciplines have now reached critical levels, and workforce shortages are rapidly expanding into nearly all areas of K-12 education. Members reported having far fewer applicants for nearly all positions, and fewer standout candidates in applicant pools.

While each district undoubtedly faces its own unique staffing issues, Working Group members agreed that the following are some of the most pressing, universal problems facing them today:

- **There are chronic staffing shortages across many disciplines, including:**
 - Math
 - Science
 - Special Education
 - Bilingual Education, especially Spanish
 - Foreign Languages, including Mandarin
 - School Psychologists
 - School Counselors
 - Career and Technical Education disciplines, including Technology Education, Family and Consumer Education, Business Education, Agricultural Education, Culinary Arts, and Automotive
 - Reading Specialists
 - Music
 - Library/Media Specialists
 - Engineering/Project Lead the Way (PLTW)
 - Computer Science
 - Advanced Placement, CAPP, and other higher-level courses
 - Long-term Substitutes
 - Director of Special Education and Pupil Services
 - Business Manager

- **There are fewer applications for every job, and historically “safe” disciplines and geographic locations are now impacted.**
 - Members reported that applications are down across the board in all disciplines. One member noted a decrease in her overall applicant pool by 75 percent across all disciplines.
 - While some members reported that they can usually find elementary, social studies, and language arts teachers, others reported struggles even in these areas.
 - Several members noted they have an easier time finding qualified candidates earlier in the hiring cycle, but that as summer approaches and new openings emerge, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to find candidates.
 - Rural school members report few to no applications for many disciplines, and members working in or near larger population centers likewise reported shallow or no candidate pools for many openings.

- **There are fewer “top tier” or standout candidates in every applicant pool.**
 - Members agreed that far fewer “top tier” candidates are applying for positions. They defined “top tier” candidates as those who, regardless of years of experience, have a high level of both the art and the science of teaching, and possess the knowledge, skills, abilities, and mindset to be an excellent teacher.
 - Increasingly, hiring authorities must select from a smaller, less impressive pool of candidates to fill positions, or find an interim solution while they recruit again.

- **Substantial numbers of veteran staff have retired or left the profession, and experienced educators in high-demand fields are increasingly difficult to retain.**
 - Members cited the loss of many or all retirement-eligible teachers after the passage of Act 10, leaving a “void of talent” across districts. There are more positions to fill and fewer qualified people to fill them.
 - Members also report routinely losing qualified applicants and existing staff to other districts that can offer substantially more money. As a result, retention is a growing challenge, particularly in the highest demand subject areas.
 - At the same time, members also note that districts may actively seek out veteran educators employed in other districts because of their skill and expertise, and because they do not require the intensive training and professional development required of new educators.

- **The face of the teaching workforce has changed, creating new staffing challenges and pressures.**
 - As more experienced educators leave the workforce in greater numbers, schools and districts are struggling to compensate for the loss of skills and experience that has occurred all at once. One member shared that it feels like it takes 7 or more new people to fill the shoes of a 30-year veteran.

- Members stated that new applicants often lack critical skills and abilities, such as those needed to work with low-income students.
 - The new teaching workforce is not only less experienced, but is roughly the same age, presenting different staffing challenges than a workforce that is more age diverse. For example, one member reported having 6 of 7 science teachers out on maternity leave this school year.
- **Rural schools are “shorthanded everywhere,” and staff members must increasingly assume additional roles in order to function.**
- Members from rural school districts cited extreme hardship in filling many positions. They frequently rely on CESAs, share positions with neighboring districts, and otherwise contract out to fill positions, if they can fill them at all.
 - Often, rural school staff members are forced to hold multiple positions simultaneously to keep programs running. One member is the Superintendent of two districts. Another member is a District Administrator, Elementary Principal, Transportation Director, Grants Coordinator, and Curriculum Director.
 - Several members, but rural members in particular, mentioned that their districts have eliminated programs altogether due to the inability to find qualified staff.

Identifying the Problem: What is Driving School Staffing Issues in Your School/District?

After discussing the most pressing issues facing their schools and districts, members engaged in both small and large group discussions to identify the factors they believe are contributing to those staffing challenges and workforce shortages. Again, while each district faces its own unique challenges, Working Group members identified the following common pressures and barriers to hiring:

- **Education is no longer considered an attractive career path for many top candidates.**
- Members acknowledged that fewer students are pursuing education as a profession in the first place, and many “top tier” candidates are pursuing other professions that garner higher pay and more respect.
 - Teachers often feel targeted and under attack, contributing to a culture where pursuing education as a profession is less attractive. One member noted that somehow “it has become ok to beat up on the educator.”
 - Members report that parents and educators themselves are increasingly discouraging students from entering the teaching profession, or at least not to enter teaching in Wisconsin.

- **Act 10 has created a “free agency” environment where competition for high demand and talented teachers is fierce, and financial and geographic differences put many districts at a competitive disadvantage.**
 - In today’s environment, members report that districts actively “poach” top teaching talent from one another, particularly in high demand areas like STEM or CTE fields. While this free agency may be a positive for teachers personally, it has significant negative ramifications for districts that can’t compete financially.
 - Increasingly, districts invest significant time and resources to train and develop their educators only to lose them to a district that can offer signing bonuses, moving costs, and higher salaries. Districts that have lower revenue limits, have high fixed costs (i.e. transportation), and/or are in rural areas believe they aren’t on a level playing field to compete for and pay top talent, and suffer competitive disadvantages as a result.
 - Significant revenue limit differences among neighboring districts, in particular, make it difficult for districts with fewer resources to stay competitive.
 - The location of many rural school districts and the relative lack of amenities make it difficult for them to attract candidates. While rural schools have historically faced recruitment challenges, the current state and nationwide boom in demand exacerbates the problem.

- **Many factors have negatively impacted teacher morale, putting more educators at risk of leaving the profession and further amplifying workforce shortages.**
 - Members stated that teachers across Wisconsin feel targeted and undervalued, especially in the wake of Act 10. The perception now is that the community is less forgiving of teachers, and there is increased pressure for teachers to be “darn near perfect.”
 - Due to budget cuts and revenue limits, members assert that there are fewer resources available overall to invest in teacher training and retention.
 - The restructuring of salaries and pressure to pay certain teachers more to recruit or retain them can lead to less experienced teachers drawing higher salaries than their peers, harming morale among those that make less money.
 - The new system of Educator Effectiveness (EE) has also had an impact on morale, particularly in combination with the timing of Act 10.
 - With respect to EE, members report increasing difficulty in getting staff to serve as cooperating teachers with student teachers out of fear that inexperienced student teachers will negatively affect their Educator Effectiveness rating.
 - Separate EE and Professional Development Plan (PDP) submissions are also a source of frustration, with one Working Group member calling it the “last straw” and that teachers “resent” the duplication.

- **Recent law changes have created new barriers for retired educators to return to the classroom at a time when districts may need them most.**
 - Members expressed irritation with recent law changes to the Wisconsin Retirement System. Intended to prevent “double dipping,” Working Group members asserted that

these law changes have made it extraordinarily difficult to hire retired educators on a short-term or part-time basis, thereby eliminating a huge potential resource to address workforce shortages.

- One member said of this change that “it seems like a punitive mindset to a problem that doesn’t exist.”

➤ **At a time when “out of the box” creativity has become necessary for hiring authorities seeking to address shortages, state laws and regulations can hinder efforts to hire otherwise qualified people.**

- Members identified several state laws, policies, and practices that can be barriers to hiring. Examples raised by members are detailed below.

Identifying the Problem: What state laws, policies, and practices related to educator preparation and licensure are barriers to school staffing?

Throughout the day’s discussions, members shared numerous concerns related to teacher preparation and licensure that merit separate recognition. As workforce shortages increase, districts must increasingly use creative solutions to staff their schools and operate programs. Specifically, members noted the following areas of concern when working to staff schools in today’s environment:

➤ **The inability to utilize licensed professional educators in other content areas unless they attain additional specific certifications;**

- Working group members asserted that many current professional educators may want to teach another content area, but are unwilling or unable to invest the time and money that would currently be required to become credentialed in that area.
- Members agreed that “good teachers can teach a lot of subjects,” and sought more flexibility for experienced educators to fill additional spots.
- Some members wondered why the state got away from a life license, and sought other ways of ensuring continuous learning besides a five-year renewal process.

➤ **The timeliness of license approval;**

- The timeliness of license approval overall was cited as a problem, particularly for out-of-state candidates and substitute teachers.
- While out-of-state candidates may be an attractive potential applicant pool, members asserted that the process for out-of-state license holders to obtain a comparable Wisconsin license is considered long and cumbersome. Members expressed concern about losing otherwise qualified people to other states when they can’t get their license approved in a timely way.

- **The need for more flexibility to use short-term substitutes in long-term roles when a shortage exists;**
 - Members cited difficulty finding licensed substitute teachers overall.
 - As districts struggle to find substitute teachers, members sought more flexibility to use short-term substitutes in long-term roles.
 - One member said the current system results in schools “playing the game” of moving substitute teachers to a different assignment every 19th day, and that this should be addressed.

- **State requirements that districts hire specific positions;**
 - Members raised questions about the state’s expectations that they employ separate reading specialists, library/media specialists, etc., especially at a time of such limited resources.

- **State requirements that certain candidates pass a reading exam;**
 - Members asserted that otherwise qualified candidates struggle to pass the state-required reading exam, reducing the supply of potential educators in certain disciplines.

- **The perception that the state’s system of licensure is too complex and has too many layers, such as:**
 - Why are there eight licenses for science and only one for math? Can this be streamlined to offer more flexibility?
 - Why is there a requirement for separate speech communication and journalism licenses from English? Why can’t there just be one?
 - Why three separate music licenses? Why can’t there just be one?
 - Why is there a need for a 316 license (Reading Teacher) and/or a 17 license (Reading Specialist)?

- **The perception that there are large hurdles to pursuing alternative licensure pathways;**
 - While recognizing that pathways exist, members expressed difficulty understanding the complexities of all of the alternative pathways.
 - Several members raised that these alternative pathways can be perceived as large hurdles, and wondered if these pathways could be simplified and marketed in a different way?
 - Several members raise examples specific to their district that highlighted the problems they experienced attempting to get otherwise qualified people into desired roles. For example, one member mentioned a current cross categorical special education teacher who they wanted to serve as an alternative education teacher was unable to do so without going back to school. Another member’s district wanted to offer a Mandarin program, but was unable to appropriately license the native Mandarin speaker identified to be the teacher.

- **The mismatch between K-12 and higher education credentialing, limiting the ability of districts to offer students higher-level opportunities directly;**
 - Members agreed that there is high demand for Advanced Placement, Youth Options, Youth Apprenticeship, and other higher-level courses, but not enough qualified personnel to fill the demand.
 - Members expressed frustration with the need for a four-year degree in all subject areas when technical colleges don't require it for CTE fields. This mismatch increases the difficulty districts experience when working on direct pathways between high school and technical colleges. Could more be done to recognize work-based experiences when credentialing educators?
 - Members also expressed frustration with the UW's requirement that teachers must have a Master's degree in the content area to teach UW CAPP courses, limiting access to those courses.

- **The need for more licensing flexibility when seeking to offer integrated courses, as well as equivalent courses;**
 - As districts explore more integrated teaching, such as STEM, PLTW, or project-based learning, members noted that licensure issues can get in the way.
 - Members also noted concerns with who can teach equivalent courses for math and science high school credit, and how those courses are subsequently reported on the student's transcript and recognized by a university.
 - In both circumstances, members sought a way to align high school credit to content of the course, rather than the specific license held by the teacher.

- **The need for Educator Preparation Programs to serve as a partner in addressing workforce shortages and staffing issues.**
 - Members expressed concern that Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) can restrict the number of students they will take in a shortage area, further clamping down on the supply of educators in high demand fields.
 - Members also raised concerns that there can be confusion among candidates about which license they should pursue and what options are available to them, and concern that candidates can get "locked in" toward a specific license.

Strategies and Options to Address Shortages and School Staffing Issues

During the second meeting (April 26, 2016) and third meeting (May 17, 2016) of the Working Group, members brainstormed and refined strategies and options aimed at alleviating workforce shortages and otherwise positively addressing school staffing issues. Members finalized recommendations during a fourth meeting (June 2, 2016) conducted telephonically. Throughout the course of their discussions, members often reflected back on the importance of elevating the profession and working together as school leaders, educators, parents, and community members to make education an attractive career path once again. Members similarly recognized the importance of the Talent Development Initiative and the statewide strategic plan that is being developed to address many of these longer term concerns and needs.

Recognizing the longer term work underway, the Working Group focused on its charge and identified strategies and options that could begin to have an immediate positive impact on school staffing and shortage areas. Members coalesced around several main ideas:

- In seeking new pathways and options to alleviate shortages, members consistently reinforced the importance of high quality pedagogical skills to ensuring student success.
- Recognizing that retaining the educators we already have will be critical to stemming shortages, they also sought new ways to retain and recruit experienced educators, and offer educators new and different opportunities in the workforce.
- They acknowledged that many districts, particularly rural districts, and specific subjects and disciplines face unique staffing challenges, and more must be done to provide assistance when critical shortages exist.
- They sought more conversation and connection between K-12, higher education, and workforce development constituencies to bring attention to the growing staffing challenges and shortages in elementary and secondary education, and more collaboration to encourage more people to pursue a career in education.
- Finally, they urged clearer, more consistent information be provided to the field at every opportunity to share what options exist when educators, schools, and districts are facing staffing challenges.

The following summarizes the Working Group's specific recommended strategies to alleviate workforce shortages and otherwise positively impact school staffing issues, and options to advance each strategy.

Strategy #1: Keep retirement-eligible educators in the classroom as long as possible, and make it easier and more attractive for retired educators to return to the classroom.

With fewer new teachers entering the profession and thousands of educators nearing or reaching retirement age every year, Working Group members emphasized the importance of retaining the educators that we have. Retaining even a portion of retirement-eligible veteran staff, including teachers, principals, administrators, and more, would significantly alleviate staffing issues.

In addition, retired educators are a huge pool of talent that districts could tap for a variety of positions, particularly those that are short-term or part-time. One member from a rural school district indicated that, while he struggles to recruit new staff, former educators who retire to the north woods are an attractive pool potentially available to him. However, members agreed that a variety of current state laws and regulations can impede the hiring of retired educators.

Working Group members urge the state to support this strategy by finding ways to incent retirement-eligible educators to remain and retired educators to return to the classroom. Options recommended by the Working Group to advance this strategy include the following:

- 1a. Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to establish a non-renewable five year license extension for retirement-eligible and recently retired educators in an effort to retain and return these educators to the classroom.***

Several members acknowledged that veteran educators often align their retirement dates to their license expiration date, signaling that the credits required for license renewal can drive retirement-eligible educators out of the profession prematurely.

Members discussed a number of options to address this issue, and ultimately recommended that the DPI make changes to allow retirement-eligible educators and recently retired educators to apply for a one-time, five year license extension. These educators would not have to take new credits to receive the license extension, but would need to pay the licensing fees and continue to participate in district-directed professional development and the state-required Educator Effectiveness system. An educator who recently retired and did not renew his/her license could also apply for the extension, which would expire five years from the original license expiration date. In other words, an educator whose license expired in 2013 would be eligible for an extension until 2018.

In addition, members believe that another recommendation outlined below (4a), which would allow educators the option to use their Educator Effectiveness work to meet the professional development requirements necessary for licensure renewal, will also greatly

reduce the burden on educators who are currently electing to take credits for licensure renewal. This recommendation, once fully implemented, should also have a positive effect on retaining retirement-eligible educators.

1b. *Eliminate/change the “double dipping” law that keeps veteran educators from returning to the classroom, even in part-time capacities.*

Members agreed that recent statutory changes to the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) have prevented retired educators from returning to the classroom and filling shortage areas and other critical needs. In an effort to prevent “double dipping”, the legislation established a cap on the total number of hours a retired employee could work before the employee lost his/her WRS payment.

Working Group members asserted that this law change has prevented districts from tapping into an extremely qualified pool of talent for even short-term or limited roles. They recommend that this law should be changed or clarified to remove the disincentive for retired educators to return to the field.

Acknowledging that this is a statutory change that will require the Legislature to take action, the Working Group recommended that the Talent Development Initiative address this issue as part of its work to create a statewide strategic plan for educator recruitment and retention.

1c. *Provide proactive advice to districts on how to use contracting to hire retired educators for short-term, part-time or project-based roles.*

The Working Group heard about efforts from other educational entities in Wisconsin that utilize retired educators on a contract basis, and thereby do not run afoul of the recent WRS conditions enacted into law. Members acknowledged that districts approach contracting differently, and recommend that DPI should share more information with districts on a proactive basis on how to take advantage of this hiring strategy.

Strategy #2: Create new opportunities and pathways for educators to take on new roles.

Members agreed that good teachers can teach multiple subjects, but that current licensing rules and regulations can make it difficult to get the right people in the right roles. A veteran educator may be looking to take on a new challenge without spending the time and money to go back to

school, or a principal may want to assign a talented teacher to a new challenge but is impeded by not holding the appropriate license. In any case, members believe that providing more flexible opportunities for licensed educators with strong pedagogical skills to teach new areas outside of their license is another promising strategy to both retain high quality people and fill current openings. Specific options recommended as part of this strategy include the following:

2a. *Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed create a district “residency” pathway or license to allow more licensed educators the opportunity to teach in new areas under the supervision of the school district, without having to go back to school or take additional state-required tests.*

Under this recommendation, schools districts could empower any current educator with the opportunity to teach outside of his/her license area on a temporary “residency” basis. Coupled with district-determined competency assessments, mentorship, and ongoing support, these educators would have a trial “residency” period of three years under the supervision of the district, after which time the district could recommend endorsement for full licensure in the new content or developmental area if the residency has been successful.

Members enthusiastically recommended this option, which would provide districts and educators alike with new opportunities to be prepared by their district, as opposed to going back to school or taking state-required exams. For example, districts could offer qualified individuals a residency to teach outside of their developmental level. An elementary licensed teacher could have a residency as a kindergarten teacher, or a middle school math teacher could have an opportunity to teach ninth grade math. Educators could be given the opportunity to teach a new content area, as well, and more district-driven residency opportunities could encourage, rather than impede, efforts to promote project-based and interdisciplinary learning.

Members discussed whether to limit this recommendation to professional educators only, or whether to recommend that initial educators also be permitted to participate in a residency program. The Working Group ultimately recommended that a district should be able to recommend any educator, including initial educators, for a residency program, as long as the initial educator had been employed and observed by the district for at least a year.

2b. *Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to allow licensed professional educators to add on licenses in any area by passing a state-approved content test.*

Working group members expressed support for recent state-level changes that allowed licensed educators to add on licenses in a related content area by taking a state-approved

content test. Members recommend that this option should be broadened to allow licensed professional educators to obtain additional licenses in any area in which they pass a state-approved content test and are pedagogically prepared, not just in related subjects.

At various points during the Working Group sessions, members emphasized the importance of pedagogical understanding, and strongly disputed the notion that someone who passed a content test alone - with no other preparation - would be qualified to teach. However, in the case of individuals who are already licensed professional educators, and thus already have pedagogical training and experience for the relevant ages and developmental levels, members agreed that they should be allowed to attain licensure in new content areas by passing a content test. As several members stated, “let the high flyers fly.”

This option would give educators more options to add on licenses, and districts would ultimately have the final say over whether to hire an educator who obtained a license in an unrelated subject through a content test.

2c. *To achieve fewer licenses with more flexibility, recommend the Talent Development Initiative or another broad stakeholder group convened by DPI review and consider consolidation of current license categories.*

Working group members spent considerable time discussing the current system of licensure, and asserted that the state should aim to have fewer licenses with more flexibility to teach a variety of subjects. However, the Working Group also recognized that this recommendation would require significant policy changes and have broad reaching effects, requiring more stakeholder discussion and participation. Ultimately, they recommend that the Talent Development Initiative or another group established by the DPI for this purpose review and streamline the licensing system in this way.

While the group suggested fewer, more flexible licenses as a general objective, some members also identified specific licensure areas that should be reviewed:

- The Reading Teacher license (316). Concerns were raised that elementary teachers with a significant background in reading cannot be hired to teach reading interventions without this specific license, despite their significant programmatic experience. There has been significant effort to raise the level of reading knowledge of all classroom teachers with the adoption of the Foundations of Reading rest and improvements in
- reading preparation.
- Consolidating current English licenses
- Consolidating current Music licenses
- Consolidating Science licenses into fewer categories and provide districts with more information about the flexibility that currently exists in teaching “entry level” science courses.
- Consolidating Social Studies licenses

In a related recommendation below (3c), members recommended further study of state-required positions and the educational attainment necessary for several administrative and pupil services categories.

Strategy #3: Empower districts with more options and flexibility in hiring, particularly when a shortage exists.

At a time when shortages are growing across the state and across a variety of disciplines, members expressed a need for more flexibility to fill open positions. Members suggested that DPI should review and update current rules and policies regarding emergency licenses/permits and substitute licenses, and should explore more flexible licensing options for districts to fill open positions. For example, members recommended the following specific changes:

3a. Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to streamline the process for issuing emergency licenses and permits, and to ease the process for renewal.

Currently, DPI rules and policies dictate a number of conditions to hire someone on emergency license/permit, and emergency license/permits are issued on a one-year basis. Members recommended that DPI eliminate some of the hurdles to utilizing an emergency license/permit, including how a district must demonstrate to the state an unsuccessful attempt to hire a qualified person. They also recommended that rules/policies be updated to make emergency licenses/permits more easily renewable.

Members cited several examples where easing the renewal requirements for an emergency license and/or permit would have allowed them to retain strong candidates and subsequently provide them with the mentorship necessary or simply provide them with the time needed to become fully licensed. Giving districts more flexibility to renew an emergency license/permit, along with some quality standards for reissuance, would provide them the opportunity to grow and mentor these individuals.

DPI cited that some of the current policies, practices, and rules around emergency licenses and permits was driven by the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). However, recent changes enacted as part of the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 likely grant additional flexibility in this area.

3b. Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to create more flexibility to use short-term substitutes in long-term roles when shortages exist.

When districts are unable to find long-term substitutes to fill a role, members recommended eliminating policies that prevent them from using short-term substitutes in long-term roles.

Under the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions of NCLB, districts were generally prohibited from using short-term substitutes for longer than 20 days. Members stated that, to get around that policy, districts will simply move the short-term substitute out of his/her role on the 19th day, and then move that person back in the next day to meet the arbitrary deadlines. Given the recent changes to federal law, the Working Group recommends DPI update its policies to allow this change.

3c. Recommend the Talent Development Initiative, or another stakeholder group convened by DPI, create pathways for districts to hire certain required positions based on competency.

Working Group members asserted that they have significant difficulty finding qualified people to fill certain positions that are required in law, such as a district-level Reading Specialist, Library Media Specialist, Career and Technical Education Coordinator, etc. In addition, members noted several administrative and pupil services categories were extremely difficult to fill, and identified the master's degree requirement as one impediment to filling these positions.

Throughout its meetings, the Working Group affirmed their strong commitment to state educational equity laws and high standards for educator quality. At the same time, several members also acknowledged the need for additional options for districts who simply cannot find people who hold the licenses or credentials currently required, and thus risk violating the law. Working Group members recommend one option for addressing this workforce shortage should include the ability to hire someone based on competency.

In the case of Library Media Specialists for example, DPI has convened a workgroup to update the requirements for this license, including the establishment of specific new content competencies and the likely elimination of the requirement for a Master's Degree. Once completed, this work should improve the ability of districts to find and hire qualified Library-Media Specialists as required by law, and expand the pool of individuals who can qualify to become a Library-Media Specialist based on their competency in this area.

Similarly, the Working Group recommends that the Talent Development Initiative or other stakeholder body, as appropriate, establish new competency-based pathways for districts to meet their obligations to provide equitable services to children.

Strategy #4: Reduce the time, cost, and effort it takes to obtain and renew a license.

Members asserted that obtaining and renewing a license can be a time consuming, cumbersome, and costly process. The Working Group identified several areas where the state could reduce time and cost, eliminate bureaucratic redundancies, and, ultimately, boost teacher morale. Specific recommendations in this area include:

4a. Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to combine and streamline the Professional Development Plan and Educator Effectiveness processes.

Throughout the meetings of the Working Group, members referenced the redundancies that exist between the state-required Professional Development Plan for licensure and the state-required Educator Effectiveness system. Members asserted that there is enough duplication between these two plans that it is a burden on educators and negatively impacts morale.

Working Group members recommend that DPI establish a path where educators could choose to use their Educator Effectiveness work to simultaneously count toward the professional development requirement needed for licensure renewal. Given the duplication that exists already, and the fact that both state-required processes are aimed at fostering continuous learning and student growth, this recommendation would significantly ease the bureaucratic burden on Wisconsin's educators.

Once DPI creates this new pathway to licensure renewal, the Working Group recommends that DPI should undertake a marketing campaign to advertise this new option to all educators, including those that are currently grandfathered into the pre-2004 system of licensure renewal by credit. Once implemented, this pathway would offer another option to retain educators who might otherwise be driven to retire based on their license expiration date.

4b. Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to shorten wait times for licensing out-of-state license holders, and create more portability and equivalency for educators prepared and licensed out of state.

Members expressed some frustration with the ability to hire qualified individuals who were prepared and/or hold licenses from out of state, a potential pool of applicants especially during this time of shortage. The Working Group recommended that DPI pursue greater portability and flexibility in awarding equivalent licenses, especially with neighboring states, as well as reduced waiting times in general.

To illustrate this point, members shared examples of otherwise qualified teachers who were prepared at out-of-state programs and whose out-of-state license did not align to Wisconsin's developmental levels. One member shared her experience of having to hire a kindergarten teacher on an emergency license, despite the fact that she had a K-8 license from a respected Iowa institution, because Wisconsin's equivalent elementary license only covers grades 1-8. Under current rules, this teacher has to pay for and go back to college to obtain an early childhood license to continue to teach kindergarten.

4c. *Review and update policies, practices, rules, and or laws as needed to reduce the testing burden on new candidates wherever possible, while retaining high quality standards.*

Members discussed a variety of issues with the testing burden on teaching candidates, and recommended that DPI review and reduce this burden wherever possible without sacrificing quality.

For example, members expressed frustration that they might be unable to hire someone they believe to be qualified and who has successfully passed through their preparation program, but has been unable to successfully pass one exam. Concerns were raised with the state's recent law change mandating many candidates pass the Foundations of Reading Exam, whether more alternatives could be used for Praxis II, and whether cut scores should be reviewed and/or adjusted.

In addition, members raised concerns with the cost associated with all of the various tests that candidates are required to take, especially if they must take a test multiple times. Members recommend that DPI should streamline and reduce costs as much as possible to alleviate this burden. One suggestion was exploring whether colleges and universities could include the cost of testing as part of tuition so that students could access financial aid.

Strategy #5: Foster more connections between K-12 and higher education to proactively address staffing issues.

At several points during the Working Group meetings, members expressed concern about a lack of alignment between the K-12 system and higher education. Members expressed frustration that there was no place for the K-12 community to connect with higher education and Education Preparation Programs specifically about what is happening in the field, where shortages are, and how to prepare candidates for the classrooms they enter today. Members recommended that the state do more to ensure that connection and alignment is occurring

between K-12 and higher education related to school staffing issues. Specific recommendations include:

5a. Review and update policies, practices, and/or rules as needed to ensure that appropriate and robust communication is ongoing between Education Preparation Programs and school districts.

As part of the Program Approval process overseen by DPI, each Educator Preparation Program (EPP) is required to have a formalized collaboration system with PK-12, such as a PK-12 Advisory Board. However, none of the Working Group members had any formal advisory role with their local colleges and universities. Members recommended that DPI do more quality assurance related to this requirement during the Program Approval process to ensure that regular and meaningful consultation is occurring between K-12 and EPPs.

5b. Review and update policies and practices as needed to establish greater connections among K-12, Higher Education, and local workforce development entities to address educator shortages around the state.

Another route to addressing school staffing and workforce shortages is greater collaboration among K-12, higher education, and local workforce development bodies. Members recommended formalizing local partnerships to bring awareness to school staffing issues and shortages, including highlighting these needs with local workforce development boards and regional economic development entities.

Strategy #6: Support local “grow your own” programs to attract and cultivate youth into teaching.

Members agreed that recruiting new teaching talent can be difficult in many areas, especially in rural schools. They suggested the creation of targeted, discrete programs aimed at raising interest and awareness of teaching opportunities among students, even while they are still in high school or middle school. Several ideas and programs were mentioned by members, including:

- Establishing a Teacher Scholars program similar to the Med Scholars program;
- Establishing Youth Apprenticeship programs for teaching;
- Offering greater pay for internships; and
- Broader, expanded loan forgiveness programs for shortage areas.

The Working Group ultimately recommended that the Talent Development Initiative, which is charged with creating a statewide strategic plan for educator recruitment and retention, was the

appropriate body to advance this strategy and develop specific recommendations. However, the group recognized the role of DPI and K-12 professional associations in leading this effort, as well. Members recommended that DPI and professional associations should share best practices from around the state and around the country, including efforts by the national Educators Rising organization, for example.

Strategy #7: Promote the pathways that currently exist more effectively.

Working group members acknowledged that DPI has already established several different pathways to becoming a teacher or to teaching outside of one's license area. In the recommendations encompassed above, several additional new pathways would be created.

However, members agreed that the perception in the field is that the current pathways are too difficult, lack the flexibility that is needed for specific circumstances, or have too many rules and restrictions to be effective. Members recommended that DPI should do more to market and promote the pathways in a way that is user-friendly and easy to understand for prospective candidates and hiring authorities alike.

For example, members recommended that DPI could do some or all the following:

- Provide proactive, simplified communications and graphics to districts and educators alike about what's available to them;
- Establish a hotline or a clear place for educators and administrators to go to have questions quickly answered, including possible CESA-level regional support centers.
- Undertake a specific marketing effort to districts about how to help people interested in a career change to become teachers, or how current educators can teach new subjects;
- Proactively seek feedback from districts and educators about improvements needed to the current pathways;
- Get the word out by attending as many conferences and gatherings as possible to share the information.

In addition, members acknowledged that school districts and professional associations have a role in seeking out this information for the educators that they serve. Members recommended that various professional organizations should make it a point to invite DPI to conferences and meetings to communicate directly with them about what is possible through the pathways that exist.

Next Steps

The State Superintendent's Working Group on School Staffing Issues submitted this final report to State Superintendent Tony Evers in June 2016. In the succeeding weeks and months, the State Superintendent and the DPI will review the recommended strategies and options and will examine the DPI's own policies, practices, and administrative rules to identify how to accomplish the Working Group's recommendations.

In addition, the DPI will share this final report with the Professional Standards Council to review and use during its Talent Development Initiative. The Working Group's problem identification work, as well as its specific recommendations, should directly align with the Talent Development Initiative's strategic efforts to recruit, retain, and develop world-class Wisconsin educators. In addition, in several instances, the Working Group specifically recommended further review and study by a larger and more representative stakeholder group, such as the Professional Standards Council.

Ultimately, the problem summary and recommendations of the Working Group should serve as a guide to help immediately understand and address some of the most pressing staffing issues facing schools and districts, and should complement the concurrent, broader work of the Talent Development Initiative. Working Group members agree that much more work is needed to address the deeper, systemic problems they identified and to ensure that all Wisconsin children have access to the classrooms they deserve. Meanwhile, their recommendations offer a starting place for immediate, positive change.