



Regional Recruitment Survey Meetings—Thematic Analysis of Responses

The Recruitment Survey

In April 2016, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) administered a Recruitment Survey to all districts in the state of Wisconsin. The survey went to all public school districts (424), all 2R charter schools (24), and each Cooperative Educational Services Agencies (CESA) region executive director (12). Of these 460 surveys, 348 responses were collected for a response rate of 75.6%.

The purpose of this survey was to provide the Professional Standards Council with data for use in crafting a strategic plan to address Wisconsin's educational staffing shortages. The survey identified numerous different strategies to attract, recruit, and retain teachers, pupil services staff, and administrators for districts. Some of these recruiting activities were already in use, whereas others were new. Data from the survey was collected and organized into Data Packets by personnel at DPI.

The Regional Meetings

Meetings were held in the 12 CESA regions between May 18th to May 23rd and were attended by over 90 superintendents, district staff, CESA staff, school board members, and faculty from the University of Wisconsin System. Data Packets were provided to each the participants and included the following information:

- A summary of survey responses, broken out by CESA and size of district by student count.
- Survey results on attracting, recruiting, and retaining teachers, pupil services staff, and administrators. Data was disaggregated by region, and included a statewide total and statewide percentage.
- Survey results on Wisconsin Educator Staffing Data by licensure, including a breakout by region and statewide total.
- Each region was provided emergency license data for their CESA

Each meeting used the same process to discuss the data in these packets. Responses from participants were recorded at each of the 12 regional meetings. These responses have been combined, analyzed and grouped according to the major themes and topic areas that were discussed.

Overview of Discussion Themes

Most of the discussion at the 12 regional meetings focused on the growing issue of staffing challenges throughout the state. These discussions focused on three different staff categories—namely Teachers, Pupil Services, and Administrators. The vast majority of the discussion focused on Teachers—over 85% of the comments were related to teacher staffing issues.

In all of these discussions, there were numerous comments directly tied to the staffing problems that different attendees had experienced, as well as a lot of discussion about possible concrete solutions to these problems.

With regard to teachers, beyond the focus on general staffing challenges and solutions to them, there were also a number of more specific topic areas that participants explored in discussion. All of these areas related to the central issue but were also common enough to warrant notice as important themes for these meetings.

These themes and specific topic areas will be discussed in subsequent pages.

Discussion of Themes regarding Teachers

Staffing issues for teachers was, by far, the most prominent topic of discussion at the 12 regional CESA meetings. Out of the nearly 420 collected responses, 360 were related to teacher staffing shortages. The approximate thematic breakdown of these responses is as follows:

# of Responses	Thematic Area
65	Direct discussion of concrete staffing challenges
72	Direct offering of concrete solutions to challenges
20	Desire for more data
19	Tactics for recruiting/attracting educators
56	Need for public relations work on education
30	Issues with the educator preparation pipeline
13	Issues with streamlining licensing or testing
56	Discussion of monetary factors
27	Interest and desire for more collaboration

It should be noted that some responses fit into more than one category and thus were counted in both. Additionally, each of these categories had subtopics that were prominent within each that will be detailed below.

1) Direct Discussion of Concrete Staffing Challenges: There were three main subtopic areas within this general theme of “concrete problems.” The first major subtopic was the issue of the state of the profession. There were strong concerns about the perceived lower status of teachers within the community and state, and how this was having a negative impact upon hiring teachers. Additionally, there was a lot of talk about how to improve the “culture” within schools to compensate for the lack of resources available. The second major subtopic focused on systemic problems that people from each district had noticed. Some of these related to higher education connections, others related to licensing issues, while still others addressed rural/urban differences. The final subtopic in this area focused on the specific problem of districts “hiring/poaching” educators from other districts, thereby merely transferring staffing problems from one district to another.

2) Direct Offering of Concrete Solutions: This was the largest group of responses overall and it had a number of different subtopics within it. There were, for example, numerous responses related to specific programs or tactics—such as hiring retirees, holding job fairs, furthering “grow your own” programs, improving school cultures, and building the Educator Rising program. Each of these areas had 5-6 responses. By far the largest topic area within this theme was the idea of increasing planning efforts on a system-wide level. Nearly 20 responses were focused on possible solutions that would involve greater system-wide planning and communications between DPI and the individual districts. Many of these responses looked towards DPI acting as a clearinghouse for solutions or strategies developed within the state.

3. Desire for More Data: There were a number of responses that involved requests for more data from DPI. Some of these comments focused on specific requests for different kinds of analyses, but three important topics here were getting more data on the educator pipeline, getting longitudinal data, and getting data on why teachers leave or depart from districts.

4. Tactics for Recruiting/Targeting Educators: This theme had two main areas of discussion. The largest area for discussion was about how to promote the profession to students—both high school and college. The other main topic was how to focus on how to recruit adults and specifically which adults to target (underemployed? Out of state?).

5. Need for Public Relations Work on Education: This theme was one of the more popular ones and most of its commentary focused on three different ideas. The most common idea was about how to promote a more “positive message” about the profession so that it could more easily attract people. The second most common idea was to more directly “market” the profession in concrete ways. Some of these responses talked about using social media, PSA’s or other kinds of technologies, while others used the language of “targeted PR campaigns” to the public by leadership officials. The final approach focused on looking to “outside help” for the profession. This help could be corporate, professional organizations, legislators or communities.

6. Issues with the Educator Preparation Pipeline: This theme focused mostly on the desire by many attendees to have more connection with the EPP’s and on current issues with the pipeline. The single biggest topic of conversation in this theme was the desire to have better connections to these programs so that they could communicate better. Districts also thought that they would then be better able to recruit candidates and to resolve issues involving the process of matching graduates to the positions that were available.

7. Issues with Streamlining Licensing or Testing: Although this theme was not particularly large, there were still a number of responses that talked about licensing and testing

processes acting as a barrier to solving staffing shortages. Costs and complexity were raised as issues in this area.

8. Discussion of Monetary Factors: This theme was one of the most common topics of discussion and it focused on three main areas. The most common topic was the general lack of monetary support for districts and how this lack of funding made it harder to support educators trying to pass test, getting licenses, or dealing with aspects of poverty. The “unsustainability” of current practices was raised. The second most common topic area here was about salary issues—namely giving signing bonuses, dealing with issues caused by differentials, and also the issues of salary schedules. Finally, there was some discussion of other possible options for obtaining funds—such as loan forgiveness programs, scholarships, and other benefit supports.

9. Interest and Desire for More Collaboration: This theme appeared to be a common desire throughout the different CESA meetings. The two most common topic areas here were the question of how districts could go about increasing their connections to other groups and then various suggestions of who the districts should collaborate more with (CESA’s, IHE’s, other organizations). There were also some comments touting the success of different collaborative efforts.

Altogether, the discussion themes on teacher staffing needs were wide-ranging but still came back to a number of central themes involving monetary issues, public relations, and collaborative problem-solving efforts.

Discussion of Themes regarding Administrator and Pupil Services

Both of these categories had some discussion at the CESA regional meetings, but far less than that of the teacher staffing needs. Some specific issues and themes that appeared in these categories are listed below:

1. Pupil Services Details: Although there were only approximately 30 comments about pupil services staffing issues, there were a few important concerns that were mentioned. First, there were a couple different comments about the growing need for pupil service positions due to the increased needs of students. Connected to this concern was the issue of there being a much smaller supply of these personnel, which made finding a qualified individual harder. Second, there was some discussion about how there were not as many ways for these educators to be involved administration or formal leadership.

2. Administrator Details: There were again fewer comments about administrator staffing needs (~30 comments total), and the situation with administrator positions did not seem to be especially critical. There was some concern that these positions did not turn over quickly and that the work/life balance in these positions was somewhat

problematic. However, the professional development opportunities were rated as pretty good in this area.

Summary Remarks

This document has analyzed and summarized the conversations held at 12 different regional CESA meetings. It could not cover every single discussion topic or detail, and for a more thorough list of such information, one should look at the “Regional Meetings Response Collection” (<http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/tepd/Regional%20Meetings%20%20Collected%20Responses.pdf>) document on the Talent Development Framework Website.

References

Stanfield, R. B. (1997). *Art of focused conversation: 100 ways to access group wisdom in the workplace*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs.