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DPI-NR 2024-118

Monday, Dec. 16, 2024

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DPI awarded \$10.5M grant to bolster special educator and leadership retention

Nearly 50 percent of new special education teachers leave state or profession by sixth year

MADISON – As schools continue navigating staffing challenges, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction announced today it has been awarded a \$10.5 million federal grant to support the recruitment and retention of special education teachers and leaders across the state.

The U.S. Department of Education awarded the five-year grant as part of its [State Personnel Development Grant Program](#). The funding will improve professional development systems for educators and help districts implement innovative strategies to address critical staffing shortages in special education. [According to DPI data](#), 49.4 percent of Wisconsin’s new special education teachers either leave the state or the profession altogether by their sixth year.

“This funding is a big step forward in helping address the urgent need of recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers,” State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly said. “My budget proposal prioritizes special education funding, and it’s time to take our special education reimbursement rate to 90%.

“Supporting the development of new educators and working to retain them is critical to resolving staffing challenges. This federal funding will help districts increase professional growth opportunities, implement innovative retention strategies, and ensure that every Wisconsin student has access to the high-quality, dedicated educators they deserve.”

The DPI’s use of these federal funds will focus on universal, targeted, and intensive supports, including:

- Development of a professional learning toolkit and social media materials to support educators statewide.
- Implementation of a statewide induction program offering specialized training and coaching for new special education teachers and leaders.

(more)

- Creation of a teacher residency program in partnership with educator preparation programs.

The DPI's initiative represents a collaborative effort, with key partnerships including the Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS), Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training, and Support (FACETS), the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and the Department of Workforce Development – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

In addition to her major proposal for the state to increase special education funding, [Dr. Underly in October announced a \\$60 million proposal](#) to strengthen the state's education workforce. The workforce proposal, part of her 2025-27 Biennial Budget request, provides stipends to eligible student teachers to help cover expenses and reduce debt, grows the educator workforce through a new state-funded grow-your-own grant program, and expands a support program for new educators.

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