

## The Wisconsin Teacher Policy Landscape (2007-2018)

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This overview of the Wisconsin teacher policy landscape covers the period from 2007-2018, and is necessarily situated in the national context of teacher policy (see [The National Context for Science Teacher Education and Retention in the United States, 2007-2018: An Introduction to the Set of State Cases](#)), as well as the recent historical context within Wisconsin itself. During the time period covered by this paper, the political shifts occurring within the state government impacted teachers greatly in some respects, while barely affecting them in others.

As of 2019, Wisconsin's K-12 education system served more than 850,000 students in 2,190 schools, ranging from densely populated urban centers to sparsely populated rural areas. The state's 421 school districts vary tremendously in size. For example, the Washington Island School District counts 75 students, while Milwaukee Public Schools literally has a thousand times more students with an annual enrollment of about 75,000. As one of the first states in the U.S. to open charter schools, Wisconsin has 211 district and 25 non-district charter schools, which include those run by the Menominee and Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe tribes. The state also runs 12 regional Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs),<sup>1</sup> which provide professional development, services, resources, and other programming to Wisconsin school districts in their areas. The state has approximately 62,500 licensed teachers, about 3,200 of whom teach a science subject in a high school.<sup>2</sup> A report by the Wisconsin Policy Forum (Chapman & Brown, 2020) noted that from 2006 through 2019, the percentage of students of color in Wisconsin schools increased from 24% to 31%, while during this same time less than 5% of the teachers in the state were teachers of color. Another report by the Wisconsin Budget Project (2020) noted that between 2010 and 2020 the state's spending on school districts had decreased from 38% to 31% of general purpose revenue.

Some of the most visible policy changes in the state during this period, such as the adoption of the edTPA performance assessment requirement for teacher certification, and changes to teacher data reporting, were simply a continuation of long standing practices and policies that had been in place for over a decade. Others, like the changes in the wake of the passage of Act 10 and the

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that a significant amount of teacher professional development in Wisconsin is operated by each of its twelve Cooperative Educational Service Areas (CESAs). These CESAs were established in 1983 to link school districts to the state and to one another. As quasi-governmental organizations, CESAs operate through grants and fees from service contracts with member districts, and receive no direct state funding.

<sup>2</sup> [https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/eis/pdf/schools\\_at\\_a\\_glance.pdf](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/eis/pdf/schools_at_a_glance.pdf)

effort to overhaul teacher evaluation processes in Act 166, greatly impacted the daily work lives of teachers.

The first section of this paper briefly describes the policy landscape in Wisconsin before and after the passage of Act 10, and details some of the law's effects on teachers in the state. The next section offers an overview of teacher certification in Wisconsin, focusing on the requirements for each stage of licensure and the state policies with regard to teacher evaluations. In the third section, we review the role of teacher quality efforts in Wisconsin through the development and implementation of the "Educator Effectiveness" teacher evaluation system beginning in 2011, the state's Race to the Top application, and its state system of data collection. In the fourth section, we review policies that have sought to influence teacher recruitment and retention, including the state's role in mentoring and induction.

In these state landscape papers, we typically examine state policies and programs specifically targeted in recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers of science. Though science teachers have been identified as a shortage area from the entire period of this report (Cross, 2016), we found no policy specifically aimed at science teachers to report.

### **Wisconsin Teacher Policy Before and After Act 10**

Wisconsin has a somewhat unique status among the states in that there have been significant policy achievements in past decades from both those who seek to professionalize teaching as well as those who seek to deregulate it (Zeichner, 2009). In many ways, these policies are part of the larger ideological and partisan battles that have been a marked feature of the state's political environment during this time, and are reflected in Wisconsin's recurring role as a swing state in federal elections.

Like nearly all states in the U.S., Wisconsin began reexamining its approach to education in the wake of national reports in the 1980s, leading to the strengthening of license requirements for teachers. State codes such as PI-3 (that outlined teacher licensure), and PI-4 (that detailed regulations for teacher education programs) were developed and implemented during this time.

One of the first teacher policies to emerge currently was the culmination of years of advocacy by tribal leaders in Wisconsin. By the end of the 1980s, these efforts led to legislation requiring instruction in the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the eleven federally-recognized American Indian nations and tribal communities in Wisconsin public school districts, which is often referred to as Act 31 (Hadley & Trechter, 2014). One component of this legislation placed specific requirements on teacher certification and licenses:

The state superintendent may not grant to any person a license to teach unless the person has received instruction in the study of minority group

relations, including instruction in the history, culture and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in this state. (§118.19(8), Wis Stats.)<sup>3</sup>

It is notable that despite all of the changes in teacher policy described in the remainder of this case study, this Act 31 requirement has held strong, and remains an integral component of both schooling and teacher education in Wisconsin (Moody, 2019). As discussed below, the Minority Teacher Loan Program was also established in this Act.

From the late 1980s through 2010, Wisconsin had both Republican and Democratic governors who exerted influence over public education policy. Issues such as school finance, equity in schooling, teacher licensure, and curriculum, each took a turn in the political spotlight. As a state with a rich labor history, teachers' unions played an important role in these discussions. However, the election of Republican Scott Walker as Governor in November 2010 brought about a set of changes in both labor and education policy that would alter the political environment in Wisconsin for a decade, and reverberate throughout statehouses elsewhere in the country.

One of Walker's first acts as governor was introduced as a Budget Repair Bill, which proposed a sweeping array of changes across nearly every aspect of state government. Some of the elements of the bill that impacted schools and teachers included the elimination of certain job protections, increased contributions to health insurance and retirement plans, the elimination of all collective bargaining, the elimination of union dues collection by employers, and an annual union recertification requirement (Swalwell et al., 2017). The proposed bill led to a series of daily protests and occupations of the State Capitol building, sometimes by thousands of people, which lasted for four months. Despite a legislative walkout by most of the Democratic members of the State Senate, the Budget Repair Bill was passed by the legislature and signed into law as Act 10, and though challenged, was ultimately found constitutional by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 2014 (Larson, 2017).

It is worth pointing out that this law did not nullify existing contracts between teachers' unions and local school boards, so in many places the impact of the law on salaries, health care costs, and pension contributions was most keenly felt as new contracts were negotiated. An investigative series by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel found that some of the other effects included a free-market effect as teachers were lured into positions through districts competing for candidates, easier removal of "low-performing teachers," increasing efforts to link teacher pay to performance, and decreased power of the unions (Umhoefer & Hauer, 2016). One 2017 research study (Swalwell et al., 2017) found that across multiple districts in Wisconsin, "the most salient changes for teachers post-Act 10 include increased workloads, reduced pay and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://dpi.wi.gov/amind/state-statutes>

benefits, decreased job stability, and unchecked school board and administrative power,” (p. 486). Biasi and Sarsons (2022) noted that prior to Act 10, there had been no gender pay gap in the state’s teacher workforce, but afterwards the implementation of “flexible pay” salary schemes following the elimination of collective bargaining agreements, an identifiable wage gap between women and men had emerged.

Chapman and Brown (2020) noted that between 2012 and 2018, students enrolling in Wisconsin teacher preparation programs dropped by more than a third. In 2016, the State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Tony Evers—who would go on to defeat Walker in the 2018 Wisconsin governor’s race—led the writing of a report that pointed to Act 10 as a driver in the state’s teacher shortage (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2016). A subsequent analysis of the impact of Act 10 on teachers found that teacher attrition did indeed rise in the years following the law’s passage (Madland and Rowell, 2017). It is worth noting that elimination of collected bargaining led to a wave of retirements, with many teachers opting to retire under existing contracts rather than risk reduced benefits under a contract not subject to collective bargaining ( Swalwell et al., 2017).

In addition to Act 10, other significant legislation was subsequently introduced that also impacted teacher policy. In 2011, Act 166, which will be discussed below, set the stage for a new teacher evaluation system in an era without teacher tenure. In 2013, the legislature passed a law (Wis. Stat. § 66.0502) that removed the ability for municipalities to mandate residency requirements for their employees. Since the 1960s, Milwaukee had been the only district in the state to require its teachers to live within its city limits, and the evidence shows a mixed impact of this rule change impact on the available supply of teachers for the city’s schools.<sup>4</sup>

## **Teacher Licensure in Wisconsin**

Teacher licensure in Wisconsin is the responsibility of the state’s Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and since 2004 has been governed by Wisconsin Administrative Code PI-34, which replaced codes PI-3 and PI-4 in 1999 and was fully implemented by 2004. In its implementation, PI-34 introduced a shift away from a solely credit-based approach to teacher licensure toward an assessment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching that remained a foundational aspect of teacher licensure in Wisconsin. Though the state has made changes over time to specific licenses since 2004, academic requirements (in terms of grade point average threshold and tests of subject matter knowledge) have remained a mainstay of the licensing requirements.<sup>5</sup> However, over the period between 2004 and 2014, issues with both the conceptualization and enactment of this system—in addition to the effects of Act 10—were

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<sup>4</sup> <https://urbanmilwaukee.com/2020/01/02/the-educator-how-does-residency-change-affect-teachers/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://dpi.wi.gov/licensing/programs/rules-statute>

perceived to be contributing to a teacher shortage. In 2016 the Wisconsin DPI released a report titled, “State Superintendent’s Working Group on School Staffing Issues,” (2016) which ultimately led to a process of revising PI-34 that was approved in 2018.

The broad categories of teacher licenses in Wisconsin—termed *stages* until 2018 and *tiers* after—have remained relatively stable, even as the requirements to achieve them have changed. In 2005, there were three main stages of licensure: Initial Educator, Professional Educator, and Master Educator. The revisions in PI-34 during the 2016-2018 period transformed these into Tier II, Tier III and Tier IV licenses respectively, and a Tier I license category was added to consolidate all of the various temporary licenses issued by the state.

### **Temporary / Tier I Temporary Licensure**

This category is best understood as a catch-all category for educators who need temporary or emergency licenses who have not met all the requirements for the Initial Educator/Tier II Provisional Educator license. Prior to 2016, these licenses were one-year in duration, but could be renewed if certain stipulations related to progression towards an Initial Educator license were met. The PI-34 revisions adopted in 2018 added a great deal of flexibility to this level of licensure, including a non-renewable three-year “district sponsored” license for teachers who are seeking an additional certification. Other Tier I specializations include substitute teachers, guest teachers, charter school teachers, tribal/community school liaisons, American Indian language teachers, and special education program aides.

### **Initial Educator/ Tier II Provisional Teacher Licensure**

Despite some of the changes made in the 2018 revision, under PI-34, the Wisconsin Initial Educator and Tier II licenses have always been considered provisional in nature. Licenses at this stage must be renewed every three years, but the policy aim has been to have teachers move through this stage by continuing their development as teachers.

There are few distinctions between traditional and alternate route preparation in Wisconsin state policy. Wisconsin has numerous university-based educator preparation programs offering a traditional path to certification where teacher candidates become certified to teach through coursework and supervised clinical experiences in schools. Other pathways into teaching do not require the completion of an educator preparation program as a pre-requisite to being hired as a teacher of record. In Wisconsin, the term “alternate route” is reserved for teachers who meet initial requirements, are hired by a school district, and then enroll in a state-approved alternate route educator preparation program. Like many states, Wisconsin also has a provision for issuing licenses based on previous teaching experience in other states, though this was also expanded into an “Equivalency Pathway” in 2018 to include teaching experience in PK-12, private/charter schools, postsecondary, or industry as well. In 2018, the state also approved an additional pathway for initial certification, that of the American Board for the Certification of Teacher

Excellence (ABCTE), which is an online-only certification program that does not require a classroom placement.

At the time that PI-34 was first enacted in 2004, Wisconsin was one of a few states in the nation that required a performance assessment as a component of certification. From 1999 until well into the 2010s, many educator preparation programs in the state required teacher education candidates to prepare a teaching portfolio in order to meet this requirement. Beginning in 2011, Wisconsin became one of the early pilot states for the assessment that would eventually become the edTPA, and by 2016 the state had adopted the edTPA as a requirement for all students in educator preparation programs. The ABCTE certification route in Wisconsin does not require a demonstration of teaching competence in a classroom (Zeichner, 2010), and unlike those in the Alternate Route programs or the Equivalence Pathway, teachers in ABCTE Pathway are exempt from taking the edTPA.

By the time PI-34 was fully implemented in 2004, secondary science teachers were required to have a subject area concentration in the content area with the exception of the “broad field science” certification, which was intended as a middle grades and non-college preparatory license. From 2004 through 2018, in addition to broad field science, the following certifications were available: biology, chemistry, earth/space science, environmental studies, life/environmental science, and physics. In 2018, the grade level range of certificates were broadened to grades 4-12, which applied to “middle school/high school” levels, and a single Science Grade 4-12 certification became available.

Between 2005-2018, each teacher at the Initial Educator/Tier II stage was required to complete a district mentoring program with a district approved mentor. Prior to 2018, districts had a wide latitude in how they chose to address this requirement. In the revised PI-34 of 2018, the state required that mentors be licensed educators and complete a state-approved mentor training. The revised regulations also specified that districts must provide induction programs that offer “ongoing orientation and support” and that such programs should be “developed collaboratively by teachers, administrators, and other school district stakeholders.”<sup>6</sup> All of these mentoring and induction efforts had no approval application or reporting requirements, with records kept locally. Thus, the local implementation of such programs varied a great deal in their nature and scope across districts.

### **Professional Educator/ Tier III Lifetime License**

One goal of the original PI-34 regulation changes in the 1999-2004 period was to professionalize teaching and prioritize and incentivize continuing teacher education and development. To this end, the Professional Educator license was inextricably linked to the creation of a professional development plan (PDP) for each educator. For teachers at the Initial Educator stage, progression

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<sup>6</sup> <https://dpi.wi.gov/educator-development-support/support-development/teacher-mentoring-induction>

to the Professional Educator stage was dependent upon the successful completion of three to five years of teaching and the completion of a professional development plan. Unlike the previous “lifetime licenses” offered prior to 2004, this Professional Educator license had a duration of five years, and in order to be eligible for renewal, teachers had to complete a new professional development plan, and there was a great deal of flexibility in how this could be achieved.

Though well-intended, in practice this requirement had a number of unintended side effects that contributed to the state’s teacher shortage (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2016). Consequently, in 2018 the renewal requirement for this license level was lifted and reintroduced as the Tier III Lifetime License, similar to the level’s designation in the 1990s.

### **Master Educator/ Tier IV Lifetime License**

In 2004, requirements for this license included receipt of a “related” Master’s degree, completion of 5 years at the Professional Educator level, and evidence of both “contributions to the profession” and “improvement of student learning.” Once an application for this license was submitted, a formal assessment of the teacher by an assessment team that was “comparable in expectations to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards process.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Master Educator license could also be earned by successfully completing the National Board Certification process.

As with the Professional Educator license, complications in managing the requirements for this license led to a rebranding of the category in 2018 as a Tier IV license, which served as an optional lifetime license for “educators who successfully completed a National Board Certification by National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) or a Wisconsin Master Educator Assessment Process (WMEAP).”<sup>8</sup>

### **Teacher Quality and Educator Effectiveness**

From 1993 through 2013, the Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS) was a publicly available data resource that provided public access to school and staffing data, as well as summaries of student achievement data. As access to the Internet grew throughout the 1990s, so did the WINSS public interface, and “a wide variety of data about academic performance, attendance and behavior, staff and other school resources, and student demographics were provided through WINSS Data Analysis tools.”<sup>9</sup> In 2013, following the state’s successful application for Race to the Top funds, a successor system, Wisconsin

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<sup>7</sup> see <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/tepdl/pdf/pi34-7-31-2018.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://dpi.wi.gov/licensing/general>

<sup>9</sup> <https://dpi.wi.gov/wisedash/download-files/winss-historical>

Information System for Education Data Dashboard (WISEdash) was launched as a successor to WINSS.

### **Teacher Evaluation**

Throughout most of the history of Wisconsin's public schools, teacher evaluation had been largely carried out as a function of each individual LEA, and by the start of 2007 was carried out in accordance with state regulations that required each school board in the state to "establish specific criteria and a systematic procedure to measure the performance of licensed school personnel."<sup>10</sup> During this period, data concerning teacher performance was retained by each individual district, and not reported to the state. Additionally, the state had previously passed legislation that prohibited the use of student test scores in teacher evaluation, which was publicly criticized by incoming U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2009. Later that year, Wisconsin Act 60 was passed, which permitted the use of student standardized test scores to be used as a component of teacher evaluation and also set qualification criteria for evaluators. Wisconsin's application for Race to the Top in 2010 proposed a number of specific evaluation reforms, and the state Department of Public Instruction convened an Educator Effectiveness Design Team in January 2011 to construct a system of teacher and leader evaluation (Kimball et al., 2019). The team, comprised of stakeholders that included labor, higher education, school board representation, issued its report in November 2011 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2011). Though the state was ultimately unsuccessful in its bid for Race to the Top funding in both 2010 and 2012, the work of overhauling the evaluation and data systems proposed in the state's applications continued.

In 2012, the Wisconsin Legislature passed Act 166, which focused primarily on implementing the recommendations of the Educator Effectiveness Design Team. The act established a common statewide teacher evaluation system, based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching model (Danielson, 2013), which was fully implemented at the start of the 2014-15 school year.<sup>11</sup> Despite Act 60, student standardized test score data was never made an explicit part of teacher evaluation in Wisconsin, though teachers had the option to do so in making their required Educator Effectiveness Plans, which included specific student learning goals as well as professional practice goals. The Department of Public Instruction was careful to emphasize a "learning-centered evaluation" approach in this new plan, which was conceived as a three-year cycle of annual evaluations culminating in a determination of educator effectiveness every three years. Though this system, now known as the Educator Effectiveness System, has been modified

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<sup>10</sup> Specifically (Wis. Stat. § 121.02 (1)(q), Wis. Admin. Code § PI 8.01(2)(q)). This description of the evaluation come from Wisconsin's 2010 Race to the Top application:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20100204063813/https://dpi.wi.gov/sprntdnt/pdf/rtt\\_application1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20100204063813/https://dpi.wi.gov/sprntdnt/pdf/rtt_application1.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Individual districts had the option of using the state-developed model based on Danielson, or using an equivalent model approved by the Department of Public Instruction.

slightly over time, the model currently in use largely reflects the work of the original design team (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2019).

### **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

Though we identified no state-level programs specifically designed to recruit teachers (or science teachers) that operated during the time period under consideration here, two programs that operated with some state support are worthy of note, the Wisconsin Education Career Access Network and the Minority Teacher Loan Program.

Started as a network of about 10 schools with the support of administrator unions, higher education, and the districts themselves, The Wisconsin Education Career Access Network (WECAN) was launched in 2001 as an online tool to provide educators a way to search for teaching jobs across Wisconsin. As noted on the website homepage, WECAN was designed to “streamline applicant review, selection, and recruitment processes” and quickly grew to serve over 500 schools in the state.<sup>12</sup> It continues to operate as a central hub for the hiring of teachers in Wisconsin, though a number of larger districts run their own local recruitment portals and do not use WECAN.

The Minority Teacher Loan Program created by Act 31 in 1989 was primarily designed to support the preparation of teachers for school districts with significant populations of students of color. With this program, teachers meeting the eligibility criteria could borrow up to \$30,000, and each year that they taught in a qualifying school district, 25% of the original loan would be forgiven (Chapman, 2021). In state committee testimony during reauthorization of the program, Wisconsin state representative LaKeisha Meyers noted:

From the 1960s -1980s, school districts in both Milwaukee and Racine invested in recruiting teachers of color, primarily those who were graduates of Historically Black colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions; colleges that are known for producing the majority of African American and Hispanic educational professionals. What has become evident in the past twenty years has been the retirement of these individuals and the lack of investment in attracting a new generation of teachers of color. It is my hope that by supporting the Minority Teacher Loan Program, this will be a first step in increasing the number of teachers of color in our state. It is also my hope that through this program, we can begin to attract and retain minority teachers at a rate that mirrors the population of our schools and our state.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://wecan.waspa.org/>

<sup>13</sup> This testimony may be found here:  
[https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/hearing\\_testimony\\_and\\_materials/2019/sb55/sb0055\\_2019\\_04\\_23.pdf](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/hearing_testimony_and_materials/2019/sb55/sb0055_2019_04_23.pdf)

In 2019 the program was reauthorized and expanded to 24 LEAs.

## Conclusion

Though the education policy landscape in Wisconsin has changed dramatically regarding teachers' licensure, evaluation, and collective bargaining over the period examined here, during this same time an incremental and steady professionalization of the teaching profession has been occurring beneath the political storms. Though state policy still yields a great deal of power to local school districts, Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction has made steady efforts to improve teacher quality, data systems, and teacher preparation. At the same time, it is clear that Act 10 has deeply impacted the work lives of teachers, with consequences of that legislation continuing to reverberate through the present.

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