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Report reveals challenges for Metro Milwaukee's teacher pipeline

A report released today by the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum shows that the educator workforce in Greater Milwaukee is stretched, with districts struggling to retain current teachers and the supply of new teachers to fill vacancies shrinking over a recent five-year period.

“Across Metro Milwaukee, the number of teachers leaving the workforce has increased 22.5% in recent years, and 53% of teachers who left did so prior reaching retirement age,” says Forum Senior Researcher Joe Yeado, the report's lead author. “This would suggest that school districts have difficulty in retaining current educators, especially teachers new to the profession.”

The report – *Help Wanted* – is the third in a three-part series looking at educators in Metro Milwaukee. It set out to quantify the number of public school teachers who leave and enter the workforce in the four-county Greater Milwaukee region (Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Waukesha, and Washington counties) and to explore enrollment and completion levels at teacher preparation programs throughout Wisconsin. Using data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, federal Title II reports, and institutional data from teacher preparation programs, it identifies a number of patterns and trends over a period of time that included the adoption of Act 10. The latest school year for which data were available was 2013-14.

The analysis finds that metro school districts have managed the transitioning teacher workforce up to now, though their continued ability to do so rests on a steady and stable supply of new

teachers. Data from Wisconsin teacher preparation programs, however, show the supply is neither steady nor stable.

Enrollments in Wisconsin teacher preparation programs are down 27.9%, from 12,323 students in 2008-09 to 8,887 students in 2013-14. UW campuses account for the bulk of the decline, with enrollments falling 31.5%. Over the same period, the number completing a teacher prep program fell 6.6%.

These statewide trends are indicative of a larger national problem facing the teaching profession. Across the U.S., teacher prep enrollments are down 35.3% between 2008-09 and 2013-14. Enrollment in two neighboring states – Illinois and Michigan – fell 57% and 51.7%, respectively, over the same period. Focusing on program completers, national figures are down 22.3%, while Illinois and Michigan declined by 37.7% and 32.1%, respectively.

“The decline in teacher prep program enrollments and completers shrinks the supply of new teachers available to fill vacancies in Metro Milwaukee districts and the shortage of new teachers in neighboring states will likely exacerbate the problem,” says Yeado. “The practical outcome of this trend is that each future teacher vacancy will be harder to fill.”

Other key report findings include the following:

- More than a quarter of the teaching workforce in Metro Milwaukee is over age 50, and as this group ages, departures are likely to become more numerous.
- About 62% of replacement teachers in Metro Milwaukee are in their first year of teaching.
- According to local school district human resources professionals, aside from retirement, most teachers leave for money or family obligations.

The report presents a number of policy options for improving retention among existing educators and increasing the supply of new teachers. For example, enhanced student loan debt assistance or

forgiveness programs may help lessen the costs associated with becoming a teacher. Increased salaries may help retain current teachers, while part-time teacher employment may better accommodate teachers who exited the profession for family care reasons.

"This research builds off the first two reports in our *Milwaukee Educator* series, which showed that the predominantly white teacher and school leader workforce declined over time, with districts responding by hiring less experienced, but not necessarily younger educators to fill vacancies," says Yeado. "We hope the findings and conclusions provide insight for policymakers and the public and spark a much-needed conversation about the future of the teaching workforce within the region."

The full report – which was funded, in part, by grants from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Northwestern Mutual Foundation – can be downloaded at the Forum's web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

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