

FEWER EDUCATION GRADS POSE THREAT TO TEACHER WORKFORCE

The number and share of college graduates earning degrees in education is declining in southeast Wisconsin, which is a concerning trend for area schools and for the regional and statewide economy. Amid that decline, racial gaps are shrinking but gender gaps persist.

Education degrees earned at colleges and universities in southeast Wisconsin declined from 2011 to 2019, raising the question of whether there is a sufficient supply of new K-12 teachers to meet the region’s teacher workforce needs. Bachelor’s completions declined sharply and master’s completions also fell. White students continue to account for the majority of education degree completions, but their share of the total has diminished over time. Women continue to dominate the field though to a lesser extent in more advanced degrees.

These trends emerge out of data collected by the [Higher Education Regional Alliance](#) (HERA) and analyzed by the Wisconsin Policy Forum. HERA was formed in 2018 to promote collaboration among 18 public and private two-year and four-year institutions in southeast Wisconsin and work toward common regional goals.

Between 2011 and 2019, HERA institutions produced a combined 18,558 education degrees and certificates,

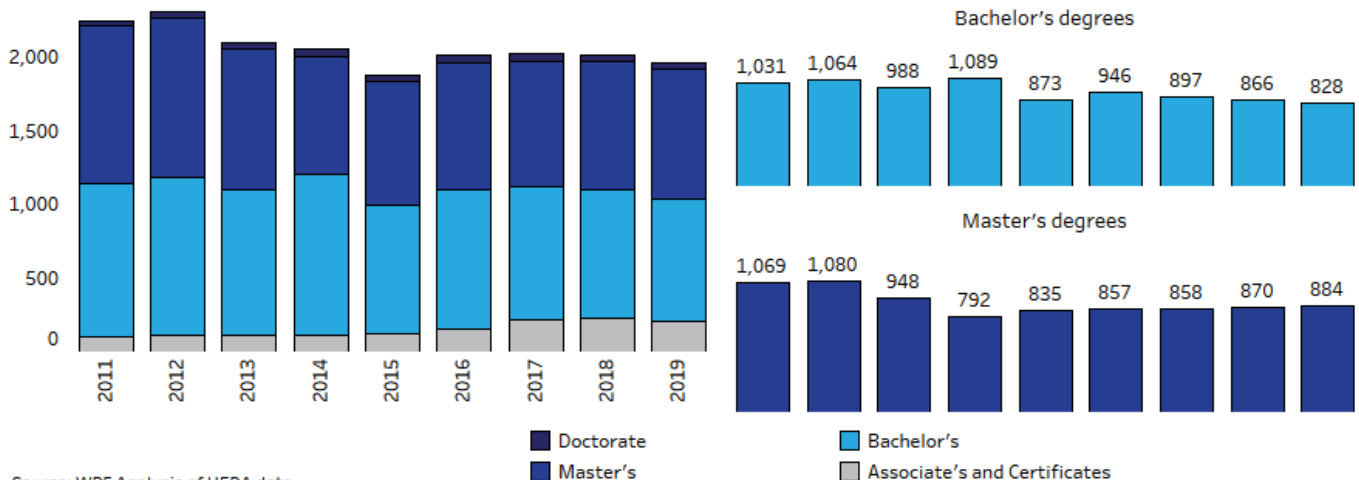
This is the third in a series of reports produced through a partnership with the Higher Education Regional Alliance. These reports examine degree production trends in several critical fields and compare them to regional workforce demands.

including 8,582 bachelor’s degree completions and 8,193 master’s degree completions. Education programs prepare students for a full breadth of jobs in preschool through postsecondary education fields, including not only K-12 teachers and staff but also school and district administrators, higher education and early childhood leaders and staff, and more.

During the nine years studied, education completions dropped substantially both in number and as a share of all new degrees and certificates awarded. Education completions decreased 12.9% from 2,244 in 2011 to 1,955 in 2019 (see Figure 1). They made up 7.3% of all degrees and certificates awarded by HERA institutions in 2019, down from 8.7% in 2011.

Figure 1: Education Degrees and Certificates Have Declined

Education completions at HERA institutions, 2011-2019



Source: WPF Analysis of HERA data



SAMPLE OF DEGREES EXPECTED FOR EDUCATION CAREER PATHS

Teaching assistants may have attended some college but not hold a degree or certificate.

Preschool teachers typically hold an associate's degree. Preschool teachers seeking to increase their skills or credentials may pursue an advanced degree or certificate.

Most K-12 teachers are required to hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent. Teachers are certified through a teacher preparation program alongside or separate from their degree. K-12 teachers seeking to increase their skills or credentials may pursue an advanced degree or certificate.

Principals and most school administrators are required to hold a master's degree.

Postsecondary teachers typically hold a doctorate or other professional degree.

Sources: DWD Long Term Occupational Projections, DPI Licensing, and interviews with HERA officials and Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators

BACHELOR'S AND MASTER'S DEGREES DRIVE DECLINE

Bachelor's and master's degrees primarily caused this overall drop. These two degree types comprise the vast majority of education completions and experienced the greatest declines in the education field. Bachelor's completions decreased by 19.7% from 2011 to 2019, and master's completions decreased by 17.3%.

The decreases raise concerns over whether enough potential new teachers are entering the field. The state Department of Workforce Development (DWD) released 2018-2028 [projections](#) for the average number of jobs expected to be open each year. (These projections do not take into account any potential effects of COVID-19.) For education, DWD projects a combined 2,565 preschool and K-12 teacher openings each year in the seven-county southeast Wisconsin region in which HERA institutions operate. These openings do not include postsecondary education, teaching assistants, or district administrators and yet are already higher than the annual average of *all* education degrees and certificates conferred by HERA institutions: 2,062 per year between 2011 and 2019.

Moreover, according to state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) data, PreK-12 student enrollment in Wisconsin public schools is declining but at a far slower rate than degree completions, dropping 1.5% between 2011 and 2019. This disparity may hamper school districts seeking to meet hiring goals, especially when coupled with the retirement of many Baby Boomers within the field and the potential for heightened demand for additional staff to support students' COVID-19 learning recovery. However, any attempt to close this gap between supply and demand should also consider research from [WPF](#) and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's [Center for Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education](#) indicating that retention of current teachers may be as important to the labor supply as production of new teachers.

In interviews, deans of education at HERA institutions attribute the declines in bachelor's and master's completions to several factors, including perceptions of increasing demands and pressure on education professionals; a perceived decrease in public respect for the educator profession; increasing politicization and de-professionalization of the field; ripple effects from the 2008-09 recession; and the lack of competitive pay compared to professionals with similar education levels in other fields.

The majority of interviewees also cited Act 10, the 2011 state law that restricted public employee collective bargaining, as accelerating the impact of these factors. Teacher workforce challenges are not unique to Wisconsin, however; a [2016 WPF report](#) found that three out of Wisconsin's four neighboring states saw greater decreases in teacher preparation program enrollment between 2009 and 2014 than Wisconsin did.

Although education master's degree completions are down from 2011, they have ticked upward since 2014 and in recent years (2018-2019) even outnumbered education bachelor's completions. Higher education and K-12 officials noted that, among other factors, educators may be predisposed toward valuing continuing education. In addition, although Act 10 weakened the direct link between educational attainment and pay in many school districts' salary schedules, master's degrees are still required for many career advancement opportunities. For second-career professionals, the master's degree may be their entry point into the education field.

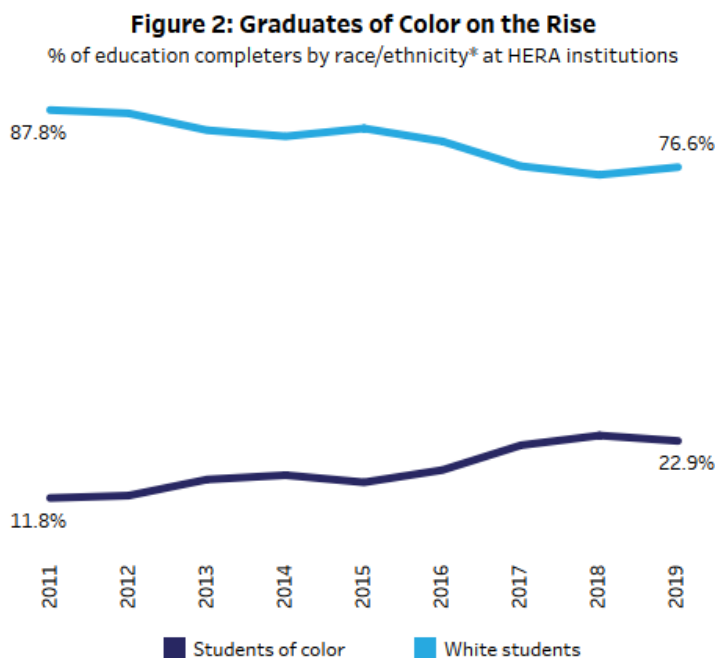


STUDENTS OF COLOR MAKE INROADS

White students continue to earn the vast majority of education degrees in southeast Wisconsin – 81.7% each year on average. This share is greater than the 74.9% average across all degree completions within HERA institutions and greater than the 69.3% of K-12 public students identified as white statewide in 2019, as reported by our [School DataTool](#).

For both education degrees and overall degrees, however, the proportion of completions by white students has shrunk over time. White students accounted for 87.8% of education completions in 2011. By 2019, that number had dropped by 11.1 percentage points to 76.6% (see Figure 2) as a result of both decreased completions by white students and increased completions across most non-white races and ethnicities.

Although education graduates of color do not yet correspond with the share of students of color in the state’s K-12 student enrollment, their 2011-2019 increase in share of total completions outpaced the increase in share of statewide K-12 student enrollment by students of color during the same time period. Though far short of parity, this shift in representation is encouraging given the benefit of educators of color to all students as discussed in the WPF reports “[A Teacher Who Looks Like Me](#)” and “[Opening Doors](#).”



Source: WPF Analysis of HERA Data. *Does not include international students or students whose race/ethnicity is unknown.

The share of education graduates of color varies across degree types. Between 2011-2019, graduates of color accounted for only 17.3% of all education degrees and certificates. Yet, graduates of color accounted for 44.9% of associate’s degrees during the same timeframe and appear to have accounted for 72.5% of certificates. (Certificate data should be treated with caution due to the number of students without complete data in this category.)

Students may pursue a certificate to gain entry-level employment skills or to build further skills in a specific field. Although certificates are not considered postsecondary degrees, they do represent work completed at the postsecondary level and may have workforce value as well as counting toward degree completion.

Established professionals seeking further credentials earn a large proportion of education certificates, according to officials at HERA institutions. Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) produces the most education certificates among HERA institutions each year and currently offers them in early childhood education and care. MATC officials say demand for certificates comes from early childhood centers hoping to increase the credentials of new and existing staff, often in response to Wisconsin’s [YoungStar child care quality requirements](#). Other institutions offer certificates in specialties like autism spectrum disorders and trauma-informed care.

Though beneficial, an increase in certificate completions alone for graduates of color would be unlikely to meet the critical education needs of the region or significantly increase diversity across the full preschool-to-postsecondary education spectrum. However, the overall 2011-2019 increase in education graduates of color, including a 107.5% increase in bachelor’s degrees, suggests that at least some of the gains may be truly across the board. The gains may derive in part from articulation agreements within and between 2-year and 4-year institutions, which allow students to more easily transfer credits and stack credentials.

Women averaged 76.8% of education degrees and certificates per year between 2011 and 2019, with little change over that time period. The gender gap is smaller, however, for more advanced degrees, with women averaging 96.9% of associate’s degree completions but 68.5% of doctorates per year.



FUTURE PROSPECTS

The current data for southeastern Wisconsin education graduates present a mixed picture for the future. On the one hand, the decrease in overall completions is concerning given the region's need for new teachers and the slower decline in K-12 public school enrollment. On the other hand, the rates of completion for graduates of color are rising. Although they remain low, particularly for bachelor's degrees and beyond, these gains suggest some progress toward a more diverse workforce.

Higher education institutions have an opportunity to help local schools and serve the regional economy by addressing the recent decline in education completions and supporting students of color. Potential models include:

- Cardinal Stritch University's emphasis on integrating classroom experience with coursework and building in wraparound supports;
- Concordia University Wisconsin's professional education partnerships with specific school districts;
- Mount Mary University's partnerships with external teacher preparation programs to quickly place teachers into classrooms; and
- The M³ initiative established by Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), MATC, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to build a "grow your own" pre-collegiate program for MPS students interested in becoming MPS teachers.

Innovations and partnerships like these might create a virtuous cycle by leading to more diverse and successful postsecondary student bodies and better K-12 and postsecondary instruction for all.

