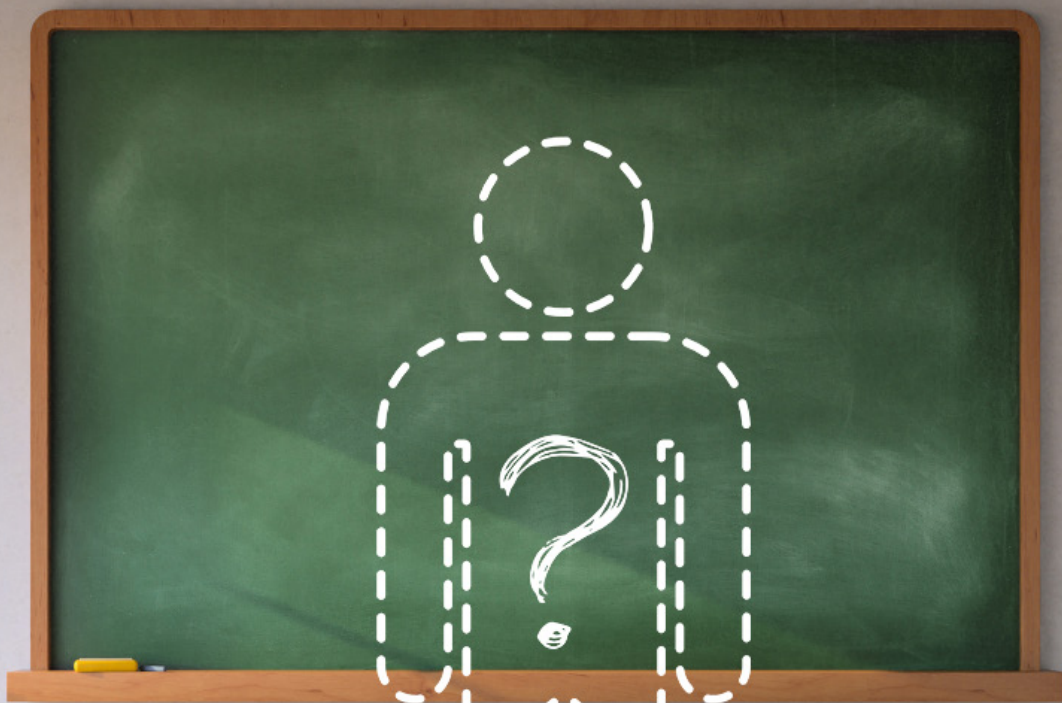




INSTITUTE FOR
REFORMING GOVERNMENT

TEACHER APPRENTICESHIPS: WHERE WISCONSIN IS NOW



*A PROVEN, BIPARTISAN SOLUTION TO THE TEACHER SHORTAGE
IS WORKING IN 47 STATES—BUT WISCONSIN IS FALLING BEHIND.*

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INSTITUTE FOR REFORMING GOVERNMENT

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR REFORMING GOVERNMENT

The Institute for Reforming Government, along with its partner organization IRG Action Fund, is focused on developing free-market and limited-government reforms, taking action on them, and getting results for Wisconsin. Founded in 2018, IRG has quickly grown into one of the state's largest think tanks, boasting an elite policy team with decades of experience in state and federal government, trade associations, and statewide campaigns. Most importantly, IRG gets results for the conservative movement in Wisconsin.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR QUINTON KLABON SENIOR RESEARCH DIRECTOR



Quinton Klabon joined IRG in 2022 to develop exceptional K-12 and higher education policy solutions for Wisconsin students.

He served many years at Saint Marcus Lutheran School, one of Wisconsin's only five-star schools serving low-income, Black students. He still actively mentors many Saint Marcus students and alumni in his free time. Prior to IRG, he was Congressman Mike Gallagher's education policy advisor, designing Gallagher's AEI-published "Wisconsin 2030" plan. Quinton is a proud Dartmouth College alumnus and Wisconsin Rapids native, and he holds an education policy graduate degree from Harvard University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wisconsin's teacher shortage has reached a crisis level. Rural districts are giving local jobs to out-of-state virtual providers. Urban schools are recruiting overseas. Suburban schools are receiving fewer qualified applicants. Choice schools are closing their doors. A bipartisan solution exists: teacher apprenticeships. These programs combine paid, in-classroom experience with a bachelor's degree, resulting in graduates that are ready for whatever the classroom throws at them and have less debt to boot. While 47 states have embraced the model, Wisconsin's pilot program remains too small to meet demand. With improvement, Wisconsin can grow its own teacher workforce - solving shortages, lowering costs, and improving student outcomes.



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WISCONSIN'S TEACHER SHORTAGE REMAINS A CRISIS

The problem is universal. Rural schools are outsourcing jobs to virtual providers. Urban schools are flying in teachers from overseas. Suburban schools have fewer candidates competing for openings. Choice schools are permanently closing.

The cause is obvious. There is massive turnover among young teachers. **19% of Wisconsin public school teachers quit before their third year.** Low pay, high debt, and weak preparation for challenging classrooms pushes too many educators out of the profession early. Those deterrents keep thousands more from considering a teaching career too.



The consequences are horrible. Special needs students are not getting the services they need. Low-income students who require the most academic growth are receiving the least-prepared teachers. High-income students are no longer the nation's strongest performers. High-performing schools are unable to expand without the staff to fill new classrooms. Century-old choice schools are shuttering.

The solution is bipartisan. 47 states [have](#) teacher apprenticeships. Students receive a standard bachelor's degree in education in 4 years. However, students simultaneously do 4 years of paid student teaching under an expert teacher. Lower debt and more real-life experience leads to higher stability and ability from new teachers. Both Presidents Biden and Trump have supported them. Efforts from Wisconsin Republicans and Democrats [led](#) to a small teacher apprenticeship pilot program in 2024.

But Wisconsin has fallen behind. What seemed like a good start has proved nowhere good enough. Other states have hundreds of teacher apprentices about to enter classrooms. Wisconsin has among the fewest in the nation.

Wisconsin cannot squander this solution. A small state investment would expand teacher apprenticeships rapidly. Instead of wasting tens of millions of dollars on expensive contractors, extensive employment searches, and remediation for students, Wisconsin schools could grow top-tier talent right here at home. Communities can solve the shortage with their own graduates if we create a path for them.

Legislators also could consider perfecting the program for participants, making apprentices' training easier to balance, afford, and excel at, copying leading states. Right now, participants must work and go to school full-time, increasing the likelihood of dropping out of the program and limiting access for mid-career professionals. Wisconsin will have trouble growing the program currently designed around credential providers' needs over future teachers'.

Wisconsin must support teacher apprenticeships to solve the shortage.

WHAT'S THE DEAL FOR STUDENTS?



- » 50% off tuition
- » Bachelor's in education
- » 4 years of classroom experience
- » Graduate in 4 years

WHAT'S THE DEAL FOR SCHOOLS?



- » Pipeline of prepared new teachers
- » Apprentices fill paraprofessional vacancies
- » Bonus pay for mentor teachers
- » Open to public or private

WHAT ARE THE DETAILS?

How do high school graduates become teacher apprentices?

- » Earn a Foundations of Teacher Education degree from a Wisconsin technical college outside of working hours during freshman and sophomore year.
- » Earn a teaching degree from a Wisconsin college outside of working hours during junior and senior year.
- » Serve as a paraprofessional in a school during working hours throughout all 4 years.

How do teacher apprenticeships make teaching more affordable?

Wisconsin is offering to pay 50% of future teachers' college tuition costs over 4 years. Additionally, students in Wisconsin, for the first time, are paid to student teach by schools, earning sustaining wages during their 4 years in college.

How do teacher apprenticeships make teaching higher quality?

Students will no longer receive instruction from graduates who are learning on the job how real classrooms work. Student teachers receive increasing levels of responsibility over 4 years as paraprofessionals or substitute teachers, all under supervision of a lead teacher. Quadrupling experience in classroom management, instruction, and relationship building produces more polished graduates. Future educators crave more in-classroom experience during college, which teacher apprenticeships deliver.



How do teacher apprenticeships make teaching turnover lower?

Lower debt and more preparation lowers turnover by mitigating its 2 biggest causes. Additionally, educators who come from the communities in which they teach are less likely to leave.

Are teacher apprenticeships an “alternative pathway” to teaching?

No, students who complete a teacher apprenticeship will receive the same bachelor’s degree, college coursework, and Tier II Provisional Educator License as traditional graduates. Unlike many Wisconsin grow-your-own programs, adults without a higher education degree can become traditionally certified teachers through this program.

Which colleges can teacher apprentices attend?

Currently, only 9 of 16 Wisconsin Technical College System Schools offer FOTE. The Departments of Workforce Development and Public Instruction have approved only Lakeland University as a bachelor’s degree partner. Many more 2- and 4-year colleges are excited to participate, but they will not receive access until the state budget funds teacher apprenticeships.

Do schools that train teacher apprentices incur extra staff expenses?

No, teacher apprentices fill existing paraprofessional or substitute teacher roles, many of which are vacant due to emergency license promotions or low wages. Journeyman teachers also receive a stipend payment from state funding for their extra responsibilities.

Can schools choose their teacher apprentices?

Yes, schools can recruit and select their own teacher apprentices according to their needs and values. They are not forced to take placements.

What type of school can employ teacher apprentices?

Currently, only selected school districts can participate. DWD wants to expand it to all districts, charter schools, and private schools and has said funding is their only restriction.

What stands in the way of Wisconsin catching up to other states on teacher apprenticeships?

DWD has stated limited pilot funding prevents them from expanding the teacher apprenticeship pilot program to all schools and colleges.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY?

Who created teacher apprenticeships?

Teacher apprenticeships were bipartisan from the beginning. Republican Penny Schwinn, former Tennessee Education Commissioner and current United States Education Deputy Secretary, worked with Democratic President Joe Biden to start them in the Volunteer State. After 1 year under a small, public university in 2022, the University of Tennessee System rapidly expanded them.

Who uses teacher apprenticeships today?

47 states, including Wisconsin, have begun to use teacher apprenticeships. Nevada, Tennessee, and Missouri have hundreds in college apprenticeship programs right now. Among Midwestern states, Iowa, Michigan, and Indiana are leaders. This is a result of collaboration and urgency, which Wisconsin lacks.

Both public and private universities act as partners. Education reform organizations and teachers unions alike are helping expand participation.

How did Wisconsin begin teacher apprenticeships?

The National Center for Grow Your Own had begun discussions with Wisconsin districts and state agencies in 2022.

The Institute for Reforming Government was the first to promote the concept publicly, [releasing](#) a policy paper in May 2023.

Senator Dan Feyen and Representative William Penterman introduced the first-ever bill to formalize teacher apprenticeships in Wisconsin law. The bill, Senate Bill 917, [passed](#) both chambers.



Governor Evers vetoed the bill. However, he announced a teacher apprenticeship pilot program at his 2024 State of the State address. Unfortunately, by design, the pilot is only training a handful of future educators. The current pilot excludes most school districts, charter schools, private schools, and colleges. As a result, Wisconsin is rapidly falling behind other states and intensifying its teacher shortage crisis.

HOW CAN WISCONSIN CATCH UP TO NATIONAL LEADERS?

Wisconsin's students cannot wait for high-quality teachers. A small state funding stream would grow the program statewide. State aid would support apprentice tuition reimbursement and journeyman stipends. It also would expand certifications to special needs.

Legislators also could consider perfecting the program for participants, making apprentices' training easier to balance, afford, and excel at, copying leading states. Right now, participants must work and go to school full-time, increasing the likelihood of dropping out of the program and limiting access for mid-career professionals. Wisconsin will have trouble growing the program currently designed around credential providers' needs over future teachers'.

State aid currently subsidizes wasteful corrections to the teacher shortage: virtual instruction contractors, international talent searches, and remediation for struggling students, not to mention the degrees of UW students who quickly quit teaching. Wisconsin can spend a lot less through a preventative solution: teacher apprenticeships.

WISCONSIN HAS FALLEN BEHIND OTHER STATES IN TEACHER APPRENTICESHIPS. OUR TEACHER SHORTAGE IS NOW A CRISIS.

STATE	ACTIVE APPRENTICES	COMPLETED APPRENTICES
ALABAMA	6	0
ALASKA	20	0
ARIZONA	0	0
ARKANSAS	35	2
CALIFORNIA	1	2
COLORADO	30	3
CONNECTICUT	4	0
DELAWARE	10	0
FLORIDA	110	6
GEORGIA	37	0
HAWAII	0	0
IDAHO	15	0
ILLINOIS	0	0
INDIANA	85	0

STATE	ACTIVE APPRENTICES	COMPLETED APPRENTICES
IOWA	439	136
KANSAS	172	8
KENTUCKY	21	1
LOUISIANA	0	0
MAINE	N/A	N/A
MARYLAND	6	0
MASSACHUSETTS	0	0
MICHIGAN	129	44
MINNESOTA	45	0
MISSISSIPPI	28	0
MISSOURI	359	25
MONTANA	N/A	N/A
NEBRASKA	89	0
NEVADA	860	0
NEW HAMPSHIRE	172	2
NEW JERSEY	80	0
NEW MEXICO	21	0
NEW YORK	15	17
NORTH CAROLINA	20	0
NORTH DAKOTA	74	0
OHIO	1	0
OKLAHOMA	0	0
OREGON	0	0
PENNSYLVANIA	27	0
RHODE ISLAND	N/A	N/A
SOUTH CAROLINA	357	42
SOUTH DAKOTA	156	7
TENNESSEE	610	187
TEXAS	289	35
UTAH	0	0
VERMONT	29	0
VIRGINIA	79	0
WASHINGTON	0	0
WEST VIRGINIA	15	0
WISCONSIN	Pilot - 0	0
WYOMING	35	2

SOURCE: [EDUCATOR REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP INTERMEDIARY](#), Data last updated 3/17/2025.



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