*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**Diversifying our teacher workforce: Existing hurdles, local strategies and state options**

Hurdles to diversifying Wisconsin’s teacher workforce exist throughout the teacher career pipeline, and while local schools and teacher training programs are taking steps to overcome them, a concerted response by state policymakers could enhance this momentum.

Focus group participants and key stakeholders interviewed for a recent Wisconsin Policy Forum report said prospective teachers of color encounter obstacles that reinforce racial disparities on college campuses, in teacher preparation programs, and within the schools and districts that employ them. The consequence has been a narrowing stream of people of color throughout the student-to-teacher pipeline.

Schools, universities, and other entities are seeking to change this with initiatives to support prospective teachers of color at the individual and organizational levels. While these steps show promise, the scale of the challenge points to an opportunity for state-level leadership.

Long-standing racial disparities in educational outcomes have persisted in Wisconsin for decades, and a growing body of evidence suggests a racially diverse and representative teacher workforce can help mitigate those disparities. Yet while students of color have been rising as a share of Wisconsin’s public K-12 student population, its teacher workforce has remained overwhelmingly white.

Initiatives being pursued by schools and other institutions to address this include mentoring for new teachers, financial support for teachers or teachers-in-training, and establishing cohorts of mutual support for teachers of color. Measures to enact institutional change include efforts to develop teaching talent from within local communities, diversify school leadership, increase cultural competence among faculty and staff, provide alternatives to teacher licensure tests, and revamp hiring and staffing processes.

The report details state policy options that could bolster and expand efforts at the local level to improve racial and ethnic diversity throughout the teacher pipeline. Such action could begin by convening key stakeholders to set a state-level vision and goals for diversifying the teacher workforce. Other state policy levers could include increasing financial assistance for students to complete college and teacher preparation programs, expanding high retention teacher residency and grow-your-own training models, re-examining teacher licensure requirements, boosting accountability for districts and teacher education programs, and building a comprehensive state education data clearing house.

Wisconsin has a long way to go to improve the diversity of its teacher workforce. But local institutions are taking meaningful steps, and actionable state policy options hold promise to help meet that goal.

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*