

Roy's campaign: An open letter to Wisconsin teachers

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MADISON, WI — The following is an open letter from Kelda Roy to Wisconsin teachers. We encourage publications to run Kelda's letter in your opinion sections.

This is a message of hope. A promise to you of what kind of governor I will be, and a heartfelt statement to demonstrate that I hear what you've been saying and empathize with what you've been experiencing.

Throughout the past eight years, you, your pocketbook, and your profession have been under attack.

You are constantly asked to "do more with less" as a result of the historic budget cuts to your classrooms. Without proper funding, the schools you work in, especially in rural communities, continue to close. You are often forced to "teach for the test" as opposed to engaging young minds in the joy of learning and helping develop students' whole selves. Your class sizes are going up, but your professional autonomy is being ratcheted down.

As a result of Act 10, your collective bargaining rights were eliminated,

compensation reduced, and work devalued. Your median salaries have continued to fall: as of the 2015-26 school year, your average pay was more than \$10,000 lower than it was before the passage of Act 10. The policies of the Walker Administration have done serious harm to Wisconsin's once-great public education system. A record number of your colleagues have left the profession altogether.

In the numbers-driven, high-stakes testing approach that many school districts are taking, your autonomy is lost. This is bad for you and even worse for students. In the ever-expanding push for "accountability," teachers are too often punished — never administrators, or politicians who fail to remedy the social and economic injustice that follows students into the classroom. Rather than addressing the teacher retention and pipeline problem by increasing pay and restoring joy to the profession, Walker and the DPI are undermining teacher qualifications by enabling fast-track "alternative" licensing for people without teaching degrees. And the expansion of privatization, from the voucher programs to so-called "independent" charters, steals resources away from our public schools and the kids you serve. It's no wonder so many teachers feel demoralized and are leaving — your ability to practice the profession you love and teach your students is constantly questioned, challenged, and denied by the very people who should be supporting you.

Despite all this, I am asking you to not to leave.

As a small business owner, as a mother, and as a proud graduate of Wisconsin's public schools, I know how critical you are to our state and our future. To attract and retain the best teachers, Wisconsin must become a better state in which to be a teacher — we must invest in public schools and educators.

As governor, I pledge I will do everything in my power to restore the funding our schools deserve, the rights, wages, and benefits you lost, and the autonomy and respect you deserve.

Please, don't leave. We need you, our kids need you, and I need you. You may feel demoralized and unappreciated, but we **WILL** stop the toxic attacks on you and your colleagues. It wasn't too long ago that Wisconsin was a national leader in public education, and when I'm governor, we will be again. I ask you to trust me and to have faith in what we can accomplish together.

Yours In Solidarity,

Kelda

This letter was originally published in the Cap Times.