

One Wisconsin Now: Crises collide: Low teacher pay intensifies student loan debt crisis for educators

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MADISON, Wis. — Education experts and research have pointed to the \$1.6 trillion student loan debt crisis as a challenge facing Wisconsin in efforts to both stem an exodus of experienced teachers and reverse enrollment declines in education degree programs. The 14th annual national report on student loan debt from The Institute for College Access and Success shows there is more work to be done in Wisconsin to remove education debt as a barrier to continuing in or entering the teaching profession.

“Good, educated, well-trained teachers are what make our schools go,” said One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Analiese Eicher. “We can’t let teachers be driven out of a job they love or discouraged from pursuing a career in education because of fears of student loan debt. But that’s exactly what is happening today.”

[Research](#) from the Learning Policy Institute finds that:

“The more college debt that students incur, the less likely they are to choose to work in a lower-wage profession such as teaching. One study of students at a highly selective undergraduate institution found that incurring debt increased the odds that students chose ‘substantially higher-salary jobs’ and ‘reduce[d] the probability that students [chose] low-paid ‘public interest’ jobs.’ The influence of debt on job choice was ‘most notable on the propensity to work in the education industry.’”

In Wisconsin, the Dean of the UW-Madison School of Education [specifically pointed](#)

[to student loan debt](#) as a deterrent to students pursuing careers in K-12 education, noting, “If you’re coming into a low-paid field, the impact of student loan debt is much more pronounced”.

According to The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS), student loan debt remains [a significant burden for Wisconsin graduates](#) as the state ranks in the top ten in the nation for the percentage of class of 2018 graduates with student loans, and the average debt of nearly \$32,000 exceeds the national average.

Financial pressures are also the leading cause of current teachers who are considering leaving the profession. A national survey of teachers found that [half have considered quitting](#). When further asked what drove them to consider leaving the teaching profession, the leading cause cited by educators was financial.

A national report released earlier in 2019 shows that [average teacher pay is lagging in Wisconsin](#) and the disparity between teacher pay here and the national average is getting worse. For the 2017-18 school year, teacher pay in Wisconsin ranked 33rd and significantly lagged neighboring states. Teacher pay in Wisconsin in 2010 ranked 18th nationally.