

# UW-Madison: School of Education unveils bold new program to invest in Wisconsin's future teachers

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School districts across the state and around the country are struggling to find enough qualified teachers – and these staffing challenges are growing.

In an effort to help bolster Wisconsin's teacher workforce and give the state's schoolchildren access to the high-quality educators they deserve, the UW-Madison School of Education launched a bold new program Tuesday, Aug. 18.

The program is called the UW-Madison School of Education Wisconsin Teacher Pledge. It's supported via \$18 million in donor funds and goes into effect during the upcoming 2020 fall semester.

Here's how it works. The initiative "pledges" to provide financial support – including up to in-state tuition, fees, and testing certification costs – for students enrolled in one of the School's teacher education programs. For teacher education students with greater financial need, the program can also provide funds to cover additional costs, such as books or living expenses.

In return, after graduating, the students "pledge" to teach for three or four years at a pre-kindergarten through 12th grade school in Wisconsin. Students who go on to teach in a high-need district or in a high-need subject area will fulfill their obligation in three years, while all others will do so in four. Over the next five years, the Teacher Pledge is expected to support more than 1,500 students in the School's teacher education programs.

"Teachers have the incredible responsibility of educating our youth, preparing them

for the future, and inspiring a lifelong love of learning,” says Carolyn Stanford Taylor, the state superintendent of public instruction. “It is important to commit to programs like the Teacher Pledge to recruit the next generation of Wisconsin educators and to support the ones that we have.”

The Teacher Pledge program is also designed to help the School of Education attract and retain diverse cohorts of students who are dedicated to becoming educators across Wisconsin.

“The Teacher Pledge will help ensure that talented and committed students – regardless of their economic backgrounds – have the financial support needed to become teachers,” says School of Education Dean Diana Hess.

The Teacher Pledge is one part of the School of Education’s ambitious new Impact 2030 initiative that’s designed to build upon the School’s excellence and its efforts to serve Wisconsin and beyond over the next 10 years. Impact 2030, which is being made possible with \$40 million in generous donor support, is centering its efforts across four pillars leading up to the School’s centennial celebration in 2030:

- **Strengthening student scholarships:** As the School of Education challenges its students to change the world, it realizes they need support to do so. The School is significantly increasing its scholarship and fellowship packages, and utilizing a new strategic plan for equity, diversity, and inclusion to better attract and serve students from groups that are historically under-represented at UW-Madison.
- **Providing innovative learning experiences:** The goal is to provide the very best, high-impact educational experiences for students across the arts, health, and education. The School is innovating beyond its classroom walls by putting new resources into developing high quality online and hybrid learning opportunities. The COVID-19 crisis accentuated an urgent need for this type of learning experience. The School is also refocusing its vital global engagement strategies and is committed to helping undergraduates become involved with cutting-edge research projects, among other efforts.
- **Bolstering faculty support:** Faculty are central to the School’s success as dedicated educators, groundbreaking researchers, and vital mentors to the next generation. The School is committed to recruiting top academics with diverse backgrounds who are dedicated to scholarship, teaching, and service that embraces and engages the full measure of the diversity of society. As part of these substantial

new efforts, the School is committing significant resources over the next decade to a new faculty fellowship program that provides flexible funding over five years to further faculty research and scholarship.

- Investing in Wisconsin's future teachers: These efforts are centered on the new Teacher Pledge.

"There are many ingredients that go into building and maintaining a top-ranked School of Education," says UW-Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank. "World-renowned faculty. Great students. Leaders who foster a culture of innovation. And cutting-edge scholarship. Impact 2030 will allow us to make important investments in all of these areas to ensure that the School of Education remains one of the best in the country. I am grateful to the alumni and friends who support our mission, and who believe – as we do – in the power of education to change lives."

Schools around Wisconsin, like those elsewhere in the country, continue to face staffing challenges. One way to measure this issue is by examining the number of teachers working in classrooms who are not professionally trained for their position. In Wisconsin, there were 2,863 emergency teacher licenses issued by the Department of Public Instruction for the 2018-19 academic year – a 180 percent increase from the 1,021 administered in 2012-13.

While these challenges are hitting rural areas of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee School District especially hard, most districts across the state are utilizing teachers on emergency licensure to fill gaps in at least some high-need areas, such as special education, bilingual education, and STEM fields.

In addition, enrollment in teacher preparation programs both nationally and in Wisconsin has declined by about one-third since 2010, according to U.S. Department of Education figures. It's no secret that low starting pay, coupled with student debt, can make teaching a tough career choice for many UW-Madison students. The Teacher Pledge program is designed to help alleviate these stressors so all students can consider a future as a teacher.

Similarly, while young teachers are leaving the profession at high rates after only a year or two on the job, the Teacher Pledge incentivizes teachers to stay on the job for at least three or four years.

"Teaching is a very difficult job, especially early on," says Hess. "We feel if teachers

stick with it, they will start to see the value they bring and enjoy the important work they are doing. We are hopeful this will create a positive ripple effect that will help schools and communities across Wisconsin for years to come.”

UW-Madison plans to study the Teacher Pledge program closely and will be sharing key findings to help aid efforts around Wisconsin and across the nation in building a more diverse and effective teacher workforce. The initiative will be examined by Nicholas Hillman, an associate professor with the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, and the director of the university’s Student Success Through Applied Research (SSTAR) Lab. This lab, which is housed within the university’s Office of Student Financial Aid, utilizes applied academic research to guide, support, and partner with practitioners whose work aims to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for current and future college students.