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Metro Milwaukee's teacher workforce shows increased stability

But departing teachers are increasingly younger and newer to the profession

A new report released today by the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum finds that teacher workforce challenges observed two years ago in both metro Milwaukee and across the state are not as severe, as overall turnover has diminished and the supply of new teachers appears to be meeting the demand created by those departing. Nevertheless, a rising trend in the proportion of newer and younger teachers leaving the profession may signal the onset of a different set of challenges.

“Overall, we find that while the teacher workforce in metro Milwaukee and the state as a whole still is smaller than before the adoption of Wisconsin Act 10, the trends in terms of teacher departures appear to be stabilizing,” says Forum Senior Researcher Anne Chapman, the report’s lead author. “In fact, the region’s teacher workforce had 75 more teachers in the 2015-16 school year than it did when we last examined the data two years ago, and the state had 140 more teachers.”

The new report updates an April 2016 Forum report that found metro Milwaukee had a shrinking supply of new teachers to replace a steady stream of existing teachers leaving the workforce. The new analysis encompasses two additional years of data through 2015-16.

“We were pleasantly surprised to find that statewide, the number of teachers has been growing slightly since 2012-13,” says Chapman. “Similarly, metro Milwaukee saw its teacher ranks increase slightly in 2013-14 and 2014-15 and remain almost flat in 2015-16.”

The report also finds that the movement of teachers both into and out of metro Milwaukee school districts decreased substantially in the 2015-16 school year. Turnover in the teacher workforce, in fact, fell to its lowest level since the year in which Act 10 was adopted.

This positive news is balanced by a clear shift in recent years toward higher proportions of younger and less experienced teachers leaving the workforce, as opposed to older teachers retiring, in both the state and metro Milwaukee. The average age of a departing teacher in metro Milwaukee between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years (45.2) is 2.4 years younger than two years earlier, while the average age of departing teachers statewide (46.4) is 1.3 years younger.

The following are additional key findings that emerge from the Forum’s analysis of two additional years of teacher workforce data covering the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years:

- **In the aggregate, annual teacher attrition in the region and state has returned to near pre-Act 10 levels.** Between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years, 1,259 teachers left the workforce in metro Milwaukee, while 4,604 teachers left the state’s teacher workforce. That compares to 1,498 teachers who departed the region’s teacher workforce two years earlier (a reduction of 16%) and 4,932 teachers who left the state workforce (a reduction of 7%). These departure levels are the lowest since the year immediately preceding the adoption of Wisconsin Act 10.
- **The number of teachers entering the region and state, in recent years, largely has kept pace with those who leave from year to year.** In metro Milwaukee, the number of teachers entering the workforce over the latest two years exceeded the number who departed by 45 teachers. For the state as a whole, those entering exceeded those departing by 134 teachers. However, these numbers do not necessarily mean that

districts have been free from recruitment challenges, especially for certain subjects, student populations, and geographic areas.

- **District by district teacher supply trends appear less conclusive.** The region is roughly split between the number of districts that saw teacher attrition or attraction rise versus fall in the additional two years of analysis. Similarly, in about half of the region's school districts, the number of teachers hired was less than the number who departed, which may suggest that teacher shortages exist in some of those districts.
- **Teachers who are departing not only are younger, but also increasingly are newer to the profession.** Among teachers who leave their position, almost one in three from metro Milwaukee and one in four statewide do so before hitting the five-year mark, a measure that appears to be trending upward. These are teachers in whom schools and districts presumably have invested in terms of recruitment, induction, and early-career professional development.

“Continuation of the trend of younger and newer teachers leaving the profession will pose a new set of challenges for area schools and districts,” says Chapman. “Even if aggregate teacher supply levels remain stable and attrition rates continue at current rates, the inability of districts to retain young and less experienced teachers may pose a significant financial cost and may threaten their ability to maintain a stable, high-quality teaching corps.”

The report suggests that, in light of this finding, “efforts to improve *teacher retention* should be receiving as much attention as efforts to enhance enrollment in teacher preparation programs or relax requirements for mid-career individuals seeking to enter the teaching profession.”

The full report – as well as the Forum's April 2016 analysis of the teacher workforce – can be downloaded at the Forum's web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues. The Forum recently announced it will be merging with the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance in 2018. A name for the new organization will be announced in the near future.

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