Finding, supporting and keeping good teachers in Milwaukee and rural school districts
Wisconsin’s Education Dilemma

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November 2009
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All the educators who took the time to talk with us
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Background

Research, personal experience and mass media stories all reiterate the significant role teachers play in their students’ lives. Teachers guide children into the worlds of science, math, literature, history, music and technology. They play a tremendous part in developing young people’s sense of competence and mastery. Teachers are, in short, vitally important players in children’s educational lives.

However, in Wisconsin, as in the rest of the United States, there are several alarming trends:
• Large numbers of teachers are leaving their jobs after just a few years.
• Often the least experienced teachers are being placed in schools with the most challenging students.
• Increasing numbers of “baby boomer” teachers are nearing retirement without adequate numbers of younger teachers following behind them.
• Budget-strapped districts are struggling to find the funds needed to address teacher shortages and teacher retention.

These trends are further exacerbated by the fact that being a teacher in 2009 is more challenging. There are a growing number of children who come to school with extra needs – for breakfast, special education or remedial help, protection from bullies who are sometimes their parents, and self-discipline 101. For many teachers in Wisconsin, these additional challenges are too much. In Milwaukee, over half will leave within their first five years of work.

For all students, but especially those who rely on school for structure and consistency in their environment, this kind of high teacher turnover is detrimental to achievement. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, “Students, especially those in at-risk schools, are too often left with a passing parade of inexperienced teachers who leave before they become accomplished educators … In the Milwaukee Public Schools, low-performing schools have double the teacher turnover of high-performing schools.”

There is an increasing body of research on teacher retention issues that suggests wages are a significant factor. While the demands on new teachers are growing, wages are not. A new report released by the Economic Policy Institute found that teachers' weekly salary was, on average, $154 (14%) less than people in comparable professions such as nurses, computer programmers, personnel officers, clergy and reporters. This figure is adjusted to account for a ten-month teaching schedule (The Teaching Penalty, 2008.) Wisconsin now ranks 20th in average teacher pay. In 2006-07, the average salary in Wisconsin ($46,390) was almost $2,700 lower than the national average. ($49,026)

Other factors thought to impact teachers' decision to leave schools are:
• lack of good leadership in the schools
• poor environment for a teacher to be effective which includes lack of physical and emotional safety, large class sizes, minimal parental involvement
• the need for more mentoring, professional development and opportunities for teacher leadership in the schools

This project was designed to explore how these factors impacted teacher decisions to leave the Milwaukee Public Schools and rural districts in the northern part of Wisconsin. In addition, the research was geared to gaining insight on the attributes of good schools. It was the hope of the project partners that these attributes could be incorporated into other schools in order to keep quality teachers in the field.
Project Overview

The Institute for Wisconsin’s Future, the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, Rethinking Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools and rural school districts in northern Wisconsin’s Northern Tier Uniserv began working together in fall of 2008 to investigate the factors involved in retaining urban and rural teachers and maximizing their effectiveness in the classroom. Because both Milwaukee and the smaller rural districts account for the highest rates of teacher turnover in the state, they were the focus of this project to determine strategies for improving teacher retention and student achievement. The project was funded by the Ford Foundation.

The following methods were employed to collect information: a review of aggregate data on teacher leavers over the past five years, telephone interviews of leavers in the recent school years of 2007-08 and 2008-09, focus groups of educators who have chosen to stay in their urban or rural school setting and expert meetings to develop recommendations and ideas for improving school systems. (See Appendix 1 through 3 for surveys and focus group questions)

Research

Part I: Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)

The Milwaukee Public Schools educates 82,444 children, 81% of whom come from low-income families. Eighty-eight percent of its students are children of color, with the largest single group being African American students (56.6%). MPS’ special education population exceeds the state average at 19.2% and 9.5% of its students are English language learners. MPS has a graduation rate of 68%. The district has 10,900 employees, 5,700 of whom are teachers.2

A. Overview of MPS teacher leavers:

Between 2003 and July of 2009, 1,699 teachers left the Milwaukee Public Schools for reasons other than retirement. That’s an average of 283 per school year. The median age of the leavers was 32.6 years. They had spent a median of 2.9 years teaching in the system. These teacher leavers were predominantly white (77%), with 14% Black and 5% Hispanic. Close to half of this group (47%) was teaching at the elementary level when they left the system; 22% were at high schools and 12% at middle schools. Interestingly, 19% of these leavers were in curriculum support positions when they departed MPS.

To get a more in-depth look at recent leavers, interviewers attempted to contact the 618 former MPS teachers who had left during the two most recent school years. (2007-08 and 2008-09) Missing contact information at MPS and lack of forwarding address and telephone numbers for the group was a definite impediment. In all, telephone interviews were completed with 161 former MPS teachers between November, 2008 and August, 2009.
### Demographic Profile of MPS Teacher “Leavers” Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OPTIONS</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 - 29</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 34</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 - 39</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 44</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 - 49</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 - 54</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of years as a teacher</strong></td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - 2 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - 4 years</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 - 6 years</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 - 8 years</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 - 10 years</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 - 12 years</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 - 14 years</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 14 years</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in the Milwaukee district</strong></td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - 2 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - 4 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 - 6 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 - 8 years</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 - 10 years</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 - 12 years</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 - 14 years</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 14 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades taught</strong></td>
<td>3K, 4K, 5K</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st - 5th</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6th - 8th</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th - 12th</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All grades</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjects taught</strong></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English/languages</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PE/F/CE/Tech ed/Art/Music</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Library/Guidance</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All subjects</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech pathology</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The MPS leavers were predominantly female. Overall, 74% of MPS teachers are women.
- Seventy-eight percent of MPS leavers were white, somewhat higher than in district as a whole (69%).
- The median age of an MPS leaver was 33.7 years.
- The majority of MPS leavers held a Masters degree.
- MPS leavers had a median of five years as a teacher. Twenty percent left within their first two years and another 34% departed by the end of their fourth year.
- The leavers spent a median of 3.17 years teaching in MPS.
- Almost a third of the leavers were high school teachers.
- The single largest category of leavers was special education teachers, at 22%.
Half of the MPS leavers in the study planned to stay in the education field for their next job and most of them were going to other public school systems in Wisconsin. Only 9% decided to pursue employment outside of education and another 20% did not know what their next employment would be.

### REASON FOR LEAVING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate professional support from administration</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much stress on the job</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size too large/ large caseload</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency requirement</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging student behavior</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts with supervisor</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem with management or too much change in management</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with teaching as a career</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate physical facilities</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or personal reasons other than pregnancy</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of growth opportunities</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal or family relocation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to move to another geographic area</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of assigned duties</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Why do teachers leave the MPS district?

Respondents were asked their reason(s) for leaving MPS and were allowed to list as many as they felt appropriate to their situation. A total of 677 responses were given, for an average of 4.2 per respondent. By a significant margin, inadequate professional support from administration was the most common reason given.

“Working with kids was delightful but it was like banging your head against a wall to get any support or help from administration.”

Former school counselor at MPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION AFTER MPS</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staying in education</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next job:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other WI public district</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72% of leavers still in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public outside WI</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13% of leavers still in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Private school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5% of leavers still in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In education, not as teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5% of leavers still in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed outside education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9% of leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7% of leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for family</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12% of leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know or undecided</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20% of leavers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other more frequent responses included: A great opportunity came up without even looking (15); provisional license expired and/or lacked certification (13); there were safety issues or the respondent felt threatened (10). Notably, some commonly-assumed reasons for teachers to leave MPS did not seem to be a major factor with this sample. Inadequate salary was mentioned only 3 times. Poor desire of students to learn was given 5 times. A lack of parental support/involvement was given as a reason only 5 times.

**Most Important Reason for Leaving MPS:** When pressed to provide the most important reason, the residency requirement emerged with the highest response.

Residency was an important factor in leaving for almost 40 teachers, cited over twice as often as any other factor:
- Residency requirement (39)
- Inadequate professional support from administrator (17)
- Family or personal reason other than pregnancy (13)
- Personal or family relocation away from area (11)
- Problem with management or change of management (11)

To look at data more generally, all reasons were placed into one of the following categories:

**Management reasons:** administrative, supervisory or assignment issues, lack of professional development, policies like residency requirement or procedural issues.

**Family or other positive occurrence:** childrearing, caring for another family member, relocation, pregnancy, going back to school, receiving unsought opportunity.

**Psycho/social/behavioral issues with teachers or students:** job dissatisfaction, stress, boredom, burnout, conflict with staff and challenging student behavior.

**Fiscal and facilities issues:** salary issues, budget cuts and physical facilities.

Problems with management was the general reason for leaving for over 70 teachers, far more than family changes or problems with the students.

“MPS should be more concerned with having people who love their jobs rather than where they live.”

MPS teacher who left due to residency rule
When asked if something could have been done about changing their minds about leaving MPS, more than half - 57% - said yes.

Lastly, interviewers read a series of statements and asked the leavers to indicate if they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed with what was read. We've grouped the statements into five areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments / workload</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching grade/subject for which certified or qualified</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload manageable and not obstacle</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed by the job</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation and leadership opportunities /development</th>
<th>Agree/SA</th>
<th>Disagree/SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to teach challenging students</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had opportunities to grow in ways that mattered</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged to continue professional development</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to be a leader</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial/ supervisory / leadership</th>
<th>Agree/SA</th>
<th>Disagree/SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received adequate feedback to do my job well</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School had stable leadership</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good or excellent support and guidance from principal</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarded for good performance/ accomplishments</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Agree/SA</th>
<th>Disagree/SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received adequate resources to do job</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School had adequate physical facilities</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School had financial resources needed</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Agree/SA</th>
<th>Disagree/SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level of trust / respect among teachers and administrators</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive relationships with teaching colleagues</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to work with community and parents</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good relationship with other teachers</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working relationships with supervisors good</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, although a significant number of teachers felt overwhelmed by their job, they felt adequately prepared and qualified to be in their classroom. They enjoyed strong relationships with their teaching colleagues and were split on whether they had opportunities to engage with parents and the community. While the adequacy of school facilities was mixed, the lack of resources to do their job and overall financial resources was a significant problem.
C. What makes teachers stay at MPS? Overview of teacher stayer focus groups

Focus group meetings were held in May and June 2009 in schools with high, midrange and low academic performance, as determined by MPS. They took place at Pulaski and Riverside University High Schools, and Hopkins Street Elementary and Allen-Field Elementary Schools. A total of thirteen educators participated in the groups and their years at MPS ranged from 5 to 23, with an average of 12.8 years. As a group they had an average of 13.4 years experience as a teacher, and all but two have spent their entire teaching career at MPS.

The teachers were asked a series of five questions which are outlined below with the combined general responses of the groups:

1. What do you value most about teaching in an urban school district and what are the advantages over teaching in another setting?

By far, the most frequent reference made was to the diversity of students and staff and the range of needs urban children have. Several teachers expressed their desire to feel needed and the importance of making a real impact in the lives of the children.

2. What do you think are the greatest obstacles to attracting and retaining teachers in an urban district?

Lack of administrative support/mentoring was the most common obstacle, although it appears that there is wide variation across schools on the amount of support new teachers receive as a matter of normal practice. Formal mentoring does not exist across the board. Building principals are not consistent in establishing formal support systems in their schools. New teachers are often at the whim of the more seasoned teachers around them and whether they have the time or inclination to take the younger colleague under their wing.

“One day at the end of the school year the principal came into my room and the kids asked who he was.”
Former MPS high school teacher

Once again, the strongest negative responses were related to leadership and management issues. A majority of respondents felt they lacked adequate support or feedback on their job performance. More than half felt they were not rewarded for their accomplishments and 48% did not feel there was a high level of trust and respect among teachers and administrators in their building.

“Working in an urban school is a calling. A passion must be there.”
MPS teacher
Other obstacles for new teachers:

• Residency requirement; living in the city is more expensive.

• Young teachers are unprepared for the challenges of teaching special education students in regular classrooms. They need more formal support, models and help with differentiation.

• Unless they’ve lived in an urban setting themselves, young teachers are not prepared to deal with the issues of class and culture they face in the classroom. Universities need to do more around classroom management and cultural/urban differences, and offer more -- and early -- field placements so students can determine early on whether an urban setting is right for them.

• Budget shortages and lack of adequate books, curricular materials and supplies. This issue was not raised across the board, in fact the participants from one elementary school spoke strongly how they have everything they need and that their school’s budget is “prioritized” so that can happen.

• Large class size was raised by the high school teachers. This made providing proper amounts of writing assistance to students impossible for one 9th grade English teacher.

• New teachers don’t have the chance for input or leadership. They are isolated.

3. What are your biggest challenges as a teacher?

• The poverty of students. Children are deeply affected when their family must worry about survival. The burden of dealing with mental health issues, truancy and poverty fall on the teacher. Other agencies need to do more to help address these issues.

• Larger class sizes impact differentiation, dealing with special needs children and developing relationships with the students.

• At the high school level, chronically disruptive kids, use of head phones, iPods, cell phones present a major challenge.

• At the high school level, lack of parental involvement at conferences or parental support with problem behavior is difficult. The transitory population at some schools makes it difficult to stay in contact.
4. What are the biggest challenges for new teachers in your district?

- The need for adequate mentoring was unanimous. It should be consistent (at least every other day), formal, done either by an outsider or in-house. The ideal would be to have a paid mentor, but there are teachers willing to put in the time without pay. The district has put this burden on the school. Support needs to come from the District on down.

- Better orientation at the building level is critically needed.

- New teachers need more modeling opportunities, to watch others teach and be watched themselves.

5. What are some strategies or incentives to help find and keep good teachers in MPS?

- Mentors should be automatic; teachers should not have to request one. Mentors should be paid so they take the responsibility seriously and spend the appropriate time. Mentors should have to go through some assessment; not all teachers can adequately mentor.

- All new teachers should be buddied up with an experienced teacher in the building to show them the ropes at that school.

- College preparation needs to include more direct exposure to students, and systems for classroom management.

- New teachers coming through MTEC need more preparation for working with students. (MTEC is a MPS program where college educated professionals from other areas get certified as teachers)

- MPS needs to market the system as trendsetting and Milwaukee as a great place to live and work.

- Incentives: money/stipends for continuing education; housing stipends; better supplies and items such as clothes, food for students and their families.

- Give teachers a lighter teaching load the first semester or year with time to meet during the school day to address issues and network with teachers.

- Little things make a difference: welcome party at Central Office with an explanation of how things work in the district; introduce new teachers at district functions.
**Part II. Northern Tier School Districts**

**A. Overview**

The northern third of Wisconsin is home to 35 rural school districts organized by the state teachers union as the Northern Tier Uniserv. Together these districts educate 20,374 children. The largest, Rhinelander, has a student enrollment of 2,721. The smallest is Phelps, with 183 students. Thirty-nine percent of the students in these districts are from low-income families.

Data was requested from all 35 districts but received from thirteen: Rhinelander, Laona, Three Lakes, Bayfield, Crandon, Lakeland, Mercer, Minocqua, Niagara, North Lakeland, Park Falls, Wabeno and White Lake. Between 2003 and July of 2009, 296 teachers left these districts for a median of 16 per district. More than half, 52%, left due to retirement. Only 142 left for reasons other than retirement, an average of 23.6 per school year for the 13 districts. In the two most current school years a median of 2 non-retiring teachers left each district. Five of the districts had no loss of teachers other than for retirement reasons.

To get a more in-depth look at recent leavers, interviewers attempted to contact the 41 former teachers who had left the districts during the two most recent school years. Lack of forwarding address and telephone numbers for the group was a definite impediment. In all, telephone interviews were completed with only ten former teachers in 2009.

The people interviewed were seven women and three men. Nine out of the ten were white and one was Hispanic. Their median age was 38 years and half held a Masters Degree. Most had taught English or ‘all subjects’ to first through eighth graders for over eight years. Of the ten leavers, three planned to keep teaching and five did not know what field of work they would choose next.

**B. Why do teachers leave rural school districts?**

**Most Important Reason for Leaving:**

When pressed to provide the most important reason for leaving, the responses were spread evenly among the following areas:

- Dissatisfaction with teaching as a career (1)
- Caseload/class size (1)
- Desire to move to another geographical area (2)
- Problem with management or change of management (1)
- Lack of certification (2)
- Grievance (1)
- Inadequate salary (1)
- Got married (1)

Notably, some commonly-assumed reasons for teachers to leave rural schools did not seem to be a major factor with this sample. Desire to move to another geographic areas was mentioned twice. Lack of growth opportunity, boredom or personal or family relocation to another area were not offered as reasons.
Looking at the data more generally, all reasons where placed in one of these categories:

- **Management reasons**: administrative, supervisory or assignment issues, lack of professional development, and policies or procedural issues.
- **Family or other positive occurrence**: childrearing, caring for another family member, relocation, pregnancy, going back to school, receiving another opportunity without seeking it.
- **Psycho/social/behavioral issues with teachers or students**: job dissatisfaction, stress, boredom, burnout, conflict with staff and challenging student behavior.
- **Fiscal and facilities issues**: salary issues, budget cuts and physical facilities.

Responses were mixed: Family or some other positive reason was given 4 times; management received 3 responses; psycho/social/behavioral was mentioned twice and fiscal/facility once.

C. Why do teachers stay in rural school districts?

**Rural Teacher Stayer Focus Groups**

Focus group meetings were held in May 2009 in three rural school districts: Rhinelander, Three Lakes and Laona. A total of nine educators participated in the groups and their years at their current district ranged from 1 to 30, with an average of 13.2 years. As a group they had an average of 16.5 years experience as a teacher, and half have spent their entire teaching career in their current district. The focus group leader also met with teams of administrators at the three districts to solicit their thoughts. All educators were asked a series of five questions which are outlined below with the combined general responses of the groups:

1. **What do you value most about teaching in a rural school district and what are the advantages over teaching in another setting?**

   Teachers most frequently stated that getting to know students and their families was much more doable in the smaller setting.

   Several expressed their need to feel part of a community that is safe and stable. The administrators echoed this and added shared values between teachers and students were important. It’s easier to get to know colleagues in smaller areas.
2. What do you think are the greatest obstacles to attracting and retaining teachers in a rural district?

Most commonly mentioned: small areas have fewer places of interest, things to do, fewer young people, making it difficult to meet friends or potential spouses. Lower pay in rural districts and lack of job security due to declining enrollment were also mentioned in all three groups. Affordable housing was also an issue in towns with significant lake property.

The administrators largely agreed with the teachers, but added that it is often difficult for the spouses of new teachers to find employment in the area. Also, the areas have fewer college choices for teachers to continue their education which can make a district less attractive to teachers.

3. What are your biggest challenges as a teacher?

In two of the districts, much of this discussion focused on district leadership issues, with too much change passed down or too much expected by the school board or district administrator without adequate training or teacher input. Also mentioned were lack of stability due to the funding formula and declining enrollment and the need for teachers to “wear many hats.”

Administrators noted that preparation time is extensive at the secondary level because of the number of classes and grades taught. Professional isolation can take place when a teacher is a one-person department. They also noted that parental involvement focuses on “fun” programs and activities and is not always there on discipline issues. Many of the parents are low-income or have only a high school education themselves. Students don’t necessarily get the message at home about changes in the economy, jobs and the need for higher education. The attitude of “get a diploma and get a job” frustrates educators.

4. What are the biggest challenges for new teachers in your district?

Teachers frequently mentioned the need for adequate mentoring which is done informally in these districts. One teacher stated that they are expected to do things “outside of the contract.” Long work hours, financial instability and unsuccessful referenda were also cited.

5. What are some strategies or incentives to help find and keep good teachers in your district?

- Change the funding formula to address issue of property-rich low-income communities and the difficulty in passing referenda. Districts need more money.
- Engage teachers more in planning, program development and decision-making. Treat them with respect and as if they have something to offer. Allow teachers the opportunity to give input without fear of repercussions.
- Offer tuition or debt forgiveness for teachers work 5 years in a rural area or in MPS.
- Institute a merit based pay system.
Looking for Solutions

Using data collected in a series of telephone surveys and small groups discussions, MPS and rural school leaders envisioned ways that the school systems could reorganize to attract and keep quality teachers.

**Part I. Recommendations for Milwaukee Public Schools**

A team of 16 teachers, administrators, union leaders, central office personnel and researchers (see Appendix 4) met to review the project data and devise some recommendations to improve teacher retention and overall educational quality in MPS. The group agreed that these were the most prevalent issue areas identified by the MPS sample:

A. Adequate Mentoring

Challenges: While MPS has several mentoring programs they do not consistently cover all new teachers in the district and it is not clear the role each type plays in orientating new staff. For example, the district has 16 new teacher mentors (tenured teachers assigned to mentoring activities only) for the hundreds of new teachers hired each year. A mentor is supposed to spend a total of 16 hours with each new hire during the school year before or after regular classroom hours.

Originally, the mentor-new teacher relationship was supposed to run for two years, but due to budget constraints the duration was reduced to one year. After the initial year a school-based mentor is to be assigned. Not all schools have school-based mentors or enough to adequately cover all new teachers. In fact, it was stated that the district’s data management system does not accurately identify all new teachers coming in to the system. Under current rules, new teachers have much more required of them in terms of assessments, portfolios, benchmark assessments, etc. Without a mentor these requirements are difficult and more burdensome than helpful for the teacher.

**Mentor recommendations:**

**Structural reform**

- MPS should have one mentoring program that covers the entire district- all schools and every new teacher.

- MPS needs improved data management to identify every new teacher.

- Mentoring should not be “building-based” and rely on teachers who also are expected to carry a normal class load. Mentors should be paid and come from outside the schools where they work.
Policy changes

- MPS ought to consider implementing a teacher residency program where new teachers are paid for one year to spend time with a mentor teacher learning classroom management, curriculum and district and school policies/procedures.

- New teachers should be assigned a lighter class load their first year to allow time to spend with a mentor and observing a variety of teachers in the classroom. This was particularly critical for special education teachers.

- Ideally teachers should receive one hour of mentoring per day at the elementary level and 90 minutes a week at the secondary level, plus time for reflective conversation between mentor and mentee.

- Mentors should team teach, model teach, do selective scripting and help devise a seating chart based on student behavior. They should assist with content strategies alignment, analyzing student work, and strategies for appropriate differentiation. When needed mentors should advocate for formal professional development for the new teacher with the building principal.

B. Structural changes in Milwaukee Public Schools

Teacher preparation and assignments

- Student teachers should be allowed to shadow teachers other than their cooperating teacher to be exposed to different, and perhaps better, methods.

- Student teachers should attend some workshops on issues of class and race.

- MPS uses the “Urban Perceiver” test with applicants to identify appropriate people to work in an urban setting. The group --- as did some teachers in focus groups --- felt the test should be changed because it was too arbitrary and eliminated from contention some teachers who really wanted to work in the system. This test should be revised to ensure motivated people are not eliminated from teaching in Milwaukee.

- It should be mandated that new teachers are not placed with the most challenging students in the most difficult situations in their early years.

- New teachers should not be asked to teach classes in a different content area from their own license.

- MPS administrators need to look at the big picture when losing and replacing teachers. For instance, one elementary school could lose several teachers in one year, more than the expected number. Instead of transferring experienced teachers from other elementary schools, all the open are generally filled with new teachers.

The practice disadvantages some schools, particularly when the exodus of teachers results from poor management at that school.
**General reforms**

- The central administration needs to coordinate its efforts and initiatives more. New programs and curriculum changes are introduced more often than is functional. The amount of required paperwork and data gathering is extreme, and difficult for new teachers to juggle. The new specialists/coaches in the buildings now require even more data gathering and benchmarking while providing limited support to teachers.

- Job sharing should be allowed, especially in special and bilingual education as well as speech pathology.

- MPS must control large class sizes and caseloads, especially for new teachers.

- The district ought to explore eliminating the residency requirement for MPS staff, although it was considered politically unviable at this time.

The MPS stakeholder group agreed that to really address the teacher retention problem, no one change could make a significant difference. They felt that a cluster of system reforms was needed to create a better environment for new teachers. A school environment needs to be created where average people can teach and succeed with collaborative planning and more autonomy in teaching. The group discussed developing a model pilot program at an average MPS school. (Model school concept paper in Appendix 5.)
Part II. Recommendations for Rural School Districts

A meeting of eight teachers and administrators was held at the Northland Pines School District. (See Appendix 6) This district, the 14th largest in the state in terms of geographical size, encompasses the communities in a 475 square mile area of northeastern Wisconsin. The rural administrators, teachers and other school leaders who met to discuss retaining quality teachers in their area spoke of a distinct set of challenges than urban schools – geographic isolation, lack of social opportunities and the many responsibilities of teaching in small schools.

Primary challenges for rural schools:

• Their retention challenge is, for the most part, either through retirement of larger “bubbles” of teachers or because a spouse can’t find work.

• Attracting the best teachers is becoming an increasing challenge. In the past it was common to receive hundreds of applicants for a single position and now, they receive far fewer. The district’s ability to hire the best teachers is some times subject driven. It is more difficult to find an excellent math teacher than an instructor in social studies.

• Rural districts have to find ways to be more competitive in their hiring practices. Districts must also spend significant time upfront in the interviewing and screening process to ensure that an applicant is a good fit, avoiding remediation on the back end.

Some districts are already using effective techniques to attract and retain good teachers. Northland Pines has made it a priority to use modern methods to attract employees and families. For example, many applicants check the districts website and Pines has the picture, biography and some short comments from every one who works there. New teachers commented that they felt like they already knew a lot of people, by sight, the first time they visited the building; and they felt that was important. Northland Pines also provides a laptop for all teachers. Northland Pines also provides a laptop for all teachers.

In addition, Northland Pines emphasizes the need for having a good mix of teachers from inside and from outside of the community. Many of those from the area have taught outside of the area to meet new people, gain teaching experience, and learn other viewpoints, and teaching styles. The quote was, “We want your new ideas balanced with our traditions.”

Like the urban educators, the rural group expressed a similar emphasis on the importance of mentoring programs.
A. Teacher mentoring in rural areas

Implement mentoring programs based on the successful Northland Pines model.

Structure

- Every first year teacher in the district is assigned a mentor; there may also be a mentor assigned during the second year.

- The district’s mentoring program should be assigned to an administrator with buy-in and the ability to “sell it” to the rest of the district.

- Mentoring should be a stated part of the district’s culture and talked about at all levels of the organization to ensure significant buy-in for the goals and expectations of the program.

- Mentor positions should be posted and arranged by contract. Highly effective teachers should be urged to apply and if there are more applicants than new teachers, applicants are put in reserve.

- Assign one mentor for each new teacher, plus what they called “unofficial friends” who watch over new teachers. The program should encourage mentors to establish a one-on-one relationship that goes beyond “business.”

- Mentors should be paid and receive one day of training through the area’s Cooperative Educational Service Agency.

Implementation

- Use social activities in the beginning of the year to establish the mentor-mentee relationship.

- Have new teachers start two days early with the technical stuff to learn the basics of purchase orders, e-mail, payroll, insurance, etc.

- Have new teachers scheduled for four additional meetings to talk about what’s working, what’s not working and what the administration may have missed. These meetings should take a focus-group approach, encouraging participants to “share their successes and share their sorrows.”

- Give all teachers an annual paid sabbatical-type day where they can do curriculum development, sit in on another teacher’s class, get extra education, go to another school, or another activity of their choice to develop themselves.
Summary of Key Findings and Conclusion

In our race to the top, many schools are stumbling over the very teachers who make it possible to win. High teacher turnover is a signal that education systems are not well structured to enable intelligent people to share their knowledge and skills with children and young adults. In Wisconsin, teacher turnover is especially serious in the Milwaukee Public Schools where the majority of Wisconsin’s people of color send their children.

Milwaukee

In Milwaukee, the prototype teacher leaving the MPS system is a 34 year old white woman with a Masters Degree who has been teaching special education in the district for a little over three years. She will continue teaching outside of Milwaukee, perhaps. She left her job because she does not want to live in the city of Milwaukee. She had large classes, did not receive enough support from her school managers and experienced substantial stress on the job. She might have stayed if someone had intervened to address the problem.

The typical MPS leaver felt the workload was overwhelming. She generally felt close to other teachers but thought her school leadership was not effective. She does not think there is adequate funding for the school.

What about the teachers who stay? They value diversity, being needed and having a real impact on kids’ lives. They are challenged by the students’ poverty, the large class sizes, the disruptive behavior of older kids and the difficulty in connecting with parents of high school students. The teachers who stay understand the difficulties faced by new teachers who are often unprepared for large classrooms of children with different issues – poverty, learning problems and other special needs. New teachers do not receive the kind of support needed to respond effectively. They need better orientation, mentoring and modeling.

Northern Rural Districts

In northern rural districts, the teacher leaver is also a white woman around 38 years old who taught multiple subjects in grade school. The sample size of this group is too small to pinpoint key reasons for leaving.

Among the teachers who remain in the rural classroom, community is a strong motivator – connection to students, their families and the “fabric” of the town. The downside of small town life is the lack of activities, people and opportunities. Funding is a problem on many levels -- low pay, job insecurity, demands on teachers to play multiple roles for long hours. Experienced teachers see a need for better mentoring for new teachers.

A school environment needs to be created where average people can teach and succeed with collaborative planning and more autonomy in teaching.

(Model school concept paper in Appendix 5)
Recommendations

MPS

The Milwaukee schools need a coordinated and comprehensive mentoring program for all new teachers provided by designated professionals with adequate time allotted to ensure success.

New teachers in the Milwaukee system should have smaller class sizes with minimal testing responsibilities and a system that ensures that they do not have the most challenging students.

MPS administration needs to address problems in school leadership.

To ensure better teacher retention, there needs to be structural change in schools to minimize required testing, provide ongoing mentoring to teachers, support job sharing and establish genuine teacher/administrator collaboration.

Rural schools

Mentoring is needed in more rural districts using the Northland Pines school district program as a model. In addition, more sophisticated hiring procedures will help ensure a good fit between new teachers and rural districts.

It is crucial to reform the state school funding system to provide districts with more money. It was also suggested that school districts engage teachers in planning, program development and decision-making as well as offering tuition reward or debt forgiveness if teachers agree to work five years in a rural area or in MPS

Conclusion

Finding and keeping good teachers is vital to all schools. In Milwaukee, where the racial achievement gap is so wide, it is especially critical to acknowledge and act on the recommendations from educators to strengthen teaching and learning. The proposals outlined above are not extravagant. Systematic mentoring and more realistic workloads can and should be implemented and tested in a pilot program to assess if they are effective in rebuilding a school system that works more successfully for teachers and children.
APPENDIX 1 - Departing Teacher Exit Interview

Name___________________________________________________
School District________________________________   School Left ____________________________

1. Demographics & other identifiers
   Sex (Male) (Female)
   Age _______________
   Ethnicity (Black) (White) (Hispanic) (Asian) (Native American) (Other)
   Number of years in the district _________
   Number of years as a teacher__________
   Subject(s) and grade(s) taught___________________________________________________
   Highest educational attainment (Bachelors) (Masters) (Doctorate)

2. After leaving this teaching job, what is (or what will be) your next employment?

   _____a) Retirement
   _____b) Employment outside education
   _____c) Employment in education but not in teaching. Doing what?
   _____d) Teaching in another public school district in Wisconsin. Where are you teaching?
   _____e) Teaching in a public school outside Wisconsin
   _____f) Teaching in a private school
   _____g) Attending school
   _____h) Caring for family
   _____i) Not yet decided

3. What were your reasons for leaving your teaching job? [Please select all that apply]

   _____a) Inadequate salary
   _____b) Lack of growth opportunities
   _____c) Pregnancy
   _____d) Family/personal reasons other than pregnancy
   _____e) Retirement
   _____f) I wasn’t seeking another job, but a great opportunity came up
   _____g) Job was eliminated for budgetary reasons
   _____h) Personal or family relocation away from area
   _____i) Too much stress on the job
   _____j) Dissatisfaction with teaching as a career
   _____k) Desire to move to another geographical location
   _____l) Inadequate physical facilities
   _____m) To go back to school
   _____n) Extremely challenging student behavior
   _____o) Dislike of assigned duties
   _____p) Burnout
   _____q) Conflicts with supervisors
   _____r) Conflicts with colleagues
   _____s) Inadequate professional support from administration
   _____t) Resignation in lieu of termination
   _____u) Boredom
   v) Other (please specify as briefly as possible) _______________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Of the reasons you selected, which one (or which several) were the most important?

   _____________________________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________________________

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5. For the following questions, please indicate whether you:
   (1) Agree strongly
   (2) Agree somewhat
   (3) Neither agree nor disagree
   (4) Disagree somewhat
   (5) Disagree strongly

   a) I was teaching grades/subjects for which I was certified and qualified. 1 2 3 4 5
   b) My workload was manageable and not a big obstacle. 1 2 3 4 5
   c) I received adequate resources to do my job well. 1 2 3 4 5
   d) I received adequate feedback to do my job well. 1 2 3 4 5
   e) My school had stable leadership. 1 2 3 4 5
   f) I was adequately prepared to teach students who are especially challenging. 1 2 3 4 5
   g) There was a high level of trust and respect among teachers and administrators. 1 2 3 4 5
   h) I felt overwhelmed by the job. 1 2 3 4 5
   i) I had very good or excellent support and guidance from my principal. 1 2 3 4 5
   j) I had opportunities to grow in ways that mattered to me. 1 2 3 4 5
   k) I had supportive relationships with my teaching colleagues. 1 2 3 4 5
   l) My school had adequate physical facilities. 1 2 3 4 5
   m) There were good opportunities to work with the community and parents. 1 2 3 4 5
   n) I was encouraged to continue my professional development. 1 2 3 4 5
   o) I had good relationship with other teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
   p) I was given opportunities to be a leader. 1 2 3 4 5
   q) I was rewarded for good performance and/or accomplishments. 1 2 3 4 5
   r) My working relationship with supervisors was good. 1 2 3 4 5
   s) My school had the financial resources it needs. 1 2 3 4 5

6. Could something have been done to change your mind about leaving? (Yes) (No)  
What?_________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Are there any other comments you’d like to offer? __________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

APPENDIX 2 - Staying Teacher Survey

PART I: Tell us about yourself.
1. Gender: ___ Male ___ Female
2. Age: __________
3. Race/Ethnicity: ___ White ___ Black ___ Hispanic ___ Asian ___ Native American ___ Other
4. School District: ________________________________________________________
5. Number of years in this district: __________ Number of years as a teacher ______
6. Current assignment: ___ Elementary ___ Middle school ___ High school
7. Education level ___ Bachelor’s ___ Master’s ___ Doctorate

PART II: For the following questions please circle the number that best indicates your opinion based on the scale below:
1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3= Neutral 4= Disagree 5= Strongly disagree

8. This school district is committed to meeting the needs of all children. 1 2 3 4 5
9. My school has stable leadership. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I am given opportunities to be a leader. 1 2 3 4 5
11. This district values student achievement. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I have supportive relationships with other teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
13. My school has the financial resources it needs. 1 2 3 4 5
14. There is a high level of trust and respect among teachers and administrators. 1 2 3 4 5
15. My workload is manageable and not a big obstacle. 1 2 3 4 5
16. I receive adequate resources to do my job well. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I feel a strong sense of belonging to this school district. 1 2 3 4 5
18. There are good opportunities to work with parents and the community. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I have opportunities to grow in ways that matter to me. 1 2 3 4 5
20. I think I could easily become attached to another school district. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I get to know my students and their families well. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I get great support and guidance from my principal. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I am rewarded for good performance and/or my accomplishments. 1 2 3 4 5
24. Mentoring is important for retaining teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
25. It seems like classroom management and discipline take up a lot of my class time 1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for completing this survey.
APPENDIX 3 - Teacher Stayer Focus Groups

Format and Questions

Introduce yourself, IWF and the project

With a grant from the Ford Foundation IWF is working to investigate the factors involved in retaining teachers and maximizing their effectiveness in the classroom. The focal points in this effort are Milwaukee and the rural districts in northern Wisconsin. Because both Milwaukee and the smaller rural districts account for the highest rates of teacher turnover in the state, they are most in need of analysis to determine strategies for improving teacher retention.

Group introductions

Completion of written survey.

Takes about 5 minutes. Purpose is to make comparisons between long-term teachers and those who leave the profession or a particular type of school district.

Focus Group Portion

We want to hear from all participants, even if someone else has already given your answer.

Questions

1. What do you value most about teaching in an urban school district and what are the advantages over teaching in another setting?
2. What do you think are the greatest obstacles to attracting and retaining teachers in urban districts?
3. What are your biggest challenges as a teacher?
4. What do you think are the biggest challenges for new teachers in your district?
5. You are all long-term teachers in this district. What drew you to teach in this district? What was the most important factor in keeping you here?
6. What strategies or incentives would be helpful to find and keep good teachers in your district?

Wrap-up/ Thanks

If they would like to receive a copy of the study report and recommendations leave their name and address with you.
APPENDIX 4 - Teacher Retention Project

Recommendation Development Meeting Participants

Tom Beebe, executive director, Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools
Bonnie Brusky, English teacher, Riverside University High School
Jo Ellen Burke, retired K-8 GT teacher in Eau Claire and interviewer for the project
Lorena Gueny, MPS Bilingual Curriculum Specialist and former associate principal
Judy Gundry, MPS mentor teacher
Ann Gutkowski, 3rd grade teacher, Thoreau School
Linda Jackson, parent of MPS student
Sunne Jones-Ash, parent of MPS student
Mike Langyel, MTEA president
Kelly McMahon, K-5 teacher, Lancaster school and MTEA Executive Board Member
Maribel Nieves-Harris, principal, Allen-Field School
Gina Palazzari, IWF associate director and Teacher Retention Project coordinator
Bob Peterson, 5th grade teacher, Fratney School and Rethinking Schools
Melissa Tempel, first grade bilingual teacher, Longfellow School
Karen Royster, executive director, Institute for Wisconsin's Future
Kathy Williams, former director of the MPS Division of Teaching and Learning and MPS editor of Rethinking Schools
APPENDIX 5  Model School Recommendation

IWF worked with Rethinking Schools to coordinate a planning conference in Milwaukee with teachers, union representatives, principals, parents and central office administrators. After a review of the findings, the group discussed the kind of doable changes necessary to reduce the high turnover rates in city schools.

After discussing specific sets of policy options, it became clear that no one particular thing would be a magic bullet. What seemed crucial was to redefine the goals of education reform. Current thinking on effective schools is focused on finding and retaining gifted teachers. In reality, most teachers are not brilliant and wildly committed -- neither are most doctors, lawyers, government officials or parents. The challenge is not to transform teachers but to reconfigure schools so that average human beings can be effective as educators. Working within the parameters of the current structure, the planning group's idea is to create a system where the average distribution of teachers with a solid (not gifted) principal could succeed in teaching children to meet proficiency goals.

The key elements of this reconfigured school would be as follows:
1. A high level of collaboration between administration and faculty and between faculty, grade levels and departments
2. A consistent level of managerial support
   • adequate quality and quantity of mentoring
   • frequent communication between new teachers and supervising principal
   • balanced assignment of work loads in term of class size and distribution of high need students
3. Teacher autonomy in implementing required curriculum
4. Minimal standardized testing and evaluation with a reasonable amount of benchmarks and assessments
5. Insulation from frequent new central office initiatives and overly high number of assessment procedures

Success would be measured in terms of:
• Academic performance improvement from the beginning to the end of the school year
• Student, teacher and parent satisfaction
• Sustainability
• Potential for replication

The process for implementing this project would be as follows:
   a. Establish a planning team of MPS teachers, administrators, parents, union reps, academics and school board members
   b. Develop a framework for the “optimum performance school model” that includes protocols for assignments, supervision, planning, testing, mentoring and coordination.
   c. Work with Milwaukee Public Schools administration to secure permission to operate a pilot project in a targeted MPS school.
   d. Select a school in the MPS system that meets designated criteria – low performance, normal distribution of teachers (in terms of experience, education and specialization.
   e. Contact principal, teacher union rep, and parent council members to see if all partners are willing to test new model.
   f. Work with school partners to review and alter protocols if necessary.
APPENDIX 6
Northland Pines Recommendation Meeting Attendees

Dar Kadulski, veteran teacher; 30 years; 6th-grade language arts, Eagle River
Kate Dvorachek, 2nd year teacher; middle and high school choral music, Three Lakes
Leah Lechleitner, 2nd year teacher; 4th-grade teacher, Eagle River
Tim Gaffney, school board president; business owner, Eagle River
Mike Sealander, school board vice-president and DNR warden, Sayner
Scott Foster, high school principal; taught district technology education
Mike Richie, superintendent since 2004; fifth grade teacher, elementary principal and
district administrator at Howard-Suamico
Josh Tilley, math teacher in Northland Pines since 2001; taught in Portage, Eagle River

Footnotes

1 United States Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, Public Elementary and

2 Milwaukee Public Schools website, http://mpsportal.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/

3 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, http://dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/pubdata2.html/PED09.xls

4 Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, SchoolFacts 09, October, 2009.