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Free-Market Paths to Better Lives



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WPRI releases data on the federalization of DPI

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Jan. 24, 2017 — Nearly half of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction employees owe their livelihood to the federal government as they execute some 59 federal education-related programs, according to a story released today by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute.

Outside of the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, which administers Medicaid, DPI receives more federal dollars than any other area of state government.

The WPRI story published today at wpri.org is available for download and publication.

A look back over the past two decades at DPI shows that, while the department has remained about the same size, federal influence has grown swiftly and steadily. In 1995, 185 DPI employees were paid by the federal government — 28 percent of the total. Today, the 302 workers in DPI personnel essentially on the federal payroll amount to 47 percent of the total.

Since the 1995-'97 biennial budget, DPI's total budget increased 87 percent, from \$7 billion to more than \$13 billion today. Over that same period, the federal contribution to DPI has grown twice as fast, up 176 percent, from nearly \$637 million to more than \$1.7 billion.

WPRI reviewed more than 2,000 pages of time sheets kept by 298 DPI employees. These sheets are required by the federal government. WPRI has requested but not yet received job descriptions for those 298 individuals and their supervisors, but a review of job titles indicate that at least 45 percent of those who filled out time sheets are not involved in classroom work but rather in large part are managing the flow of federal dollars. These includes accountants, administrators, auditors, budget analysts, grant specialists and others. Anecdotal evidence exists that bureaucracy at the local level also has increased in response to increased federal funding.

"All this raises questions about the amount of time and money spent on administration and bureaucracy rather than bettering the lives and minds of Wisconsin's children, as well as the extent to which local school districts must follow the dictates of Washington, D.C., bureaucrats and their counterparts in Madison rather than the wishes of parents, teachers and local educators," said the story authored by Dan Benson, editor of WPRI's Project for 21st Century Federalism, and project reporter David Daley.

Both Benson and Daley are former Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reporters, and Benson is also a former Gannett editor. The article was published as part of WPRI's Project for 21st Century Federalism, which focuses on the growth and coercive effects of the federal grants-in-aid system.

WPRI President Mike Nichols and Benson **presented their findings** today to the state Assembly Committee on Federalism and Interstate Affairs. They pointed out that DPI is far from the only area of state government to become increasingly federalized over recent decades.

Twenty years ago, there were 4,382 full-time equivalent employees in state government (not counting the UW System) paid with federal dollars, according to budget documents reviewed by WPRI. Today, there are 4,987 — an increase of 14 percent that represents more than 600 positions and tens of millions of dollars of additional, annual

spending. With the federal dollars, the article points out, come a mountain of federal regulations, paperwork and concomitant state spending, much of which has gone uncounted at the state and local level.

State Rep. Josh Zepnick (D-Milwaukee) said that Nichols and Benson raised a number of issues that were "really relevant," whether Democrat or Republican. Zepnick said Milwaukee teachers in his district complain to him about the burden of paperwork requirements. "Paperwork comes up all the time," he said, noting that teachers wonder if some of the paperwork is relevant or connected to the job they do as teachers.

With the federal Every Student Succeeds Act scheduled to take effect this fall, data on the reach and efficacy of federal education funding to DPI and local school districts will help inform debate on how the state can move forward on education policy.

"We believe that, if the state is truly given more latitude over education policy, it should examine how DPI is structured and intermingled with the federal bureaucracy," said Nichols. "Ultimately, Wisconsin must take advantage of any new opportunity to redirect its focus to actually serving and educating children rather than kowtowing to the federal government."