



THE SPEAKER'S TASK FORCE ON URBAN EDUCATION:

Report from the Vice-Chair and Minority Members

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Introduction

In August 2015, Republican leadership led by Speaker Robin Vos created the Speaker’s Task Force on Urban Education. The intention and directive of the Task Force was:

...to study issues pertaining to teacher recruitment and retention; best practices to address problems such as truancy, below average academic performance, and low graduation rates; ways to improve access to technology in high poverty urban communities; and review the “Opportunity Schools and Partnership Program” created in the 2015-17 budget.

Overall, the Urban Education Task Force was created to address challenges facing urban schools in Wisconsin. These challenges have become more and more difficult as available revenue and resources have sharply declined over the past five years. The impact of these cuts has been felt across the state but is often magnified in our few urban centers. These urban centers account for nearly 20% of our student population. The challenges of educating in each of Wisconsin’s urban settings are unique and cannot be solved by catch-all policies or solutions. To stay competitive and to maintain Wisconsin’s historic standing of nationally-recognized public school performance, these issues must be addressed with an approach that addresses the causes - not the symptoms - of these problems.

From September 2015 to March 2015 the Task Force held five public hearings, following tours of schools in six urban school districts. Hearings in each city were meant to address and focus on one subject area of the Speaker’s directive. The subjects did not necessarily match the characteristics of the city, yet superintendents and invited speakers were arbitrarily assigned a focus on a single topic. The school districts, and corresponding topics, were as follows:

Madison – Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Training

Kenosha/Racine Unified – Mental Health, Behavior, Truancy

Green Bay – Education Alternatives: Technology for Virtual/Online learning, Charters, Choice

Eau Claire – Closing the Achievement Gap

Milwaukee – Early Childhood Education/Alternative Schools

During these hearings and visits there was a consistent message from administrators, teachers and members of the public that more resources and new strategies were needed to address these problems. Many best practices showing promising results in addressing these issues were shared with the Task Force, but most relied too heavily on corporate and community generosity, partnerships and donations.

This Task Force, as an extension of the legislature, is charged with finding solutions to reinforce their directive put forth by the state Constitution, [Article X, sec III] to *“provide by law for the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable.”* It is clear that urban inner-city schools face challenges of poverty and inadequate community services that question uniformity. Therefore it is the legislature’s duty to take steps to ensure that all school districts in Wisconsin provide equal opportunities for all students.

The Task Force Report released on June 15th was meant to provide comprehensive recommendations from all members of the task force to the legislature. Instead, the Majority Party and Chair released a report that omits many of the original objectives and only contains vague recommendations, which were authored by the nonpartisan Legislative Council. The report fails to take or recommend any meaningful action to address the aforementioned issues. Furthermore, the report does not contain any recommendations from the minority members of the Committee, providing a one-sided view of the Committee's findings.

As Vice-Chair of the Committee, my Democratic colleagues and I are providing this additional report to specifically identify issues that we heard at the hearings and to provide concrete recommendations to address them, and make positive impacts on education in urban areas. It is our hope that the Governor and Legislature will take action.

If our state fails to invest in adequately educating our urban populations it will have an indelible impact on our academic prestige, our economy and our future. Providing our urban-area students the opportunities for post-secondary education and future careers by investing in their early development and by sustaining support systems that keep them on the path for success will increase the quality of urban life, reduce incarceration and ensure that Wisconsin has a well-trained and educated workforce. Thoughtful and targeted investments made now will ensure that our urban populations can, and will, find success that can be sustained for generations to come.

In the following report, you will find our recommendations, based on public testimony, tours and recent school-related research and data.

I. Poverty

Perhaps the single most important factor in determining a child's lack of success is the child's exposure to poverty. Early childhood brain development is severely impacted by the conditions of poverty. According to testimony heard, this occurs for a few reasons. Children raised in poverty often lack positive brain stimulation and are subject to high levels of stress, malnutrition, family instability and a greater exposure to violence. High levels of stress can result in a reduction of the brain's grey matter mass, sometimes reaching a 10% reduction in growth in the frontal lobe, temporal lobe and hippocampus. According to researchers at the University Of Wisconsin La Follette School Of Public Affairs, this lack of proper brain growth and development can put a child at a [20% performance deficit](#) in comparison to their peers.

As poverty affects brain development in early childhood, it is often just one factor in the many causes for sub-par mental health. The conditions in an impoverished lifestyle often contribute to mental health issues that impair children's ability to perform and learn in the classroom. Unstable family life and poor living conditions contribute to poor physical and mental health. As students fall behind their peers in reading, social skills, and other academic performance areas, the stress of falling behind negatively impacts mental health, thus compounding poor performance and stress.

Given the weight of poverty on a child's future success, it was startling to minority members of the Committee that the topic of poverty was not an announced focus of any of the Task Force's

public meetings. Although none of the hearings were meant to focus on poverty, the Committee heard countless times during each hearing the long-reaching impacts it has. As the Task Force heard testimony about growing rates in poverty, single-parent households, homelessness and exposure to domestic violence and drug use, it is clear that tangible action must be taken to address these conditions for students and their families.

Recommendations:

1. Increase the statewide minimum wage

From a legislative standpoint, an obvious solution is to address the issue at its source: do what we can to combat poverty in our state. While schools may be able to, and have attempted to work through this issue through after-school programming, free and reduced lunches, and stretching limited resources, a significant step forward in our state's policy would be to address the real issue at hand: families in urban areas are struggling under current wage laws.

In Wisconsin, the minimum wage is set at \$7.25 per hour. This minimum wage figure was last increased in 2009 as part of a federally mandated increase. Unfortunately, Wisconsin's current minimum wage levels fall woefully below standards for a "living wage," or a wage that would allow individuals to become self-sufficient and cover typical day-to-day expenses. [Studies from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) determined that a single adult would need to make \$10.13 per hour to earn a living wage.

When factoring the common need to adequately support a family into this calculation, Wisconsin's minimum wage standards become even more limiting. At \$7.25 per hour, a family of four would fall below the [federal poverty line](#).

Refusing to adjust the statewide minimum wage to a living wage has negatively impacted our state's poverty levels over the past five years. As said previously, [Wisconsin's poverty level reached record highs in 2014](#) (the latest reported year).

Legislation to increase the minimum wage has been introduced in previous legislative sessions, including the 2015-2016 session. This includes AB 264, which would have raised the minimum wage to \$15/hour and AB 12, which would have raised the minimum wage to \$10.10/hour.

[States that have currently raised the minimum wage](#) above federally required levels include Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, D.C., Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

In addition to improving family income levels for students, increasing the minimum wage has [been proven](#) to create stimulating effects on the economy and reduce employee turnover.

2. Restore Cut to Earned Income Tax Credit and Provide Resources for Statewide Expansion of Transitional Jobs Programs

The earned income tax credit (EITC) has existed for decades on both the federal and state levels. The purpose of this credit is to supplement the wages and self-employment income of low-income workers and is intended to offset the impact of the social security tax and increase the incentive to work. Eligible individuals and families receive the state credit in an amount calculated in relation to the federal credit. A claimant with one dependent child can receive up to 4% of the federal credit (max. \$132), a claimant with two children can receive up to 11% of the federal credit (max. \$601) and claimants with 3 or more children can receive up to 34% of the federal credit (max \$2,088). These supplements can go a long way for providing appropriate food, housing and clothing for students in urban areas. Currently over a quarter of a million Wisconsin residents claim this credit. Since the 2010-11 fiscal year, state responsibility for the program, which is also supplemented by federal temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) funding, has [dropped from \\$82.5 million to the current \\$46.5 million](#).

We recommend that the legislature restore the tax credit to pre-2011 levels in order to provide supplementary relief to more claimants. We believe that these credits can go a long way to help needy families provide appropriate learning environments for students.

3. Provide Additional Resources for the Transform Milwaukee Jobs and Transitional Jobs Programs

Citizens in poverty often find it difficult to get resources and skills that they can use to find employment. Through the creation of the Transform Milwaukee Jobs and the Transitional Jobs Programs, run by the Department of Children & Families, these individuals are provided job training and experience, case management, and subsidized transitional jobs that give them the tools to rejoin Wisconsin's workforce.

These programs target unemployed ex-offenders, unemployed child support payers, and unemployed parents of children in the welfare system. Currently the Transform Milwaukee Jobs program is targeted specifically at the Milwaukee area and has an estimated 530 participants. The Transitional Jobs program is targeted at the city of Beloit, Racine county, and rural areas of Forest, Langlade, Menominee, Florence, Ashland Bayfield, Iron, Sawyer, Rusk and Taylor counties. The program is currently being implemented in these regions by contracted agencies that are conducting outreach to employers and potential participants.

The current 2015-17 state budget funds the Transform Milwaukee Jobs program at [\\$5 million per year](#), while the State Transitional Jobs program is funded at [\\$2 million per year](#). 2015's [AB484](#) expands this program and provides additional resources and flexibility for the state to provide these services. We recommend that the legislature pass this legislation to help disadvantaged citizens in poverty access the resources and opportunities to attain financial security and independence for their families.

4. Reduce Burden of Childcare Costs for Low-Income Families

Rising childcare costs are a major concern in Wisconsin and especially in urban areas. The estimated annual cost of infant care in Wisconsin is [\\$10,775 per year](#). When considering that the [median income for a single mother is \\$23,568 and \\$79,589 for a two-parent family](#), this amount is staggering. Childcare costs amount to 45.7% and 13.5% of those families' incomes. If our kids are to succeed in their academic careers, steps must be taken to ensure that they are in an enriching environment and that their parents are able to provide for their basic needs.

In the 2015-17 session, [AB399](#) was introduced to help lower-income families offset the high costs of childcare. This bill would create a nonrefundable individual income tax credit based on the federal tax credit for expenses related to household and dependent care services. We recommend the legislature seriously consider this legislation in the future to provide relief to these families in order to create an environment for children that sets them up for success.

5. Pass and Implement the Fair Funding Model

Fair Funding is commonsense legislation that would, over the course of three school years, restore state funding responsibility to school revenues to the [previously promised](#) rate of 66.6%. In addition to this, the bill addresses both rural and urban poverty by counting pupils eligible for free and reduced price lunch (FRL) as an additional 0.3 pupil. To combat revenue losses due to declining enrollment (which occurred in each of the urban areas and cities visited by the Task Force except Eau Claire) there are safeguards to ensure that no district would receive less than 90% of the amount it received in a previous year.

This proposal, co-authored and introduced by all minority members in November 2015, never received a committee hearing and a motion to take the bill up on the floor in January 2016 was refused by the majority party.

We recommend that this proposal be seriously considered to address disparities in lower-income school districts and to ensure that schools have the resources they need to provide adequate services to at-risk students.

6. Reinstate Chapter 220

The Chapter 220 voluntary integration program was upended by the 2015-2017 state budget after claims that the program faced declining interest. For 38 years prior, Chapter 220 provided additional funds to school districts to better integrate their schools - allowing minority students to attend and receive state-supported transportation to the school of their choice. Participating suburban schools were to have less than 30% minority students to be eligible for the program.

This program was successful in integrating a percentage of students who applied. However, while the administration argued the program faced declining interest (and therefore should have been cut), statistics on program interest indicate that, if anything, the program should have been expanded.

[In the Milwaukee Public School District \(MPS\) alone](#), 495 students applied for the program, with only 52 gaining entry. The remaining 443 were put on a waitlist. In the previous year 700 MPS students applied with only 77 getting seats. Counting participants alone, ending the Chapter 220 program disenfranchised approximately 28,000 students in 22 districts across the state.

In its years of operation, the program was also successful at diversifying suburban school districts, especially in one of the country's most segregated metropolitan areas. Diversifying our schools, and ensuring that minority students have equal access to a high-quality education, is an exceptionally important goal for this task force to address. Research shows that racial isolation - allowing for specific racial dominance in urban and suburban districts - is harmful to students' learning.

[A study conducted in North Carolina High Schools](#) examined the performance of African-American students in racially isolated (more than 75% African-American students) schools. The results, as expected, showed that attendance at racially isolated schools was associated with lower performance on basic metrics - such as English and Algebra comprehension exams.

In 2015, nearly half of MPS' African-American students attended schools with more than 90% African-American attendance. To date, Chapter 220 was the only program in Wisconsin that specifically addressed the issue of racial isolation. Without the constraints of Chapter 220, and other diversifying programs, this proportion can only become worse.

II. Addressing Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Between 2010 and 2014, Wisconsin saw the [exit of 1,478 teachers](#) from Wisconsin public schools. During this time student enrollment stayed the same. Over half of those departures were in or near the Milwaukee area. A large portion of teachers exiting the profession were much younger than retirement age. With teachers and school staff unable to refinance and repay student loans, many are leaving the profession for other well-paying fields just to make ends meet. Not only is Wisconsin losing teachers at an alarming rate, but we are not graduating as many new teachers to replace those who move to other careers or those who retire.

There has been a sharp decline in students entering the teaching field. According to a report produced by the Public Policy Forum, between 2010 and 2014, Wisconsin's teacher training programs produced 7% fewer graduates and enrollment in those programs has [dropped by a staggering 28%](#).

Learning cannot take place without teachers. Principals and administrators are faced with educating virtually the same amount of students with declining staff. Instruction has proven to be of higher quality with smaller teacher to student ratios, as students are able to receive more individual attention. When these ratios exceed 17:1, instruction suffers.

To provide high quality education we must invest in attracting and retaining teachers who are dedicated and passionate. Incentivizing and supporting high-risk, high-need positions is a start to accomplish this goal. Overall, the image and prestige of the teaching profession must be restored in order reverse the declining trends that began following 2010.

Recommendations:

1. Pass and Implement Fair Funding

As explained earlier in this report, fair funding legislation would provide more state support for school districts. This additional revenue will allow districts to offer experienced teachers competitive salaries and attract new teachers to gain teaching experience in high-need urban settings. According to the [latest statistics](#) provided by the National Education Association, Wisconsin's average starting teacher salary (\$33,546) trails both the National average (\$36,141) and the average of similar Midwest states (\$34,590).

A recent report by Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty showed that full-time teacher salaries in Wisconsin declined by an average of approximately \$2,000 annually since 2011's Act 10. When benefits are factored in the [decline ranged from \\$2,095 to \\$5,580](#).

Prestige, respect and adequate compensation must be restored to the profession before increases in well-trained and experienced teachers will occur. When pay and benefits increase, so will prestige in addition to the number students entering the profession.

By restoring the cuts that school districts have endured since 2010, they will be more prepared to offer competitive salaries to attract and retain highly qualified teachers that our students deserve.

2. Create Grants for Incentive Pay

In many of the Committee's hearings around the state, members heard about the challenges urban schools face in recruiting and retaining teachers. Drawing experienced teachers to high-need schools is a unique problem that the legislature should address in order to provide an equal education to all Wisconsin students.

Currently, drawing individuals into the teaching profession around the state has been a challenge. With teacher pay remaining stagnant and benefits being cut, many more longtime teachers are leaving the profession with fewer qualified, trained teachers available to fill their positions.

During the Committee's hearing in Madison, representatives for Teach for America presented on the benefits of its model to infuse a school with new teachers from its program. While models like these are beneficial to filling vacancies, our state should also look at sustainable methods to attract long-term, highly qualified educators to a school.

One way to address this issue is to provide financial bonuses, thereby incentivizing urban-area teaching positions. [Various studies](#) have indicated the importance of higher pay in both retaining teachers, and attracting new teachers to a district.

The U.S. Department of Education currently awards [Teacher Incentive Fund \(TIF\) grants](#) to states to improve pay structures in high-need schools.

Wisconsin does not currently have its own program to award performance-based compensation in high-need districts, nor does it have a program to specifically incentivize movement to high-need districts.

Therefore, our recommendation is that the state create and adequately fund a grant program to incentivize an existing Wisconsin School District teacher's transfer to a high-need school.

3. Expand HEAB Grants for Loan Forgiveness

Due to many factors in urban areas, coupled with recent declines in university education enrollment, it is difficult to find an equal number of teachers to fill vacancies in urban schools. This results in larger class sizes, fewer certified teachers filling positions, and ultimately, fewer opportunities for student growth. In previous sections, the unique challenges of repaying an education degree were discussed. State-sponsored loan repayment programs can help to ease this burden, and make the teaching profession a more attractive postgraduate option.

Currently, the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) administers a teacher loan program for students who meet certain eligibility criteria, including enrollment in a program of study leading to a teacher's license in a teacher shortage field. Under the program, HEAB may award, to an eligible student, a loan of up to \$10,000 annually for up to three years. HEAB must forgive 25 percent of the loan for each school year that the loan recipient is 1) employed in the city of Milwaukee as a full-time elementary or secondary school teacher in a high-demand teacher shortage field; and 2) receives a teacher rating of proficient or distinguished.

During the most recent legislative session, the HEAB program was expanded to include teachers employed in school districts in rural counties. With additional areas included, and the same amount of grant funding, the grants would go to a smaller percentage of teachers and become even more competitive.

Therefore, the Committee members recommend the expansion of HEAB teacher loan forgiveness to urban areas facing teacher shortages, and increasing funding to the loan program.

4. Reinstate a Fully-Funded SAGE Program

The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program has been in effect since 1996. The aim of the SAGE program is to improve student achievement through the implementation of four school-improvement strategies:

- 1) Class sizes of no more than 18:1 or 30:2 in grades K-1, and grades 2-3 at the district/school's choice;
- 2) Increase collaboration between schools and their communities;
- 3) Implementation of a rigorous curriculum; and
- 4) Improved professional development and staff-evaluation practices.

325 schools in Wisconsin have participated in the SAGE program. 2015 Wisconsin Acts 53 and 71 effectively ended the SAGE program, which will be phased out by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

The SAGE program was replaced with the Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) program. The AGR program would only be available to previous SAGE participants.

The AGR program has a few different requirements of participating schools. The requirements are:

Implement one of three strategies in each class in each participating grade:

- a. Professional development on small group instruction and reduction of class size to an 18:1 or 30:2 ratio
- b. Instructional coaching for the class teachers
- c. One-to-one tutoring for pupils in the class who are struggling with reading or math.

Due to the differences in programs, as well as availability for new schools to participate, we recommend the following: the continuation of the SAGE program, factoring in new AGR guidelines, and restoration of pre-2015 funding levels.

Under the new AGR program, only SAGE-participating schools will be able to receive grant funding. This model is not sustainable for future practice, as school districts' needs may change in future years. Furthermore, limiting requirements for schools under these programs – allowing them to choose one of three strategies – will not be beneficial to students. Combining achievement-gap reduction strategies, as was done in the SAGE program, calls for required higher standards in public schools.

Additionally, funding for the SAGE program was cut in the 2015-2017 state budget. Funding to the SAGE program allowed schools to staff additional classrooms, all while keeping class sizes smaller – allowing low-income students to have better interaction with their teachers. Therefore, the minority members of this committee further recommend a restoration of funding to the SAGE/AGR programs.

5. Develop Programs to Recruit More Teachers of Color

Pablo Muirhead Ph.D. - coordinator of Teacher Education at Milwaukee Area Technical College - testified that students of color perform better when they feel culturally validated by increasing cultural congruence between students and teachers. These students perform better when they see role models of similar race and ethnicity in positions of respect. Dr. Muirhead illustrated that in many of Wisconsin's urban districts, the demographics of the teaching force are not changing in sync with the pace of student demographics. Districts outside of major urban centers such as Milwaukee and Madison face massive racial disparities between minority students and their teachers. The Green Bay School District has a 39% racial minority student population while only 3% of their teaching force consists of minorities.

Dr. Muirhead testified that excessive assessments, the draw of other professions and a lack of classroom autonomy were closely associated with teachers leaving the profession and declining enrollment in state postsecondary education programs.

Programs like Milwaukee Area Technical College's (MATC) Teacher Education Track work specifically to attract students of color into the education field to reduce the significant gap

between the percentage of students of color in student bodies and the percentage of teachers of color in their schools.

Implemented in 1988, this program was created for urban and minority students from lower-income families to be given the opportunity to begin their foundational courses at MATC at a lower cost and then assisted in transferring to a four-year institution to complete their degrees. Currently, 70% of the students in this program are racial minorities.

In addition to the MATC Teacher Education track program, Dr. Muirhead also highlighted the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC) as an option for minority students who seek training and support for getting prepared and licensed to teach in a challenging urban setting. MTEC is a non-profit organization focused on teacher certification and professional development in order to recruit, support and retain teachers in urban settings. Their programs offer prospective educators customized certification programs, professional development workshops and instructional coaching.

The legislature should make significant investments to strengthen these programs and either expand them or create similar programs in areas of need around the state. By implementing and investing in more of these types of initiatives, it is our hope that achievement gaps caused by racial incongruence can be addressed and inspire the next generation of diverse and well-trained teachers.

III. Mental Health, Behavior, and Truancy

Mental Health

As poverty affects brain development in early childhood, it is often just one factor in the many causes for sub-par mental health. Research has found that social and emotional variables related to mental health exert the most powerful influence on academic performance. Yet, according to the Department of Public Instruction, an estimated 1 in 5 children in Wisconsin have a significant mental health issue that disrupts their performance in school, at home or in the community. An estimated 20-30 percent of these students do not receive the services that they need to help address these issues.

Wisconsin schools, due to a lack of appropriately allocated resources, are falling woefully behind in providing up-to-date special education services. As such, we proposed two lines of recommendations: one to help reduce the incidence of impoverished lifestyles that contribute to mental health issues, and one to help youth in schools who have already developed mental health issues.

Impacts of Suspensions/Expulsions

These two penalties for in-school misbehavior can result in a student's increasing or permanent disengagement from their educational process and progress. This disengagement can lead to, in

the case of one or more suspensions, a student becoming chronically absent or even truant, even when the student is not on probationary terms at school.

In addition, the State does not require school districts to provide alternative education programs outside an institutional setting to suspended or expelled students. Therefore, suspension and expulsion regularly leave youth with little or no supervision and without the opportunity of an education. They then become the problem of local governments and police departments, and sometimes the juvenile justice system.

The use of suspensions and expulsions to discipline misbehaving students leads to other problematic results as well. The federal government in recent years has considered the complexities of the national absenteeism/truancy problem [grave enough](#) that it issued directives to all school districts to mitigate the impact of penalties for misbehavior (i.e., suspension or expulsion) on students of color in particular. [Recent research](#) shows the same impact among students with disabilities.

Behavioral issues and high levels of truancy are often the product of a student's environment. The recommendations provided below alter or increase school's approaches to these issues, allowing the Wisconsin urban-area schools to better meet the needs of today's students.

1. Create Initiatives for Trauma-Informed Care and Child Interactive Therapy Program Grants

In a child's development, the benefits of proper at-home care cannot be overstated. There are programs around the state that focus on specialized therapies to encourage positive interaction between parents and children. The Children's Hospital of Wisconsin's Strong Families, Thriving Children program is implementing a trauma-informed therapy called Parent-Child Interactive therapy, in which a therapist coaches a parent on positive interactions with a child who has been subject to Adverse Childhood Experiences.

[Research on child development](#) indicates that children who experience adversity are 25% more likely to face enduring physical, mental and behavioral challenges. Childhood adversity has also been proven to cause issues in later life - including substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, poor health outcomes, and poor academic performance. Adverse childhood experiences can include exposure to violence, incarceration, extreme poverty and more.

Currently, the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin has partnered with UW-Milwaukee's Helen Bader School of Social Welfare to create the Institute for Child and Family Well-Being, a community-based approach to address issues of childhood adversity in the Milwaukee area. The Institute emphasizes the importance of Early Intervention as well - encouraging the development of stable, caring relationships in students. This type of program could be of great assistance to students in MPS. Unfortunately, similar programs are not available to all impoverished families in urban areas. Therefore, it is critically important that schools take on some of this responsibility.

Due to the importance of early assistance in childhood development, this Committee recommends the development of Child Interactive Therapy grants for urban schools. This type of grant would allow schools to create partnerships with therapy programs, allowing therapists to

coach teachers with similar trauma-informed methods of interacting with children, widening the use of a proven tool in helping children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences.

2. Provide Aid for Districts with a High Percentage of Mobile and Transient Students

Mobility numbers are determined by the number of students who move within a school district or into a school district after the start of the school year. Open enrollment and vouchers are not factored into the numbers.

The last district report card issued by DPI was for the 2013-14 school year. The fourth page of the report card is titled “District Mobility” and tracks four types of mobility:

1. Students attending a new school that did not exist the prior school year.
2. Students who are attending a new school because their school closed the prior year.
3. Students moving to another school within the district, so they were in the district for a full academic year, but not in the same school.
4. Students that moved into the district and did not attend for the full academic year.

High mobility creates a challenge for districts because when students move during the school year, it requires the district to revisit staffing and resources to ensure that all the students’ needs are met. Students who live in transient or highly mobile situations suffer due to the lack of educational stability. Repeatedly transferring within a district leads to a constant period of readjustment and a lack of focus on learning.

In testimony before the Committee, Michelle Langenfeld, Superintendent of the Green Bay Area Public School District, noted that after the start of the school year the district added 407 additional students and saw 331 leave for another district. According to Langenfeld, when students move in this manner, it requires the district to revise staffing and resources in order to ensure students’ needs are met. Green Bay is not the only urban school district in Wisconsin facing this issue.

Therefore, the legislature should provide additional aid for districts with a high percentage of mobile and transient students focused on providing transportation with the goal of keeping students in the schools where they first are enrolled. This added stability would provide benefits to the student’s overall stability, educational focus and the district’s ability to allocate resources with certainty.

3. Increase state reimbursement of Special Education to 33%

Special Education services in schools present unique challenges to a district, both in terms of funding and maintaining adequate curriculum. In order to address the specific needs of a special education student, districts often need to allocate more resources to a special education student than they would a typical student.

In order to meet this challenge, districts have relied on state reimbursements for providing special education instruction. However in recent decades reimbursements have fallen significantly, forcing districts to shoulder the cost burdens. The reimbursement rate to districts for the cost of providing special education instruction has fallen from about 70% to about 25%.

As a result of the 2015-2017 budget, special education reimbursement rates were frozen. The reimbursement rate has not been increased since 2009. Given the current freeze, without additional funding [the reimbursement rate is likely to continue to fall](#), as costs for educating special education students continues to increase.

There are [five states](#) in the United States that currently fund special education through a reimbursement program: Wisconsin, Michigan, Nebraska, Vermont, and Wyoming. Of these states, Wisconsin has the lowest special education reimbursement rate.

The State Superintendent of Schools has noted publicly that this funding level could be in conflict with the State Constitution's guarantee of a fundamental education for all children in Wisconsin.

While immediately returning to a 70% reimbursement level may not be feasible, increasing the reimbursement levels slightly would do a lot for our districts, and make our state more competitive in providing a fair education.

Therefore, we recommend that the 2015-2017 special education freeze is reversed, and that the legislature boost special education reimbursement to 33% in the 2017-2019 budget.

4. Devise Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion

Schools understandably need to maintain a safe, undisturbed learning environment for their students and as such require the ability to remove students if they create frequent disruptions or safety concerns. Under state law, individual school districts are permitted to require educational alternatives for suspended or expelled students. Some do, while others do not. We recommend that all school districts in the state be required develop plans to ensure safe, alternative means of educating students who are either in danger of, or have been suspended or expelled.

Statewide, districts have pursued different strategies including first offenders programs, abeyance programs, redirecting students to specialized schools including virtual schools, and restorative justice programs to decrease class time lost to suspension and expulsion and reduce distraction to all parties involved.

According to the DPI report on [Alternatives to Expulsion: Case Studies of Wisconsin School Districts](#), leaders in alternative programs offered the following suggestions: more diverse and expanded funding to address alternatives; additional community mental health and social services; and securing staff, including student services staff such as school social workers, school psychologists, and trained Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse counselors.

5. Create Outreach Teams in High-Truancy Schools

In order to achieve a holistic response to the need to reduce frequent suspensions and expulsions, funding must be provided to hire “outreach teams” to work out of the schools with high need for disciplinary responses to students’ misbehavior. These teams could include staff such as social workers, counselors, parents as peers, [technology experts](#), etc. to physically visit the homes of students with chronic discipline problems and work with their families to address underlying issues relating to misbehavior at school. These teams would help families engage in and proceed through the changes they would have to make in order for the students in the family to attend school and be productive and non-disruptive. The staff would have to be highly trained in available resources, advocacy, and an understanding about how particular schools and school districts are or are not functioning regarding unruly students.

Home visiting has been shown in other areas, such as child abuse prevention or early childhood health, to be an effective intervention that can make headway in situations that otherwise seem intractable.

Some existing programs address truancy in these ways:

- [The Harlem Children’s Zone](#) provides appropriate supports and services such as anger-management groups or referrals to substance-abuse treatment providers, and can assist families with any number of acute needs, from housing to clothing to after-school programs for their children. In addition, they conduct regular home visits in order to build stronger relationships and gain the trust of families in order to better support them.
- [Colorado’s Truancy Reduction Program](#) identified primary causes of truancy, and went on to create “Keep Kids in School” projects, which included community liaisons to connect with families.

6. Apply Targeted Community-Schools Model Services

What remains after every conversation or argument about the truancy rate in Milwaukee Public Schools or any other schools, is the truth that without attacking the causes of truancy on the front end, it will continue to happen. It is important to enforce consequences on truant kids in addition to the statutory consequences for their parent/guardian. But whether lenient or severe, consequences alone do not stop the problem of kids deciding it’s not worth their time, or that it’s too dangerous, or they need to work to attend school.

The models of the wrap-around or community school, of the safety/assistance zone around schools, could be applied in an even more targeted way to truant students and their families. If these models are already in place for entire schools, these services could be tailored specifically, with separate teams, for truancy cases. It’s hard to help students’ lives improve when they’re in school; when they’re not, it’s harder in a much bigger way. Special resources would be needed to actually address this problem, no matter the school or school district.

7. Pass Legislation Regarding Educational Neglect

Chronic tardiness or absenteeism in elementary school set patterns that are difficult to break as children grow older. Without a consistent educational presence in their life a child may grow disinterested in education, only exacerbating attendance and performance issues. When absenteeism issues present themselves in early school age children it can be a sign of educational neglect.

Many times these issues can be addressed through a combination of remedies. Some of these include informing parents of available individual or family counseling, drug or alcohol counseling, parenting skills classes, and making certain that parents have a clear understanding of their own legal obligations regarding their child's attendance and compulsory attendance laws. If these efforts fail and a parent or caretaker's actions are directly resulting in attendance issues or impeding the ability of a child to learn it is necessary to consider this educational neglect.

Wisconsin should enact legislation that extends the definition of neglect to include educational neglect defined as "the absence of education as required by law if a parent has been given the opportunity to correct truant behaviors." In order to add this provision Wisconsin should pass 2015 [AB 955](#), legislation regarding the definition of neglect that removes the term "physical" from the definition of neglect to allow for a more complete definition.

IV. Education Alternatives

As school districts and educators are increasingly tasked with providing more than just a Standard English language education in core subjects, schools are being asked to expand their mission and scope of services in a rigid funding and regulatory environment. In Wisconsin's urban school districts these challenges are compounded by higher concentrations of poverty and English as a second language/English language learners (ESL/ELL).

[According to the Department of Public Instruction](#), for the 2015-2016 school year, 5.6% of Wisconsin students are ESL/ELL and a staggering 39.5% of students qualify as economically disadvantaged. These challenges require innovative solutions such as an increase in the number of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate options and other unique approaches to post-secondary preparation and job training in the classroom.

Recommendations:

1. Increase resources and incentives for ESL/ELL training both for incoming and existing teachers

As the population of English language learners in Wisconsin increases in areas both urban and rural, it is vital that we provide adequate resources to incentivize high-quality educators to become trained in ESL/ELL education in order to ensure quality educational opportunities for all students. In impoverished urban school districts the challenge to recruit and retain high quality educators who are prepared to work in classrooms where English is not the native language of most students is doubly difficult.

Currently there are funds available under [s. 20.255 \(2\) \(cc\)](#) and distributed under the Bilingual-bicultural education aids program. These funds can be used to reimburse some district costs to administer ESL/ELL programs.

Wisconsin should increase the funding available to DPI as part of Bilingual-Bicultural education aids and allow for a greater proportion of the aids to be available for the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers and teaching assistants. From the testimony heard by the committee, some of the most effective ways to recruit and retain these professionals are tuition or loan assistance, scholarships, professional development and increased mentoring opportunities.

2. Invest in Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Expansion Grants for High School Pupils

Improving equity and opportunity in urban schools includes making AP and IB courses accessible to students regardless of what school they attend. These grants will help schools and districts work together to develop and implement an expansion plan for AP and IB to allow students in all schools to enroll in a variety of courses with more challenging coursework, whether in person or via distance learning.

As the committee saw in Green Bay, a combination of increased academic rigor, a strong student support network, and increased student engagement can lead to dramatic improvements in educational outcomes. Green Bay West High School provided a compelling example of such improvements. Since West became an IB school in 2011, the percentage of graduates earning some college credit has grown to half of the student body and amount of scholarship dollars earned by graduates has nearly tripled. These successes can be traced back to West's conversion to an IB World School and its different approaches to learning and encouragement for students to take responsibility for their own educational progress. State grants for the expansion of additional IB schools and AP courses would help duplicate this successful formula of increased community engagement and academic rigor in urban schools across the state.

3. Allow for the Creation of Flexible School Districts of Innovation

Green Bay Area Public School District provided evidence of the need for increased flexibility regarding mandates to allow for new ways of educating. School Districts of Innovation are a concept that respects the expertise of our local school boards, administrators, and educators and allows them to implement the 21st century educational innovation that is essential in meeting the needs of all students. It creates the space that is needed for these breakthroughs to occur by building an infrastructure and culture in our state that welcomes and encourages creative practices and partnerships and unleashes the power of district, school, and classroom-based innovations.

Wisconsin must pass legislation that enables and encourages urban, suburban, and rural districts to apply for the District of Innovation designation, which will allow them to disregard certain identified state mandates that impede their ability to create the optimal education environment for their students. These designations will not be granted without a rigorous evaluation process

conducted by a state Innovation Board and the Department of Public Instruction, and no waivers will be given in the case of necessary health and safety protections.

V. Achievement Gap

“Achievement gaps are defined as differences in levels of achievement between groups of students. While some might argue that these differences in levels of achievement are inevitable, most policymakers and education professionals view gaps as a serious problem. This perspective is based on a belief that no group of students should consistently score well below other groups. As reported in the popular press, Wisconsin’s achievement gaps for students of color, students from low income families, and students with disabilities have persisted for decades and are now among the worst in the nation.” - Wisconsin School Psychologists Association (WSPA) testimony - Eau Claire, March 2016

According to further testimony from the WSPA, the vast majority of achievement gaps are created by issues of poverty, dialect and language, and trauma. Students from homes where English is not the primary language essentially have to learn a second language just to learn at school.

Children from impoverished families face challenges in proper nutrition, hygiene and clothing, and housing. These same children in poverty are often faced with a lack of language exposure, which inhibits growth in the neural networks responsible for processing spoken and written language. Trauma-related stress has also been shown to hinder brain development and academic growth. The WSPA noted that early intervention and high-quality instruction is “highly effective in preventing and remediating achievement gaps.”

To ensure that our state is providing quality education for students of all backgrounds we must find ways to close these gaps to ensure that students’ educations will give them pathways to success, whether they choose to pursue additional postsecondary education for a professional career or decide to join the workforce immediately with the skills they’ve already learned.

Graduation rates are perhaps the best measuring stick of success in K-12 education. Statistics provided by the US Department of Labor show that students who graduate with a diploma and enroll in postsecondary education are more than two times less likely to be unemployed ([14.5%](#)) than students who do not finish high school (30.3%). In addition, high school graduates on the average [earn \\$6,100 more per year](#) than individuals who do not graduate.

Many of the urban areas that were visited by the Task Force produce lower-than-average graduation rates compared to both the state (88%) and national (81%) averages. As we heard in testimony, these rates especially suffer among low-income students and students for color.

In order to close that gap, solutions must be found to ensure that every student has a fair opportunity to succeed. Higher graduation rates mean more skilled workers and job creators who will be the backbone of our economy and our future.

Recommendations:

1. Develop State-level Programs to Assist Districts in Implementing Achievement Gap Intervention (Response to Intervention) Programs

WSPA, citing multiple studies, outlined in their testimony that once significant achievement gaps have been identified in students that interventions are crucial to close these gaps. They identified an effective strategy known as Response to Intervention (RtI). They recommend beginning with supplemental interventions to assist students struggling with proficiency standards. According to the WSPA's cited studies these interventions must include and provide elements of explicit and systematic instruction at an appropriate instructional level, with ample practice and feedback, in addition to the core curriculum. These interventions should be monitored and the results assessed to determine whether or not sufficient progress is being made or if the intervention must be modified.

In certain situations, the aforementioned interventions do not yield the desired results. In extreme cases in which the student struggles in multiple areas ranging from lack of attendance, to mental health and behavioral issues, they must undergo a more intensive intervention that must be customized specifically to a student's needs. These plans can include increased intervention time, changing learning or intervention materials used, and creating supports to increase engagement and motivation.

Based on this testimony, we recommend the legislature develop a state-level program in which a school district can be provided a framework of critical components, consistent definitions and applications to support school-wide implementations of RtI to address achievement gaps in schools. WSPA provided the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) [RtI implementation plan](#) as a successful example. From 1998-2013, under this program, Florida's scores in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rose from 205 to 225, taking their state rank from 35th to the top 10. These gains have translated to significant shrinkage in achievement gaps for students from low-income households, students of color and students with disabilities. Development and implementation of these types of programs will undoubtedly help reduce achievement gaps in areas of high-need in Wisconsin.

2. Provide grants for expanding AVID/TOPS pilot programs in urban areas

At the Task Force tour in Madison, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program in conjunction with the Boys & Girls Club's Teens of Promise (TOPS) program were featured as college-readiness programs to prepare kids for successful post-secondary educations. The focus of the program is to teach and reinforce organizational strategies, study skills, critical thinking, to provide tutorial support, and to make sure students are prepared not only for college, but for the careers that may follow. Students learn how to properly complete FAFSA forms and college admission applications and receive guidance in enrolling and completing courses required by four-year colleges. First and foremost, students are given the path, skills and tools to graduate high school on time.

The programs are structured through an elective course that accelerates under-achieving students into more rigorous courses and provides the necessary support for those students to succeed. The

students not only receive support and help from teachers and staff, but also from other students as the program has a focus on guiding and supporting peers.

Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) started the program at Madison East High School in 2007 with 28 students. It has been such a success that there are now over 1,200 students in 11 middle schools and 4 high schools participating in the program. The program was studied by Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, UW-Madison Professor of Educational Policy Studies and Sociology and the founding director of Wisconsin HOPE lab. The report found that the AVID/TOPS programs increased cumulative and core GPAs of all high school participants with most notable gains and gap reductions for low-income students, African-American students, low-income students of color and male students of color. The report also shows great increases in Advanced Placement (AP) course enrollment in the aforementioned subgroups in addition to great improvements in attendance and behavioral referrals.

Facts and Statistics:

- 99% of Seniors enrolled in the AVID program graduate on time
- AVID helps socioeconomically disadvantaged succeed – In 2013-2014 among Seniors in the program 75% of participants' parents did not go to college or university, 74% qualify for free/reduced lunch and 22% are English language learners
- Seniors graduating through the AVID program apply to a four-year University 88% of the time with a 78% acceptance rate
- As of 2013, 91% of AVID high school seniors complete four-year college entrance requirements versus the 36% national average.
- MMSD's AVID/TOPS program was recently certified as a National AVID demonstration school – a distinction given to only the top 2% of schools implementing the program

We recommend that urban districts in Wisconsin include the AVID program in their course offerings. MMSD's program is made possible by TOPS, as they currently provide full-time student coordinators, after-school mentors, funding for tutors and a selection of college and career related field trips. In lieu of support provided by the Boys & Girls Club TOPS program, we recommend that state-funded grants be available to provide the service and staff to implement the AVID program in urban areas of high-need.

VI. Early Childhood Development and Alternative Schools

A child's experiences early in life are a major determinant of their later level of success. The State has a vested interest in ensuring that children in urban school districts receive the same benefits and opportunities available to preschoolers in all other districts. Wisconsin spends an estimated \$3,527 per child enrolled in preschool, ranking its per-student spending at 27th out of 41 states that offer state-funded preschool. 4K is funded at 0.5 the level of other grade levels, and 3K receives no state funding at all. Total state spending on preschool for the 2013-2014 school year was \$175,264,100.

Recommendations:

1. Provide Full State Funding for 4K and Partial State Funding for 3K Instruction.

Recent studies have shown the benefit of full-time 4K, especially for at-risk children. In fact, according to research published by the Human Capital Research Collaborative at the University of Minnesota, children in full-day preschool programs scored higher on school readiness indicators and had better attendance than did peers in part-time programs.

Wisconsin has an over 165 year tradition of supporting four year old kindergarten and Wisconsin is currently ranked 6th among states for the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool. However, Wisconsin's state-funded 4K preschool program meets only 5 of the 10 quality recommendations put forth by the National Institute on Early Education Research. This ranks Wisconsin's 4K program near the bottom in terms of quality, at 41st out of 53 preschool programs in the U.S.

The Committee heard in Milwaukee that partially funding K3 students at 0.5 FTE would bring in an additional \$3.5 million in revenue, which would allow the district to expand K3 services to 30 additional MPS classrooms serving 1800 more K3 students. Fully funding K4 education would bring approximately \$21 million more in resources to the district resulting in smaller class sizes, additional paraprofessionals, and increased professional development of staff.

Our recommendation is that the Legislature should pass legislation allowing for districts to count every 4K pupil as 1.0 pupils and for the first time extending funding at a 0.5 pupil level for 3K programs. This funding will allow for the full extension of 4K preschool programs across the state and provide the option for districts that wish to explore starting 3K programs. Additionally, providing adequate and equitable funding will ensure that Wisconsin's 4K programs meet basic quality requirements and serve as a strong foundation.

2. Increase Funding and Resources for Summer Reading Programs, with an Emphasis on 4K through 3rd grade

The importance of early reading instruction on future educational success cannot be overstated. [Studies show](#) that one in six children who are not reading proficiently by 3rd grade do not graduate high school on time, at a rate four times greater than proficient early readers.

The impacts of low literacy rates become even more staggering when examining outcomes for below-basic readers. 23% of below-basic readers drop out or fail to finish high school on time, compared to 9% with basic reading skills and 4% of proficient readers.

Most community libraries in Wisconsin offer summer reading programs, which seek to improve reading skills for youth, young adults, and adults. Unfortunately, participants in such reading programs are a self-selecting sample – it is unlikely through these programs that a large group of basic or below-basic readers will be reached.

In order to best reach the largest number of students, it would be beneficial for school districts to implement their own summer reading programs.

This legislative session, 2015 Assembly Bill 338 was introduced to create grants for summer reading improvement programs in the Milwaukee Public School district. The bill would have required the Milwaukee Public School District to apply to the Department of Public Instruction for a grant on behalf of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University to conduct a summer reading program.

In addition to proposing a similar program for MPS, it may be beneficial for the legislature to consider opening up the grant program to urban districts across the state, with an emphasis on 4K- 3rd grade, in order to improve proficiency by the 3rd grade mark.

3. Create Grants for Community Schools

[A proposal](#) put forward during the 2015-2016 legislative session involved investing in community schools. As defined by the legislation, a community school is a public school that focuses on improving student learning, strengthening families, developing healthier communities, working with community partners to provide additional services to the surrounding community and providing wrap-around support services to pupils and their families.

During task force meetings, education leaders often advocated funding community-focused schools. These types of schools would not only be focused on providing a quality education for students, but on improving their environment and making it more conducive to productive learning.

Community schools would focus on:

- Improving pupil learning through an engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging curriculum and high-quality teaching
- Strengthening families and developing healthier communities by integrating academics, health and social services, intergenerational programming, youth and community development, and community engagement
- Working with community partners to provide additional support and opportunities to the community surrounding the public school
- Providing wrap-around support services to pupils and their families, including nonemergency medical, dental, nursing, and optometric services and individualized social, emotional and behavioral services

In impoverished areas, the community schools model would seek to bridge the frequently-present gap between home and school life.

Therefore, our recommendation is that DPI create a community school start-up grant program, under which DPI awards competitive grants to school boards to plan and implement community schools.

Under this grant program, DPI would be required to allocate a portion of grant funding for planning and implementing community schools in high-poverty school districts (a school district in which at least 50% of the school district's enrollment was eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch in the federal school lunch program) and low-performing school districts (a public school that was in the lowest 5% of all public schools in the state in the previous school year or that was

placed in the lowest performance category in the most recent school district accountability report).

Implementing a community schools model in specific areas of the state, [according to the 2015 bill's author](#), “not only provides schools with the resources to succeed academically, but will also allow our community schools to address factors we know impact a student’s ability to thrive in school, such as access to a healthy diet, counseling services, medical and dental care, and a safe environment before and after school.”

Summary of Proposals

First and foremost, the minority party members of the Task Force would like to give thanks and show our gratitude to the countless district and school staff – including but not limited to: superintendents, principals, teachers and support staff - for giving us an inside look at the operations in their schools. We would also like to thank invited speakers and members of the respective communities for sharing data, best practices and an inside look at their successes in addition to insights on challenges ahead. Without these people, we would not have gained as deep an understanding of the issues facing our urban districts, nor would we have the information that we would need to begin to address the needs of these schools and districts.

It is time for the Wisconsin State Legislature to act. Data, research and testimony have made it clear that the state must invest on the front end of education to prevent insurmountable educational deficiencies in our urban students' academic careers. If we are able to give teachers and staff the resources they need to detect and identify these problems early, the return on investment and success rates will speak for themselves. Interventions are proven to be more effective at younger ages and it is imperative that we set at-risk and low-income students up for success early to improve overall academic performance and graduation rates.

This Task Force has shown us that any school in any district can be successful. The price for this success should not be viewed as a cost, but rather as an investment. The answers to challenges in educating our urban students are not wrapped up in a singular solution, but instead lie in a multifaceted collaboration in which the state and local communities provide adequate resources for teachers, support staff, parents and students to individualize learning and to give students the tools and skills they need to succeed.

Not every issue will ever be completely solved and new issues will undoubtedly emerge along the way. Only when we address the causes rather than the symptoms of urban education issues in a thoughtful and holistic manner can we make gains in establishing a standard from which we can continue to raise the bar to provide the education students in our urban communities deserve.