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Budget is a Win for Teachers

The most discussed portion of the recently passed state budget is the over \$600M increase in spending for our public schools. And rightfully so. Our children are our future workforce and this budget invests in their futures significantly. Equally as important as investing in our children, is investing in our children's teachers. Teachers play a vital role in shaping a child's educational outlook. This budget makes the necessary investments to support our state's world-class educators.

Wisconsin, like most states in the nation, is facing a teacher shortage that is felt throughout the state. To address this issue, the budget created a Teacher Development Program to help individuals, like teacher's aides, obtain a Bachelor's degree and a teaching license. These individuals have relevant classroom experience and often want to become full-time teachers, but face significant hurdles to becoming a fully licensed teacher. This program will partner school districts with local universities so that candidates may work towards a Bachelor's degree and full licensure without sacrificing time in the classroom. In addition to creating the program, the budget provides funding to help candidates afford the cost of tuition. Minnesota recently created a similar program and has seen success bringing in new teachers from diverse backgrounds into the classroom.

Rural school districts are even more challenged when trying to fill vacancies. The budget creates a program that places college students training to become teachers in rural schools. Not only will future teachers gain classroom experience earlier in their college career, the program will expose new teachers to the positive aspects of teaching in the many rural, tight-knit communities throughout Wisconsin.

Finally, the budget provides much needed relief for current teachers by simplifying the licensure process. Previously, to maintain a teaching license, a teacher had to complete an onerous, five-year process, every five-years, which involved writing a lengthy, verifiable professional growth plan. All this while simultaneously being evaluated under the Educator Effectiveness program. Subjecting teachers to two similar programs is unnecessary. Instead of two parallel teacher evaluation programs, the budget reinstates lifetime licenses and utilizes the Educator Effectiveness program, which uses local superintendents and principals instead of bureaucrats in Madison, to evaluate teachers. These changes will allow teachers to spend more time doing what they do best: educating our children.

The budget will not eliminate the teacher shortage our state is facing, but, when coupled with historic investments in education, it takes a big first step towards addressing this issue while at the same time rewarding our best and brightest teachers.

Despite all this budget does, there is still more work to do. My colleagues and I will continue to advocate to boost up our low-spending school districts and advance innovative ways to help our school districts provide a top-notch education in an ever-changing economy.