



Mineral Point Elementary School new teacher Jenny Singer shares a laugh with a student.



Attracting & Retaining

Ideas for overcoming today's teacher shortage | *Kym Buchanan*

We need to attract more teachers into Wisconsin schools. We also need to retain them better. We can do that partially by treating them as professionals, which includes trusting them with interesting problems to tackle. In fact, the current crisis is an opportunity to revisit what we want and need from K-12 schools and thus, teachers.

■ The Talent Shortage

We may be witnessing one of the worst hiring seasons in a generation. There just aren't enough good teachers looking for jobs in Wisconsin.

Principals report dismay at the low numbers and tepid qualifications of applicants in some specialties. In specialties where it's been challenging to recruit historically, prospects are grimmer than ever (*e.g.*, special education, technical education). Furthermore, loyalty seems lower, anecdotally. Significant differences in compensation and other incentives compel teachers to change districts, sometimes days before the start of a term.

I have a distinct perspective on this problem. I lead one of the oldest and largest teacher preparation programs in the state at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP). We recently launched our EdD in Educational Sustainability in which our students study how organizations like schools can be more resilient. I also participate in multiple organizations in teacher preparation. That includes serving on the Professional Standards Council, which advises the State Superintendent and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Finally, I have two daughters in local schools, and I worry about the quality of their education.

So far, we've seen many triage and low-threshold solutions. For example, districts have transitioned many substitute teachers into regular classroom teachers. (That's created a new problem: a sub shortage.) In June 2017, the DPI implemented emergency rule changes to give districts and licensing authorities more freedom.

Our School of Education is doing our part, including reducing obstacles in our traditional pathway (*e.g.*, more test waivers). We've also

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obtained a grant to develop new, innovative pathways to license working professionals in our region, whether they need to complete a baccalaureate degree or a post-baccalaureate induction.

To be clear, preparation programs haven't suddenly awakened to these issues. For years, a variety of programs around the state have offered alternative, yet, robust pathways (including UWSP). What's changed is that districts are more directly recruiting candidates for these programs. Some districts are even exploring funding candidates' enrollment or incentivizing completion.

■ New Teachers, New Licenses

Imagine a scenario in which a principal knows that the stay-at-home parent volunteering in their building has a non-teaching BA and a dream of rejoining the workforce. Similarly, imagine a district administrator who knows that one of their best student services paraprofessionals with an

associate's degree seems ready for a classroom of their own. Both these individuals could grow through alternative pathways like ours.

This spring, the DPI is presenting further, permanent rule changes to the state Legislature (explained on page 9). Based on what our lawmakers decide, the DPI will lead a multi-year process of revising the outcomes for teacher preparation programs. The licenses we grant the UWSP Class of 2023 will look very different from the Class of 2018. In particular, we anticipate new majors/licenses with a greater breadth of content over a deeper range of grades/ages.

Let's step back for a moment and consider what those scenarios and anticipated changes say about our profession. Our ship has so many leaks that we're desperate for any patch we can find. Principals have to scramble just to achieve the basic win of filling one position, one at a time. More clearly qualified individuals will become teachers, but so might

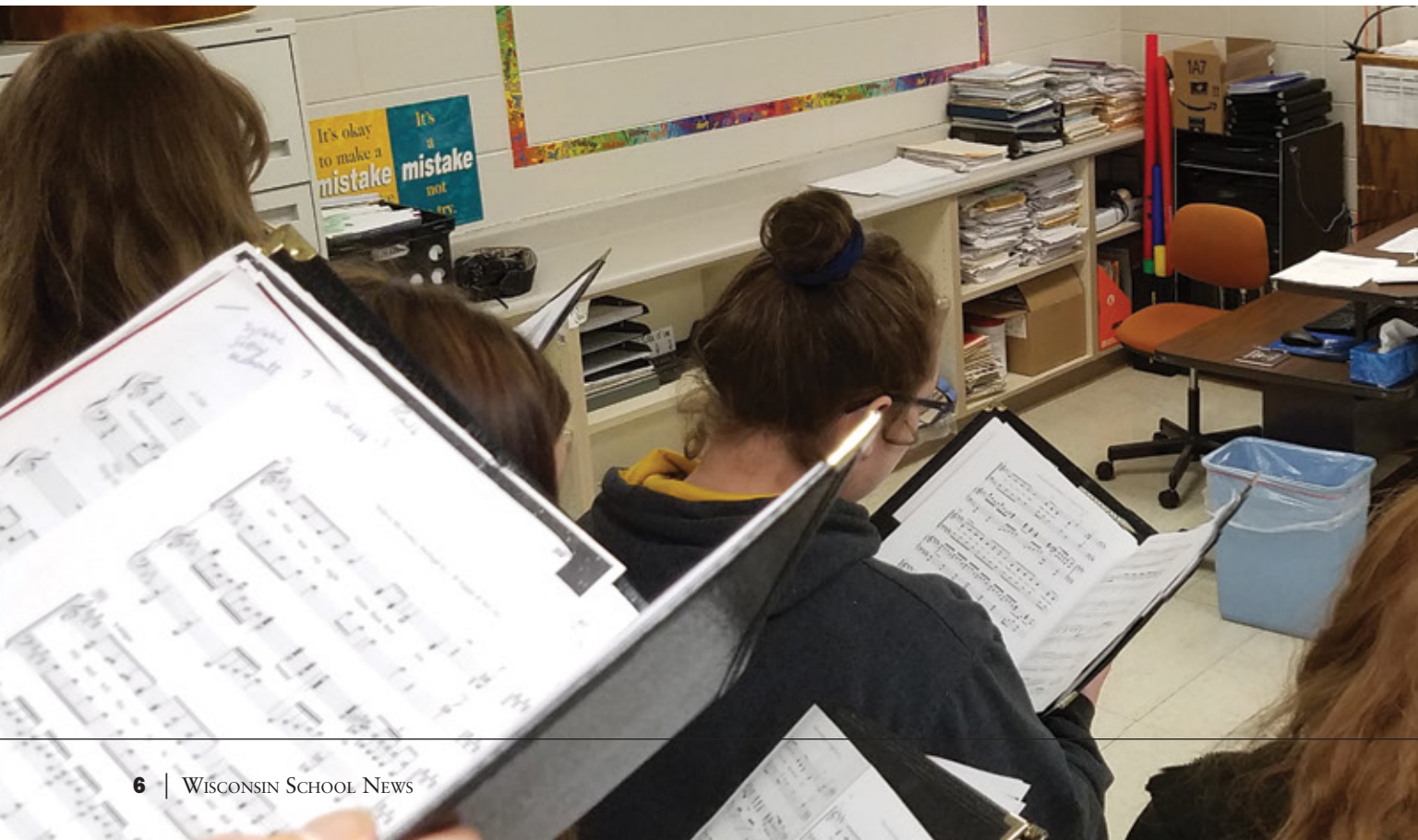
some marginally or under-qualified individuals. Schools seem just a few steps away from recruiting any reasonable adult who we can entrust with children.

■ The Talent Retention Challenge

I bring another distinct perspective to these issues, because I'm a scientist who studies human potential. Recently, I've been grappling with issues like how professionals find satisfaction and joy in their jobs, and how organizations can foster loyalty and growth in their employees.

We know that compensation is a key factor in attracting and retaining teachers. The talent shortage is driving up salaries, so that may help. But research and common sense show that many other factors impact employee satisfaction and loyalty. The ultimate influences on retaining a teacher may include the following.

- District and building leaders, especially those with mutual



only be assessed by professional educators, not standardized tests.

trust and respect for teachers.

- The workplace climate, *e.g.*, positivity, a shared narrative of success.
- Having the freedom to do the work teachers regard as interesting and meaningful (*e.g.*, the intellectually fun problems that originally drew them to a discipline and which engage students).
- How teaching is regarded and talked about by politicians and society.

If we just informally audit those influences, we're in even bigger trouble. I've had countless conversations with teachers who feel confusion, frustration, and even anger because they see teaching being de-professionalized. They acutely feel a lack of trust and respect in many ways. For example, some of the public rhetoric around standardized tests implies that we can't trust teachers to effectively teach and assess students.

■ Pivoting to the Future

The test craze is especially ironic, because we're chasing anachronistic ideals. In the 21st century, the secure, well-paying jobs require abilities that can only be assessed by professional educators, not standardized tests. I mean abilities like empathy, cultural competence, creativity, and collaboration. In contrast, standardized tests measure abilities that are growing obsolete as automation spreads, like memorizing facts and following a script.

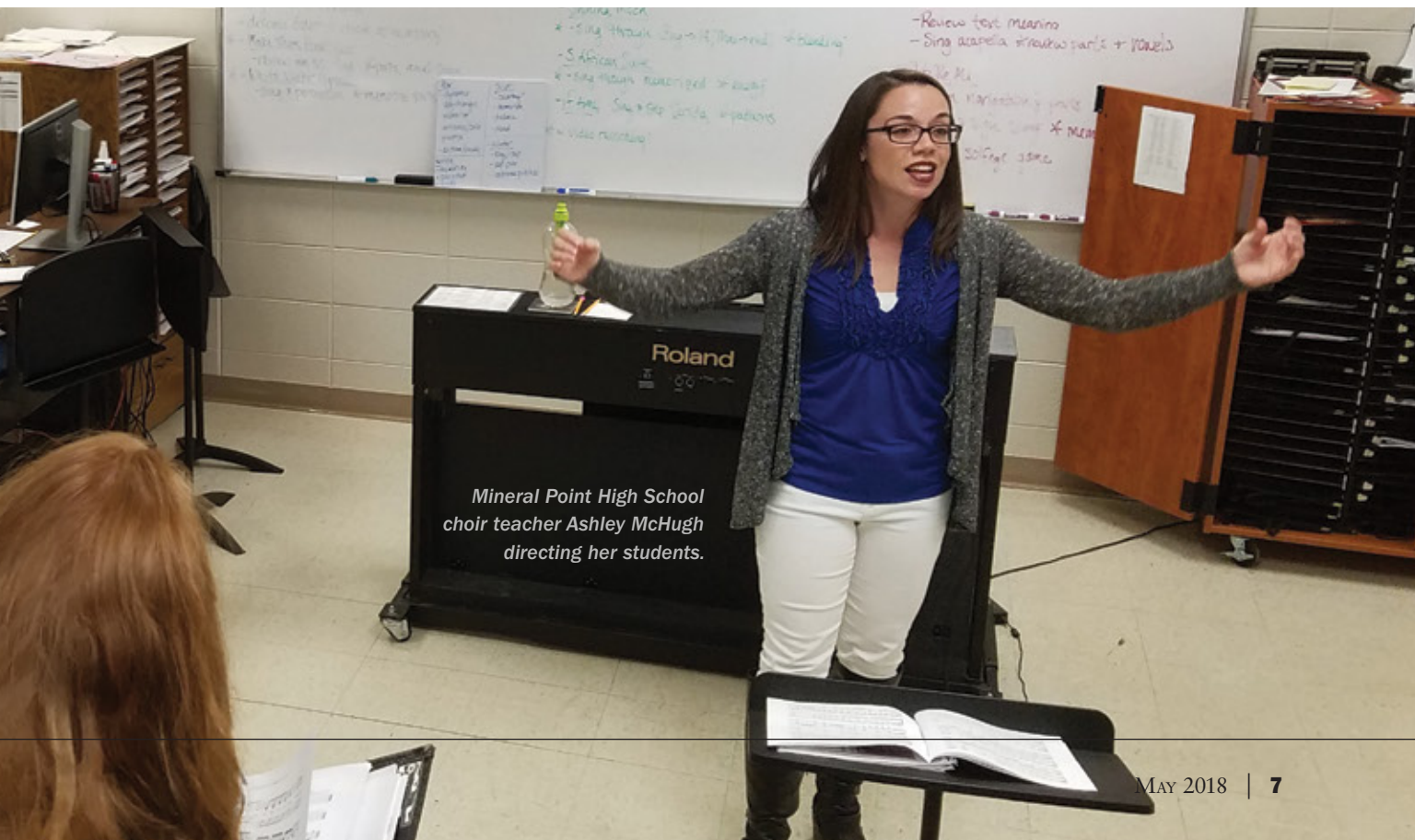
However, in that irony I find inspiration for action. If we want to retain teachers, we must give them more respect and trust. They want to teach towards meaningful outcomes, they want to feel that they're doing right by their students. Teachers would feel more respected, engaged, and impactful if they could focus more on preparing students for 21st century careers, not just the Forward Exam.

For better or worse, we're going to change preparation program

outcomes and district hiring practices. Prep programs like mine will do at least some restructuring to align with new DPI program outcomes. As districts hire during a talent shortage, at least some hiring decisions will be compromises on fit and readiness. So at least some teachers will need significant post-hire professional development.

In all that churn, perhaps the craziest thing we can do right now is rethink our K-12 student outcomes. Yet it may also be the smartest thing.

After all, in Wisconsin, education is far from alone in facing a talent shortage. The growth of many market sectors, especially high tech and health care, is constrained by talent. We need more young adults with stronger 21st century abilities. We could better serve the state by focusing on those abilities and by trusting teachers to design and assess the curriculum to match. At the same time, we'd improve teacher retention.



Mineral Point High School
choir teacher Ashley McHugh
directing her students.



Mineral Point Elementary School teacher Katie Hughes works with students.

■ Change Takes Resources

A commitment to pivot to more meaningful outcomes would force us to prioritize the qualifications that matter, both in prep programs and hiring. But real change takes real resources.

In any organization, leaders' time and attention are zero-sum. This means that a talent shortage steals energy from the long-term, hugely important work of leading improvement and innovation. If principals and senior teachers have to scramble just to hire junior teachers and back-stop their job performance, they don't have the capacity to pivot in the way I've described.

Prep programs like mine at UWSP already face many challenges of our own around enrollment, budget, and attracting and retaining our own talent pool. I'm not sure how my faculty would respond to a bold call to help rethink K-12 student outcomes in the midst of everything else.

But I'm certain that both university faculty and K-12 teachers are

wary of responding to one crisis after another, of just patching and jerry-rigging the status quo. We need a new strategy.

Some educators argue that the current crisis is partly manufactured by state funding and policies. Be that as it may, our best argument for more resources will always be what's best for K-12 students. That includes curriculum that better prepares them for 21st century careers. It also includes teachers who stay in the same schools year after year, forming long-term relationships with students, families, and the community.

■ Never Waste a Good Crisis

I've sketched an argument for a new strategy and new resources. We need to attract and retain more teachers, and we can do that partly by trusting them with interesting problems

to solve. Let's use the current crisis to revisit what we want and need from K-12 schools and teachers.

As a teacher, I try to always be ready for this question from a student: Why are we studying this? Maybe in the midst of this crisis, we can actually improve our answer to our students, and to ourselves. ■

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Photo credits: Joelle Doye, communications director, Mineral Point Unified School District.



New Law Makes Changes to Teacher Licensure

2017 Wisconsin Act 206 lays out changes to lifetime licensure and grants to assist high school teachers to qualify to teach dual enrollment course

In April, 2017 Wisconsin Act 206 went into effect, which made substantial changes to teacher licensure. Details on these changes are detailed below.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has been maintaining a website tracking the recent changes to educator licensing. *From the DPI website...*

The proposed rule changes (based on 2017 Wisconsin Act 206) are meant to make the licensing process more understandable and increase flexibility, while maintaining high-quality staff in Wisconsin schools. Key aspects of the proposed rule are:

Updates, clarifies and makes consistent the program approval process for both traditional and alternative route programs. The new rule creates a standard, streamlined approach to approving educator preparation programs, while ensuring these programs provide our educators with high quality, rigorous training.

Simplifies the licensing process. The new rule creates a tiered approach to educator licensing, which will allow educators to obtain a license fitting their unique training and experience. Under this approach:

- Tier I licenses are of limited duration and authorization, so school districts can meet short-term or specialized needs.

- Tier II licenses are provisional licenses which allow new educators, out-of-state license holders, and other highly qualified individuals to start the progression to a life license.
- Tier III licenses are life licenses for educators.
- Tier IV licenses are optional master educator life licenses for educators who meet additional rigorous requirements for quality and effectiveness.

Consolidates subject areas. The new rule will provide districts and teachers more flexibility by preparing educators to teach entire subject areas instead of specialized subjects (e.g., science, social studies, music).

Adds flexibility. The new rule allows highly qualified license holders to add additional license areas, giving them access to new opportunities and helping school districts fill high demand assignments.

Creates clarity. The new rule uses standardized, simplified language and structure to make the rule clearer, more understandable, and shorter. As a result, the new rule is approximately two-thirds as long as the old rule.

For more information visit:

dpi.wi.gov/policy-budget/administrative-rules/pi-34

MORE INFORMATION ON 2017 WISCONSIN ACT 206

This is taken from an edition of WASB's publication "New Laws."

► **Changes Affecting Lifetime Licensure.** 2017 Wisconsin Act 206 changes statutory requirements related to lifetime licensure of administrators, teachers, and pupil services professionals. The most significant changes include the following:

- The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) may issue a lifetime license to an individual who holds a qualifying provisional license if the individual has successfully completed 6 semesters of teaching, administrating, or pupil services experience, as defined by the DPI by rule. (Note: Under prior law, school districts that had employed the applicant were required to certify to the DPI that the semesters completed in that school district were completed successfully.)
- If an individual who holds a lifetime license is not regularly employed in education, as defined by the DPI by rule, for 5 or more consecutive years, the DPI is required to invalidate the lifetime license. (Note: Under prior law, the DPI was required to invalidate the lifetime license if the individual was not actively

employed by a school district for 5 or more consecutive years.)

► **Dual Enrollment Credential Grants.** This new law creates and makes a \$500,000 appropriation for a grant program to assist high school teachers in covering tuition expenses for courses taken to meet the minimum qualifications necessary to teach dual enrollment courses. The grants will be administered by the Higher Educational Aids Board. The grants may be awarded to school districts, private schools participating in a parental choice program, and to independent charter schools. The grant recipient would then provide financial assistance to teachers who are seeking to qualify to teach dual enrollment courses.

The new law defines "dual enrollment programs" as programs or courses of study designed to provide high school students with the opportunity to gain credits in both high school and an institution of higher education, including transcribed credit programs or other educational services provided by contract between a school district and an institution of higher education.

The full text of this Act can be found at:

docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2017/related/acts/206