



Testimony to the Assembly Colleges and Universities Committee

Assembly Bill 554

Wisconsin Education Association Council

October 26, 2023

The Wisconsin Education Association Council is strongly opposed to Assembly Bill 554.

Wisconsin Public School students need and deserve to have a diverse representation of teachers and education support professionals throughout their academic careers. A highly qualified education workforce that reflects a student's family and community inspires and encourages, but it takes intention and resources to build a diverse staff in every school.

Of the licensed teachers in Wisconsin, 94 percent are white, just over 2 percent are Hispanic and 1.8 percent are Black, according to 2021-22 data from the state Department of Public Instruction. However, 13 percent of public school students were Hispanic students and 9 percent were Black.

Wisconsin has taken some steps to attract and retain teachers of color, including the Minority Teacher Loan Program, which has been successful in helping future teachers of color achieve their dreams to help students learn. This bill would deal a devastating blow to that and other programs designed to increase the number of minority educators in Wisconsin's public schools. Additionally, it would harm overall efforts to recruit more professionals into the teaching profession.

Most alarmingly, ending programs to recruit and keep teachers of color would have a negative impact on every Wisconsin student. All students benefit from a diverse and representative school staff, opening new ways to look at the world and shaping attitudes in a positive way.

Students tend to benefit from having teachers who look like them, especially nonwhite students who are more likely to be affected by disadvantages like poverty and racism and by positive influences like high-quality schools and role models. Research shows the effect is more marked as students get older.

Research also shows that teachers of color help close achievement gaps for students of color and are highly rated by students of all races. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that even with intentional efforts like the Minority Teacher Loan Program and the other programs affected by this bill, the pace of increasing the minority teaching force is slow and attrition rates are high, leaving growing gaps between the demand for a representative staff of teachers and the number who enter the teaching workforce.

In a time when schools are struggling to attract enough qualified professionals, Wisconsin should be moving forward to build a diverse teacher workforce – not backward by ending successful methods to address this critical problem. University of Wisconsin data and research show that students of color are more likely to drop out and less likely to graduate than their white peers. High costs and a lack of

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financial aid are part of the problem, and this bill would make that problem worse. Greater diversity in schools can keep more teachers of color in the profession, preventing feelings of isolation, frustration and fatigue that can cause individual teachers of color to leave the profession.

Instead of making sure Wisconsin is doing everything it can to staff schools with qualified professionals by standing by proven programs to increase the teaching workforce, this legislation will set Wisconsin back for generations as enrollment in teacher preparation programs would drop even more.

Wisconsin Public School educators want every child to feel they belong in their school communities and to see the endless possibilities public education provides. This bill would do the opposite. We urge you to join Wisconsin Public School teachers in opposing Assembly Bill 554.