



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

**DAN KNODL**

STATE SENATOR • 8<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

**Senate Bill 608**

Public Testimony

Senate Committee on Education

January 23, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Jagler and members of the committee, for holding this hearing on Senate Bill 608.

Education is not immune to the tight labor market, and our traditional standards for entry into the teaching profession have unfortunately fenced out many worthy candidates. Among those are hundreds of high-performing paraprofessionals already working in classrooms in our state. Paraprofessionals are not highly paid, and consequently their ability to follow the traditional pathway to securing a teaching degree is limited. This bill gives them the means to follow their potential.

This bill would create a provisional teaching license for a paraprofessional upon the endorsement from the school's principal, the school district's administrator and Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Department of Public Instruction. The paraprofessional would need at least a year of classroom experience in the sponsoring school district, and the school district would be responsible for pairing the individual with an experienced teacher with at least three years of experience in the district.

On a final note, it is important to recognize that this bill does not mandate this pathway. School districts may choose to employ this method, or not, and will have full discretion over which paraprofessionals they endorse for licensure.

Senate Amendment 1 seeks to address concerns raised in the Assembly hearing, including:

- Removal of the lifetime license provision
- Requiring eligible paraprofessionals to have been in the district for a minimum of three consecutive years and to have 60 credit hours (or more) or an associate degree
- Establishing a clear pathway to a four-year degree
- Setting forth criteria for the mentor teacher (must have taught for at least 3 years, must have previously served as a mentor to either a first-year teacher or to a teacher new to the district)
- Requiring as part of the ongoing growth and development plan for the paraprofessional that the district shall provide release time for the mentor teacher to observe and provide feedback to the mentored teacher
- Requiring passage of the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT) after completion of a four-year degree, consistent with current law for traditional teachers
- Requiring those that will teach in an elementary school to complete Science of Reading training.

Thank you for your time, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



State of Wisconsin  
2023 - 2024 LEGISLATURE

LRBa0878/1  
FFK:amn

**SENATE AMENDMENT ,  
TO SENATE BILL 608**

1           At the locations indicated, amend the bill as follows:

2           **1.** Page 4, line 6: delete “district.” and substitute “district and has mentored  
3 a first-year teacher or a teacher who is newly employed by an employing school  
4 district.”.

5           **2.** Page 4, line 8: delete “provisional” and substitute “Tier I”.

6           **3.** Page 4, line 12: delete “one school year.” and substitute “3 consecutive school  
7 years.”.

8           **4.** Page 4, line 12: after that line insert:

9           “(b) The individual has earned at least 60 credits from an accredited institution  
10 of higher education or technical college or has earned an associate degree.

11           “(c) The individual intends to obtain a bachelor’s degree that includes such  
12 professional training as the department requires under s. 118.19 (3) and obtain a  
13 license to teach under s. PI 34.040 (2) (a), Wis. Adm. Code.”.





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# BARBARA DITTRICH

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 38<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

January 23, 2024

**Rep. Barbara Dittrich Testimony on SB 608 – a license to teach based on working as a paraprofessional in a school district**

**Senate Committee on Education**

Thank you Chairman Jagler and committee for taking up Senate Bill 608 in committee today. I want to express my gratitude to Senator Knodl as well, who is here testifying with me on this bill.

The intent behind this bill is to help with the recruitment, retention, and placement of teachers by creating a licensure pipeline for paraprofessionals who are recognized as exceptional by their school districts, but who often cannot afford to follow the traditional pathway to licensure. The bill would create a provisional license contingent on approval, on an individual basis, from the school's principal, the school district's administrator (or his/her designee) and Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Department of Public Instruction. The paraprofessional would be paired with a "mentor teacher" who has at least 3 years of experience in the school district. Being paired with a "mentor teacher" allows for guidance and correction to ensure the best outcomes and quality teachers are in our classrooms.

An important point to keep in mind is implementation of this provisional license will be optional for school districts. This legislation simply creates another recruitment and retention tool that districts may use to attract quality teachers. School districts would have discretion in implementation and availability based on need/desire to participate in the program.

I appreciate the committee considering this legislation. As the Assembly Committee on Education has already heard this bill, it is my hope we can agree this straightforward concept will go a long way for the benefit of our schools and workforce.



January 23, 2024

**Senate Committee on Education**

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony  
2023 Senate Bill 608**

Thank you, Chairperson Jagler, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Jennifer Kammerud, and I am the Director of the Licensing, Educator Advancement, and Development Team at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). With me today is Tom McCarthy, the Deputy State Superintendent at DPI. We are here to testify in opposition to 2023 Senate Bill 608 (SB 608).

SB 608 provides that every paraprofessional who has three years of work experience and is recommended by their school district shall receive a Tier II license to teach in any subject requested in their district, regardless of the paraprofessional's background. A Tier II license is a full license, the same license teachers receive upon completing an approved program with their bachelor's degree. The bill further requires the DPI to issue a lifetime license with no restrictions after six semesters of experience.

The bill eliminates all state requirements for becoming a teacher in all subject areas in which an initial license can be obtained for those using this pathway to a license. It eliminates the requirement to hold a bachelor's degree, the requirement for passage of the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT), and requirements of reading knowledge that just passed in 2023 Wisconsin Act 20. It eliminates the requirement for training in teaching students with disabilities, impacting required knowledge on how to provide a free appropriate public education required under the law. It eliminates all required knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are acquired and demonstrated through completion of an approved preparation program, which includes learning aligned to standards for each subject area and the Wisconsin teaching standards. The Wisconsin standards address pupil development, learning differences, learning environments, content knowledge, application of content, assessment methods, planning for instruction (connecting content knowledge, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, pedagogy, and students), instructional strategies, professional learning and ethical practice, and leadership and collaboration.

Under the bill, all common state requirements and expectations for a license are replaced with whatever standards or expectations any one school district may have for the teacher who receives a license under the provisions of this bill. Minimum licensure requirements for those licensed under this bill would be lower than what the state requires of private school teachers in the choice program.

Under current law, all those completing educator preparation programs are required to receive a certain number of clinical experiences across the breadth of the license for which they are preparing. Licenses are issued in grade ranges of birth to grade 3, K-9, K-12, and 4-12. Students are required to complete student teaching and are supported and evaluated based on standards by both their approved preparation program and the trained cooperating teacher, who is required to have a license in the same area and at least three years of experience. This is all eliminated under the provisions of SB 608 and replaced with the offer of an experienced educator mentor who is any educator in any subject with three years of experience. There are no requirements around any knowledge or skills specific to being a mentor under the bill. No specific training or other support is required to be provided to the teacher. The paraprofessional may have been recommended for the license by someone who has no background in the specific license, and the day-to-day reality of how stretched educators are makes it unlikely schools will have the additional staff and expertise to provide teachers licensed under this bill with the full-time support and training they would need in the license area.

If SB 608 were to become law, the licenses issued under it would be indistinguishable to parents, the public, and other hiring agencies from licenses issued to those who have bachelor's degrees and completed an approved educator preparation program. The department would have no way to determine in real time if someone who received a Tier II license under this provision changed employment, and there is no revocation option even if the department were to be notified, as the bill simply states that the license is no longer valid. The license would transition to a portable one after six semesters and the acquisition of the lifetime license.

Absent transparency, many school districts will not know that some licensed teachers are ineligible for special education aid and not allowed to teach students under the federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). All special education teachers are required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree under 34 CFR 300.156(c)(1)(iii).

The committee should be aware of the significant steps the department has taken and is taking to address the shortage in a manner that honors standards in Wisconsin law and the fact that teaching is a skilled profession requiring significant training, information, and support. For instance, the department repealed and recreated the entire rule chapter governing licensure in 2018 to create broader grade spans and subject areas to provide districts with more flexibility in assignments and to make it easier for people to teach and train while they become licensed. An example of this moved the state from licensing in discrete subject areas in science to a grade 4-12 science license. Another example is anyone with a bachelor's degree is eligible for a one-year license with stipulations, which allows them to teach while they make progress in an approved preparation program and work to a full Tier II license upon completion. Wisconsin now has one of the most flexible licensing systems in the country.

At the same time, the department has worked with technical colleges on foundations of teacher education and two plus two programs, and all technical colleges offer associate degrees in either early childhood or foundations of teacher education that transfer to four-year approved educator preparation programs. Looking ahead, the department is discussing apprenticeships and changes in rules such as creating flexibility to establish equivalencies to student teaching requirements.

There is a shortage of teachers, and while this bill represents one thought on how to address that shortage, it comes with significant consequences to students and the workforce. Teachers who come into the classroom unprepared can harm students.<sup>1</sup> Our students who are struggling the most or need the most support will be disproportionately impacted. Teachers who feel unprepared are more likely to leave the profession, exacerbating the retention problem we have in Wisconsin, which is the major cause of the state's shortage.

Being a teacher means being challenged to think beyond one's own experiences and expectations, inspiring students to dream bigger, pursue learning opportunities, and strive for a bright future. Any path to teacher licensure should build on a necessary, required foundation and actively ensure that candidates are able to see a bigger picture of education for students, beyond their own classroom and district walls.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison, at [kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov) or (608) 264-6716.

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<sup>1</sup> Darling-Hammond, L., Holtzman, D. J., Gatlin, S. J., & Heilig, J. V. (2005). Does teacher preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, Teach for America, and teacher effectiveness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(42), 1-48. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ846746>

*From the ERIC abstract:* "Recent debates about the utility of teacher education have raised questions about whether certified teachers are, in general, more effective than those who have not met the testing and training requirements for certification, and whether some candidates with strong liberal arts backgrounds might be at least as effective as teacher education graduates. This study examines these questions with a large student-level data set from Houston, Texas that links student characteristics and achievement with data about their teachers' certification status, experience, and degree levels from 1995-2002. The data set also allows an examination of whether Teach for America (TFA) candidates—recruits from selective universities who receive a few weeks of training before they begin teaching—are as effective as similarly experienced certified teachers. In a series of regression analyses looking at 4th and 5th grade student achievement gains on six different reading and mathematics tests over a six-year period, we find that certified teachers consistently produce stronger student achievement gains than do uncertified teachers. These findings hold for TFA recruits as well as others. Controlling for teacher experience, degrees, and student characteristics, uncertified TFA recruits are less effective than certified teachers, and perform about as well as other uncertified teachers. TFA recruits who become certified after 2 or 3 years do about as well as other certified teachers in supporting student achievement gains; however, nearly all of them leave within three years. Teachers' effectiveness appears strongly related to the preparation they have received for teaching."



*"Where Students Are First"*

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**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 608**  
**Senate Committee on Education - Tuesday, January 23, 2024**

Good morning, my name is Dr. Deb Kerr, Superintendent of the St. Francis Public School District, in St. Francis, WI located on the south side of Milwaukee County. It is my privilege to advocate for 1,100 St. Francis children, 760 families, and 90 teachers and 50 staff in our school community. We serve over 50% students of color, 50% economically disadvantaged, and 50% of our students come to us for a better education through open enrollment from over 60 different Metro Milwaukee schools.

I have been a superintendent in our great state of Wisconsin for the past 24 years working in a variety of school districts from a small K-8, a successfully consolidated school district, and larger public schools such as Brown Deer and now in St. Francis. I have also been elected to serve the state and national associations of superintendent leaders advocating for public education not only in WI but across the country.

I address you today in passionate support of Wisconsin Senate Bill 608, a visionary initiative aimed at empowering our paraprofessionals to transition into licensed Wisconsin teachers with the invaluable support of district leaders, who are the gatekeepers over all staffing decisions.

Paraprofessionals are the mainstay of our education system, tirelessly contributing to the effective functioning of schools statewide. They serve as the "glue" that binds our educational institutions, catering to the diverse needs of our students. Establishing genuine connections with students, they tailor their support to meet individual needs, playing a pivotal role in helping students realize their full potential through unwavering encouragement.



The paraprofessionals I have had the privilege to work with embody exceptional qualities - they are highly knowledgeable, flexible, and possess a multifaceted skill set. Some are specially trained to assist children with unique learning needs, modality issues, or essential self-care requirements. Collaborating closely with classroom teachers, they meticulously plan and prepare learning resources, focusing on strategies tailored to all learners, particularly those facing challenges. Their daily experiences similar to student-teaching or an apprenticeship underscore their commitment to the educational process.

Despite their motivation to teach and learn within their respective schools, many paraprofessionals encounter barriers such as financial constraints, transportation challenges, or family responsibilities that curtail their dreams of becoming licensed teachers. We must create pathways to education, similar to the successful models like Career and Tech Education licensure, based on workforce experiences that efficiently recruit and provide quality education leading to a teacher's license.

Teacher turnover and staff shortages affect every school district in the state, with diverse and rural systems facing the most significant challenges. Senate Bill 608 emerges as a creative solution to address the workforce development problem, ensuring a steady supply of qualified teachers without compromising the quality of education for our students. To overcome primary barriers like cost and time, potential revenue sources such as Pell grants, Teach grants, Apprenticeship grants, and Workforce (WOIA) Funding, in conjunction with district support, can make this initiative a reality.

The bill introduces an innovative "apprenticeship" like model, offering on-the-job experience regardless of a paraprofessional's entry-level education. I currently witness four dedicated paraprofessionals pursuing their associate or bachelor's degrees in the evenings or on weekends, demonstrating their commitment to professional growth. The apprenticeship-like programs proposed by Senate Bill 608 would provide these candidates with essential on-the-job training, fostering both their professional development and degree advancement.

Embracing change and diversification is imperative for our future competitiveness in the workforce. A well-qualified and diverse workforce is essential for talent development, and schools must attract the best staff to achieve this goal. The bill aligns with successful practices implemented in other states such as Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois, which leverage local colleges and universities to create effective talent development pathways.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 608 offers the flexibility and opportunities essential for school districts seeking alternative ways to fill their teacher pipeline. District leaders and school boards, as gatekeepers for hiring, should recognize this unique alternative certification pathway as a means

to access talented professionals from various organizational contexts without imposing financial hardships on aspiring educators. Let us collaboratively work towards improving existing practices and embracing change to better serve our educational institutions. Your leadership in championing this crucial legislation is commendable, and I express my heartfelt gratitude for your commitment to creatively leveraging dedicated staff to advance their careers and fulfill the teacher pipeline.

Yours in Education,

*Dr. Deborah Kerr*

Dr. Deborah Kerr

Superintendent - St. Francis Public School District

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January 23, 2024

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education

From: Faith M. VanderHorst, Executive Director, Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA)

Re: Testimony in support of SB608

Chairman Jagler and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. Thank you Senator Knodl for introducing this legislation. I would also like to thank Senator Knodl's his staff for their work on the Amendment.

My name is Faith VanderHorst. I am the Executive Director for the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA). The **Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA)** provides school leaders with objective, non-partisan information and training they need to be strong advocates for educational excellence. SWSA serves 27 urban and suburban public school districts with a combined enrollment of more than 200,000 students (approximately 25% of Wisconsin's public school students).

I am here today to speak in support of SB608 which creates a pathway for a provisional licensure for paraprofessionals to teach full-time in our schools. As you are aware, there is a teacher shortage today not only in Wisconsin but around the country. Passage of this legislation will allow Districts the opportunity to develop and train those Paraprofessionals that have been working in the District, that know the students, understand the school environment and community culture. These individuals are committed in a time when few are entering and many are leaving the field of teaching; they are passionate about working with students.

Providing provisional licensure for these dedicated paraprofessionals will allow them the added economic opportunity to work toward their degree either on-line, in person or through a portfolio program such as BloomBoard. While they are teaching they will be mentored by veteran teachers. Their progress and success will be monitored by their local Superintendent.

Giving paraprofessionals an apprenticeship-like opportunity will not compromise the quality of education. It is not unlike the student teacher experience, yet with the added benefit that the paraprofessional is already familiar with the students, the staff and district teaching techniques and expectations.

Several questions and concerns were expressed by members of the Assembly Education Committee during the December 5, 2023 hearing on the companion Bill AB640. Since that time Senator Knodl's office worked diligently with Dr. Kelsey-Brown and SWSA to amend the original Bill. As a result the following changes were made:

1. The Lifetime License provision was deleted
2. Eligible Paraprofessional is defined as:
  - a. Has been in the District for a minimum of three consecutive years (this equates to the complete new teacher cycle).
  - b. Has 60 credit hours (or more) or an associate degree.
3. Established a clear pathway to a four year degree
  - a. Complete the degree within the original 3 year licensure period. One licensure period extension can be requested by the District Superintendent if the Provisional Licensure Teacher is making progress toward the degree.
  - b. Degrees can be earned from any accredited Degree institution.
4. Established Criteria for a Mentor:
  - a. Must have taught for at least 3 years (completed one entire experienced Educator cycle).
  - b. Must have previously served as a mentor to either a first year teacher or to a teacher new to the district.
5. To ensure ongoing growth and development for the Provisional Licensure Teacher, the District shall provide release time for the mentor teacher to observe and provide feedback to the Mentored teacher.
6. Upon completion of the Bachelor degree the Provisional Licensure Teacher will be required to take all tests required by Statute or DPI for new teachers.

We acknowledge this legislation provides only one small solution toward filling the pipeline. As Dr. Kelsey-Brown indicated there are teacher subject areas that are growing increasingly hard to fill, including Special Education, higher Math, English and Sciences. While the hard decision can be made to not offer certain higher math and science classes, discontinuing Special Education support is not an option and presents added stress on Districts due to state and federal mandated requirements. This Bill is an innovative way to address the needs of our schools. I want to also encourage the legislature to start thinking about how to grow and fund teacher pledge and apprenticeship programs. We need your help to grow the teacher pipeline.

Teaching is an essential profession for the future of our children, state and nation. Workforce competition is no longer local, statewide or even nationwide. It is global. It is imperative that we support all students, providing them with as many opportunities for success including preparation in the trades, service industries and college readiness, as Districts' budgets will allow. Well qualified, PASSIONATE teachers are the key to their success.

We respectfully ask that you support this Bill as a step to fulfilling our teacher needs. We are willing to work with anyone who is interested in finding a solution to the teacher pipeline challenge.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Faith VanderHorst  
Executive Director, SWSA  
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**Testimony to the Senate Education Committee**

**Senate Bill 608**

**Wisconsin Education Association Council**

**January 23, 2024**

The Wisconsin Education Association Council is opposed to Senate Bill 608.

Wisconsin students need and deserve highly qualified teachers and education support professionals in all positions. Teachers who complete rigorous preparation programs, including mentoring and support as they begin their careers, say they feel more prepared and are more likely to stay in the profession.

Equated to nursing, this bill would allow a part-time CNA to become a nurse based on a supervisor's recommendation. We appreciate the efforts to assuage some of the most concerning parts of this bill, but even amended it would continue to allow employers to self-select potential licensed teacher candidates and has no requirement for candidates to pursue a 4-year degree. Other parts of the bill, such as mentor assignment and passing of the FoRT exam, are already requirements for a license.

Rebuilding a highly qualified education workforce will take intention and resources, not one-off attempts in desperation to fill vacancies that will cause more confusion and undermine the professionalism of teaching by bypassing the coursework, clinical experiences and student teaching – all requirements that a person with a degree in education must complete. This bill puts the quest for excellence in the profession at risk by allowing unprepared individuals to obtain a teaching license – the same tier of license a person would receive after graduating from college.

This bill not only misses the mark when it comes to what students need, but also puts our dedicated and outstanding paraprofessionals in a difficult position, as they would enter the teaching profession without the preparation and support to make them as successful as possible.

The staffing problem in Wisconsin schools has hit crisis levels as the result of state cuts to public schools coupled with expansion of school tax funding used to fund private school vouchers. The solution is to stabilize public education, provide clear and predictable compensation for educators, and create sustainable mental health resources for students and educators. Carving out exceptions to teacher licensure will not strengthen neighborhood public schools, and educators impacted by this bill would not meet federal standards to teach special needs students under IDEA, nor in Title 1 programs.

Educators support financial assistance and other grants, grow-your-own programs and apprenticeships that encourage paraprofessionals who are called to teach to complete their teaching degrees, not fast-tracked attempts that allow administrators to bestow a license on staff with limited requirements.

WEAC, representing teachers, paraprofessionals and other education support professionals, urge the committee to reject this proposal and instead partner to advance the solutions classroom educators support, including statewide salary schedules that pay professional wages to school support staff and teachers, affordable health care, and a voice in decisions that directly impact the students we work with every day. We urge you to join Wisconsin Public School educators in opposing Assembly Bill 640.

Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, President

Bob Baxter, Executive Director